### 1AC – Cybernetic Episteme v3

#### We’re in a cybernetic episteme. Objective reality is gone – in its stead, communication has become the new site of capitalist extraction through endless derivation. Decision-making is the newest victim of cybernetic capitalism as actions cannot be separated from their ability to produce value. Capitalism causes colonialism, imperialism, and environmental destruction.

Emmelhainz 21, visiting scholar @ Vermont College of Fine Arts (Irmgard, “Authoritarianism and the Cybernetic Episteme, or the Progressive Disappearance of Everything on Earth”, e-flux journal, issue 122 November 21. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/122/430488/authoritarianism-and-the-cybernetic-episteme-or-the-progressive-disappearance-of-everything-on-earth/>)--js

Life and society worldwide have been transformed by digital technology, including the fabrics of emotional relationships. Many believed the internet would be the largest ungoverned space in the world with unlimited emancipatory potential, and trusted Big Tech to make the world a better­ place. Yet power and capitalism filled that space with surveillance systems, the production of private capital, the monetization of data, and the control of human lives. Social media now shape daily life and many have lost faith in the possibility of a shared consensus reality. We are living in a scenario similar to one imagined by Black Mirror: our belief in digital communication and social media creates narcissistic personalities, selves dissociated and dislocated from their reflections online. Digital communication offers an opaque mirror that delivers egos without bodies, eliding alterity.

The collapse of reality, however, is not an unintended consequence of advancements in, for instance, artificial intelligence: it was the long-term objective of many technologists, who sought to create machines capable of transforming human consciousness (like drugs do). Communication has become a site for the extraction of surplus value, and images operate as both commodities and dispositives for this extraction. Moreover, data mediates our cognition, that is to say, the way in which we exist and perceive the world and others. The image—and the unlimited communication promised by constant imagery—have ceased to have emancipatory potential. Images place a veil over a world in which the isolated living dead, thirsty for stimulation and dopamine, give and collect likes on social media. Platform users exist according to the Silicon Valley utopian ideal of life’s complete virtualization.

The internet, moreover, has radically changed the political communications game and must be considered a complex propaganda apparatus. Although a single Tweet can destroy someone’s career, and fake news can start a real news cycle, meaning is subordinate to the circulation of vacuous content. The capitalist capture of data for profit does not rely on policing content; the production of capital only relies on the constant exchange and circulation of information. We don’t yet know the full extent of the manipulation of companies such as Facebook, Google, and Amazon in the last two elections in the US or in other elections around the world. But it is undeniable that digital platforms are actively censoring content in the interests of particular political actors. For instance: in October 2020, Zoom canceled a meeting hosting Palestinian human rights activist Leila Khaled; a month before, Facebook and Twitter censored information detrimental to Joseph Biden’s presidential campaign. The same two companies intervened and shut down pro-Trump accounts in 2020, even Donald Trump’s own Facebook and Twitter accounts.

After the attempted coup at the US capitol on January 6, 2020, Facebook’s recently instituted oversight board ruled that Trump had created “an environment where a serious risk of violence was possible.” In this light, it seems likely that he will continue to be banned from the platform. According to journalist Shoshana Zuboff, however, this is insufficient, given that the oversight board’s decision (whose work is supported by a $130 million endowment from Facebook) follows years of inaction by CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who indulged and appeased Trump while entrenching what Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism.” A liberal might think that shutting up Trump and helping Biden is not bad, as they are actions that seemingly advance the interests of the Democratic Party. What is at stake here, however, is not whether the platforms take a “good” or “bad” stance on a particular issue; the problem is that they have immense unchecked power and can act as they please. Platforms are allowed to secretly extract behavioral data from users, whether or not users are aware, transforming the information into targeted ads, destroying privacy, changing human experience into data, altering elections, and reshaping human civilization. This structure can be termed the “cybernetic episteme,” and the new form of control, which goes beyond the previous regime of biopower, can be termed “neuropower.”

According to its Greek etymology, an “episteme” is a system of understanding. In The Order of Things, Michel Foucault uses the term “épistemè” to mean the nontemporal or a priori knowledge that grounds what is taken as truth in a given moment. Several epistemes coexist at a given time, as they constitute parts of various systems of power and knowledge. The cybernetic episteme, as defined by the collective Tiqqun some twenty years ago, describes our relationship to technology and machines (which are inseparable from the workings of capitalism). The cybernetic episteme is based on the modern tenet of progress and human-led transcendence achieved through science and technology.

Under neuropower, the sensible gives way to cognitive pathologies. These pathologies depend on the consumption of content rather than the sharing of meaning. As Thomas Metzinger explains, the internet has become an integral part of how we model ourselves, as we use it for external memory storage, as a cognitive prosthesis, and for emotional self-regulation. This has radically changed the structure of conscious experience, creating a new form of waking consciousness that resembles “a mixture of dreaming, dementia, intoxication, and infantilization.” Other effects of neuropower are humans’ growing invisibility to each other and a paroxysmal racism that infiltrates power, technology, culture, language, and work. For Franco “Bifo” Berardi, racism has become a “virus” that exacerbates fear—above all, the fear of extinction, which seems to have become one of the motors behind white supremacy in the world. Dissociated from our environment, alienated from each other, we are oblivious to the challenges that are being posed to humanity by the Capitalocene.

1.

Under lockdown, internet-based technology became embedded in everyday life more than ever before. Zoom and other platforms became the matrix of a production model that exacerbates the power of technology over society. A new lockdown economy has emerged in this disembodied communication space, where knowledge is subsumed under the rules of capital accumulation. The pandemic has led to extreme alienation, to the point that privilege is defined as depending on invisible laborers to sustain forms of life. This means that a new “virtual working class” has emerged that can take basics like food, water, and electricity for granted, knowing that they do not have to risk their bodies to have these comforts.

Until 2016, digital technology promised access to all human knowledge, unlimited exchange, self-expression, democratization, participation, opportunities to make money, the acceleration of bureaucratic processes, and the means for grassroots and popular power to challenge governments and corporations. The peak of this alluring cyber-utopia came around 2010–11, when social media played a crucial role in the Occupy and Arab Spring movements. But in 2016, when Cambridge Analytica was revealed to have intervened in the US elections that brought Donald Trump to power, the public’s belief in such technologies to change power structures began to shift. We witnessed the worldwide rise of right-wing governments and populist movements supported by wealth. Maurizzio Ferraris has called this the era of “post-truth,” when the deconstruction of a stable truth became an important political tool. In online public space, discourse has been shattered, truth has become indiscernible, and relativism has become the norm. The public sphere—the bastion of established and emerging democracies, bolstered by mass media—began to shatter.

Leaders such as Benjamin Netanyahu, Donald Trump, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Jair Bolsonaro, and Narendra Modi have used digital communications to construct charismatic identities and disseminate populist messages, causing deep social and political polarization. Politics has profoundly mutated: while minorities and people at the margins have found ways to validate their speech by expressing their perspectives, individualized propaganda has become the order of the day. Algorithms feed users the information they search for, resulting in personalized information bubbles designed to engage preexisting biases. Much of the news media now functions by monetizing user engagement through this type of targeting, which has led to new forms of intensified racism and other types of prejudice. Author Andrey Mir has termed this “postjournalism.” He explains that, since mass media outlets have lost publicity revenue, they need to monetize engagement on the internet and do so by generating anger and hatred, usually directed at some specific group of people. For many, the news is the way to access the world, and rage has become currency: platforms drive and monetize anger as a mode of engagement.

A complex form of authoritarianism is emerging, linked to digital platforms owned by the powerful CEOs who make up the notorious “Silicon Six.” Under the new authoritarianism, populations are no longer commanded: they are asked to participate, and in this simulation of involvement, the “ideology of connection” replaces the idea of social relations, neutralizing democratic demands from users to have control over their own lives, rights, and data. In this way, people are made passive. Cédric Durand explains the difference between the original conception of the World Wide Web and the subsequent development of closed platforms. The WWW began as a decentralized architecture in which a generic transaction protocol (http) and a uniform identification format (URI/URL) generated a space of flat content. In this space, human and nonhuman agents could have access to information without any third-party mediation. In contrast, closed platforms use application programming interfaces, or APIs, to mediate interaction, giving way to data loops in which interactions are more dense. The technical object that sustains this hierarchical architecture is the API, each of which is owned by a platform. On the one hand, big platforms, by way of APIs, offer apps that incorporate basic and indispensable data for users. On the other, platforms have access to the additional information generated by the API, such as user activity and buying habits. As the ecosystem grows in complexity, the platform is able to accumulate more and more data. We become more densely connected with each other and with the platforms every day, as our lives get more and more tied to the cloud. Our dependency on platforms provides the ground for technofeudalism. Historically, feudalism was characterized by a fundamental inequality that enabled the direct exploitation of peasants by lords. The lord was both the manager and master not only of the process of production, but of the entire process of social life. In today’s technofeudalism, platform owners are the digital lords and users are the serfs. Rather than commodity production, these platforms are geared towards accumulation through rent, debt, and the privatization of the basic infrastructure that sustains our lives. What is at stake is no longer “true” or “fake” information but the cybernetic episteme upon which our lives and subjectivities have been built.

The cybernetic episteme is premised upon modernity’s enclosure of experience. In modern epistemology, which is the precondition of the cybernetic episteme, the self is externalized and experienced at a remove from the body. Perception is centered on the brain and eyes instead of the whole body, separating sensation from reason. The self’s relationship with the world is mediated through mirrors, camera lenses, the canvas, the microscope, and mathematical models. The cybernetic episteme, moreover, is inextricable from colonialism, which entails dispossession, dislocation, dissociation, and appropriation. Ariella Azoulay has called the logic underpinning these processes “the shutter”; this logic is materialized in photographic technology that separates humans from objects, self from the world, and people from their lands. The shutter is the principle of imperialism by which campaigns of plunder have left people both worldless and objectless. For Azoulay, the logic of the shutter was invented centuries before photography gave it a technological apparatus, and it enabled the dispossession of non-Western peoples in tandem with the accumulation of visual and material wealth in archives and museums in the West.

The cybernetic episteme is likewise conceptually constituted by this shutter, since it relies on capturing, naming, moving, and archiving subjects—as does imperialism. In this regard, the cybernetic episteme naturalizes the mediation of the self; it creates not only the condition of detachment from the world, but allows the appropriation of the cultures of others, as well as the dissolution of collective being. The shutter is akin to Heidegger’s Gestell or “representation,” which goes hand in hand with Eurocentrism and Anthropocentrism. The Gestell and the shutter both imply that the world and experience have become representation, through an aesthetic order in which what is produced as artifice becomes the reality of experience.

In a 2017 Facebook promo video for a new virtual reality technology, Mark Zuckerberg and his colleague Rachel Frank tele-transported themselves to Puerto Rico after a devastating flood. They intended to showcase the potential of the new technology, but instead revealed its inherent violence. The ability to transport oneself to faraway places “as if” one’s body were present gives the illusion that one we can make a difference in the world through technology. Another example, in a different register of colonial modernity is that way Western museums allow visitors to "transport" themselves by observing objects looted from elsewhere, like the Pergamon Museum in Berlin where museumgoers can roam around the Ishtar Gate, which has been on display in the museum since 1930. In a section of Ariella Azoulay’s video Undocumented: Unlearning Imperial Plunder (2020), she films actual visitors to the Pergamon while noting that dislocation is the essence of (imperial) modernity. The VR museum visitor is at the center of a world, but they are not really there (an effect similar to the dispositive of perspective in painting). For globalized Western culture, the ground for vision, enlightenment, culture, and even social change is the dislocation and disappearance of bodies.

Disembodiment and dislocation are also fundamental epistemological premises of transhumanist Silicon Valley ideology. In this ideology, the teleology of secular modern individualism culminates in the uploading of a person’s mind to a new biological, artificial, or biological-artificial body. The utopian goal of expanding and preserving human consciousness is physically and spiritually achieved. Transhumanism is the dream of enhancing the human body through technology, and ultimately escaping human suffering by transcending the “errors” of death and aging.

Posthumanism takes things a step further: its goal is to immortalize consciousness by uploading it to a robotic or synthetic body. Posthumanism does away with the biological dimension of the self, fundamentally altering what it means to be “human.” In both trans- and posthumanism, technology promises to give us the divine attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, making humans into “pure consciousness,” achieving a kind of individual and secular transcendence. In the first episode of the British TV series Years and Years (2019), Bethany, an adolescent whose face is hidden behind a 3D emoji mask, announces to her parents that she is “transhuman.” She declares: “I don’t want to be flesh. I want to escape this thing and become digital, I want to live forever as information.” Eventually Bethany becomes a hero with transhuman superpowers: her mechanized eyes and brain, which are connected to all the data in the world, allow her to make visible the horrors that the British government have perpetrated in a refugee camp. This techno-utopian narrative implies a democratic ideology, insofar as one political goal of democracy is to make visible the ordeals of oppressed minorities—in this case through virtual disembodiment.

In contrast to this techno-utopian narrative, science fiction—especially cyberpunk literature— generally portrays transhumanism as a nightmarish apocalyptic scenario of social control and individual subjection. Several episodes of Black Mirror do this, for example. But what Black Mirror and Years and Years have in common is that technological advances and the increasing symbiosis between humans and machines are associated with political, economic, and social instability. In reality, “mind uploading” has attracted millions of dollars of investment from the billionaires of Silicon Valley and beyond. In a mixture of engineering and enlightenment, consciousness is now being hacked through biofeedback techniques, meditation practices, and microdosing drugs. Many critics have observed that the utopian ideology of transhumanism underpins the Valley’s culture of “move fast, break things, and make as much money as possible.” Technologies aiming to expand human consciousness are rooted in purely extractivist, capitalist values. In this sense, cybernetics is a political project on a planetary scale. As described by Tiqqun, cybernetics is a gigantic “abstract machine” made up of binary machines deployed by empire, and a form of political sovereignty that has merged with the capitalist extractivist project.

2.

In the pre-cybernetic era—that is to say, before the 1940s—machines were intended to emulate humans; their actions resembled human behavior, but ostensibly without intent or emotions. This is why Donna Haraway describes pre-cybernetic machines as “haunted.” They seemed animated by ghosts, reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s automaton that was inhabited by a hunchbacked dwarf. Machines were not self-moving, self-designing, or autonomous. They could not achieve human dreams, only mock them. In turn, humans related to machines by using or acting upon them: switching them on or off, using them as tools to achieve an end. Today, the relationship between human and machine is based on internal, mutual communication in a feedback loop. Early machines were led; today, machines lead us. This does not mean that machines have simply become humanized through the proliferation of androids. Rather, humans have surrendered consciousness to AI, becoming obedient and predictable. In the twenty-first century, machines have blurred the distinction between the artificial and human mind, not only because machines can imitate human functions, but because humans have become increasingly passive, since we are now subject to neuropower.

Within the cybernetic episteme, it is no longer enough to talk about a “control society”; we must talk instead about a composite of interlinked forms of oppression (exploitation, alienation, and domination), in tandem with extreme securitarianism. Another way to see the cybernetic episteme is as the reconceptualization of social worlds into information-processing systems. Practices of computation are used to produce new organizational and infrastructural apparatuses, which in turn create value and profit by exploiting and disposing of human life. Social worlds are subsumed into technologies through techniques such as statistical forecasting and data modeling.

The cybernetic episteme stems from a world brought into being by Europeans; this world began with the discovery of the “new world” and the creation of empires and colonies (which coincided with the scientific revolution). In this sense, the cybernetic episteme is inseparable from the Western civilizing project for the whole world, which connected disparate places through technologies like the telegraph and steam shipping, often powered by the extraction of fossil fuels like coal. This project has culminated in globalization as the deregulation and financialization of world economies.

The Western civilization project, based on Enlightenment values including equality, peaceful public life, access to modern science, the rule of law, democracy, and technological progress, involved the creation of infrastructure to unify nations and the world. We can call this infrastructure the “technosphere.” The technosphere comprises not only digital technology but all machines, factories, computers, cars, buildings, railways, and mobility infrastructure, as well as systems of food production, resource extraction, and energy distribution. Today, the infrastructure of the world—the technosphere—is shaped by information, which means that the world we inhabit is designed by data.

The technosphere is a supplement humans have created to help overcome the limits of “human nature” insofar as humans cannot live independently from structures geared towards sustaining life. The technosphere has promised to enable us to increase production and reproduction with less human effort. Moreover, the technosphere is also regarded as the main tool humans have to fight decay, entropy, and death, since it comprises all the structures humans have built to keep themselves alive on the planet. The total mass of the technosphere amounts to fifty kilos for every square meter of earth’s surface—a total of thirty trillion tons, which coexists with the diminishing hydrosphere (water, the frozen polar regions) and the biosphere (all of earth’s living organisms). The ultimate price of the technosphere is global warming and environmental devastation. Like humans, the technosphere needs external energy input, which is not sustainable as long as it comes from fossil fuels that will eventually be depleted.

From this standpoint, the cybernetic episteme represents the gradual merging of human activity into the activity of what we have built and surrounded ourselves with. Much of this built environment is invisible. Infrastructure and data are partially occult because we are alienated from them, even as we are produced and managed by them. The invisible infrastructure that sustains our lives is what matters politically right now. And insofar as the technosphere is cybernetic, it is inextricable from capitalism and politics.

3.

Human communication is at the center of the cybernetic global order. The neural system of globalized networked society is digital communication. In a 1975 film called Comment ça va?, Anne-Marie Miéville and Jean-Luc Godard discuss the “illness” of information. They begin with an image of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, published in the leftist newspaper Libération. At the time, photojournalistic images had begun to proliferate as a form of information, and Godard and Miéville critique Libération (the most left-wing newspaper in Europe in those days) for failing to include the reader in the creation and dissemination of information. They ask: “How is it that things enter and exit the machine?” (Comment ça va de l’entrée à la sortie de la machine?). This question is about how ideas, words, discourses, human interaction, and images become information and then reach readers and viewers.

In Comment ça va?, mass media represents an illness that has killed communication and language. Last year, Godard updated his critique of the media in an interview posted to Instagram. He stated: “Plato’s cave has been fixed on paper/screen.” For Godard, the consequence of the becoming-information of communication and language is the loss of ambiguity in communication. Digital technology has infiltrated every aspect of existence, and the margin of error between the transmission and the reception of a message has been eliminated by mediatization and digitization. For Godard, digital communication denies the force of the image or the word because it eliminates redundancy, misunderstanding, the possibility of reading between the lines, and the possibility of alterity.

In a more recent film of his—Adieu au language from 2014—Godard suggests that digital media have destroyed face-to-face communication. He asks: What kind of self could emerge in a time when objects and bodies are disfigurable and refigurable through virtual manipulation? Godard posits that the origins of today’s totalitarianism can be traced to the interruption of interior experience by the spectacle. In the film, Godard features a lengthy quote from Philippe Sollers explaining that the spectacle “cuts off” the subject from its interior life—a process that is, paradoxically, highly seductive. Furthermore, for Godard digital communication creates a new form of isolated solitude where people lack ties to others. In this light, technology has not become an extension of man, as Marshall McLuhan predicted, but has instead attained autonomy from man, since digital media can communicate amongst themselves without human mediation. For Godard, this means that the “face-to-face” encounter—a basic form of human relation that is the foundation of ethics—is no longer possible.

Sherry Turkle, a clinical psychologist and sociologist, comes to similar conclusions: daily conversations no longer involve eye contact, and face-to-face discussion has been replaced by words on a screen. According to Turkle, texts, tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram messages, and Snapchats split our attention and diminish our capacity for empathy. They have created new codes of etiquette; no longer do we feel restrained from reaching for our phones in the presence of other people. This new etiquette entrenches a culture of individualism and isolation from each other. This isolation cultivates the perfect ground for fascism.

The digitization of communication not only has political and communal consequences. It also affects the neuroplastic potential of the living brain. The cybernetic episteme reshapes our working memory by rearranging its contents. As Warren Neidich writes, the new focus of power is not only the false reproduction of the past (the manipulation of the archive), but the manipulation of our working memory—the type of memory that influences our decision-making. Authoritarian neuropower wants nothing less than to shape our future memory, argues Neidich.

If the nervous system of cybernetics is digital communication, at the center of digital communication is desire. Mark Fisher devoted his last lectures at Goldsmiths in 2017 to this subject. During one lecture, he played for his students a famous Apple TV commercial from 1984, directed by Ridley Scott and originally broadcast during the Superbowl. In an overt reference to George Orwell’s novel 1984, the commercial depicts a dreary, repressive control society. This society is seemingly liberated when a buxom blonde woman tosses a sledgehammer at a large screen broadcasting the image of an authoritarian figure, causing the screen to explode. The commercial ends with these lines crawling across the screen: “On January 24, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you’ll see why 1984 won’t be like 1984.” Fisher observes that the video counterposes top-down bureaucratic control to upstart entrepreneurialism. The dreary control society depicted in the commercial is an allusion to not only the Soviet Union, but also IBM, the dominant computer maker at the time. Apple posits itself as the dynamic, colorful new company that will liberate society from dreary IBM, ushering in a new, more vibrant world order. This new world order will fulfill our (capitalist) desires in a way that the communist world cannot. As Fisher suggests, we now live in that world of libidinal capitalism.

Elsewhere Fisher writes that what drives the circulation of information is the user’s desire to make one more connection, to leave one more reply, to keep on clicking. Capitalism persists because cyberspace is already under our skin, writes Fisher; to retreat from it would be like trying to retreat into some nonexistent precapitalist imaginary. In his view, we believe we have as much a chance of escaping capitalism as we do of crawling back inside our mother’s womb.

5.

By means of the cybernetic episteme, Silicon Valley has shaped the world we all live in. As we are poisoned equally by microplastics and fake news, losing our grasp of a shared reality, the “Silicon Six”—as Sacha Baron Cohen called the titans of Silicon Valley in a 2019 speech—propagate algorithm-fueled fear, propaganda, lies, and hate in the name of profit. As Baron Cohen pointed out, the major online platforms largely avoid the kind of regulation and accountability that other media companies are subject to. “This is ideological imperialism,” he said. “Six unelected individuals in Silicon Valley impos[e] their vision on the rest of the world, unaccountable to any government, and acting as if they are above the law.” He called digital platforms the greatest propaganda machine in history.

Democratic institutions have failed to reign in the information chaos and the destruction of the public sphere. As Shoshana Zuboff argues, we inhabit a communications sphere that is no longer a public sphere. She describes this situation as an “epistemic coup” that has taken place in four stages: First, by way of companies gathering personal data about us and then claiming it as their own private property. Second, through data inequality, which means that companies know more than we do. Third, through the epistemic chaos created by algorithms. And fourth, through the institutionalization of this new episteme and the erosion of democratic governance.

Baron Cohen observes that people can take a stand against platforms by recognizing our power to boycott them. (One example is the mass defection from WhatsApp to Telegram when the former announced that would share its user data with Facebook.) But we also need to defend the existence of facts and a shared reality, understanding the world not as something we see but as something we inhabit—treating life not as something we have, but as something we live. Anti-platform strategies might be accused of Luddism, but they are not necessarily opposed to technology—only to certain uses of technology.

It is also crucial that we regard the cybernetic episteme as inextricable from a broader malaise: humanity’s relationship to life and the planet is a toxic one. The very technologies that supposedly enable us to read, think, flourish, and desire are destroying the world we inhabit.

People continue to yearn for commonality, mutuality, and something to share. But the culture we currently share is largely mediated by repressive, profit-driven digital platforms. This is why we need to flee from the invasion of images, to distinguish between image and reality, and to affirm the opacity of the world and the ambiguity of language. We need to resist platform monopoly through presence, embodiment, immediacy, and human memory. We need to find ways to create life as opposed to turning it into data, combine emotional and intellectual knowledge, and regard visceral gut feelings as a form of human consciousness. We need to learn to exist in symbiosis with others and with the environment, not dislocated, uprooted, and detached.

#### Antitrust is outdated – data’s circulation is the new site of the generation of profit as it increasingly lacks a physical referent. The surplus of information, transfer and data controls the contours of a supposedly free market.

Halpern et al., 22 [Orit Halpern is an associate professor in sociology and anthropology at Concordia University. She is also the director of the Speculative Life Research Cluster and D4 : The Disrupting Design Research Group, laboratories bridging the arts, environmental sciences, media, and the social sciences. She is the author of Beautiful Data: A History of Vision and Reason since 1945 (2015). Patrick Jagoda is a professor in the Departments of English Language and Literature, Cinema and Media Studies, Obstetrics and Gynecology, and the College at the University of Chicago. He is executive editor of Critical Inquiry and director of the Weston Game Lab. He is the author of Network Aesthetics (2016), The Game Worlds of Jason Rohrer (2016, cowritten with Michael Maizels), and Experimental Games: Critique, Play, and Design in the Age of Gamification (2020). He is also a recipient of a 2020 Guggenheim Fellowship. Jeffrey West Kirkwood is an assistant professor in the Department of Art History at Binghamton University, State University of New York. He is the author of Endless Intervals: Cinema, Psychology, and Semiotechnics around 1900 (2022). Leif Weatherby is associate professor of German and director of the Digital Theory Lab at New York University. He is the author of Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ: German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx (2016)., “Surplus Data: An Introduction,” Winter 2022, Critical Inquiry, volume 48, number 2, p 197-210]//Townes

Surplus Derivation

“Data is the new capital asset of the 21st century,” announces Tom Wheeler, former chairman of the US Federal Communications Commission, commenting on the rise of Amazon over companies like Walmart.25 We can further extend this line of thinking to consider Facebook, Alphabet, and Twitter’s role in the Capitol riots of January 2021. Democratic members of Congress have suggested that the mayhem that day was driven by informational excesses, whose exploitation was responsible for simultaneously destabilizing the American political system and generating a huge windfall for the largest tech companies. According to Wheeler, such situations lay bare the inadequacy of old regulatory concepts for capturing new technological, social, and commercial realities. The regulation that Wheeler and others are accostomed to is based on “industrial antitrust, anti-centralization kinds of concepts.”26 What Wheeler suggests is that our contemporary situation in both politics and economy no longer functions according to the ideals of efficiency, energy, and scarcity that preoccupied industrial economies. Surplus data is the condition that Wheeler places beyond the industrial, and its paradigm is derivation. It was once the imagined limits to resources and energy that shaped industrial conceptions of efficiency, energy, and labor power.27 In the early twenty-first century, data capitalism changes this formula by putting the derivative before the source. Derivation takes the place of extraction, and where there was efficiency, there is now optimization.28

We glimpse the centrality of such inefficiency and derivation in the highprofile case of the r/wallstreetbets subreddit, whose members in January 2021 (and again in February and again in June) strategically bought up shares of dying brick-and-mortar companies, such as GameStop and AMC Theatres, which had high levels of short interest. These actions triggered a massive short squeeze that nearly drove some hedge funds, like Melvin Capital, out of business. The improbably parabolic price movement was made possible by ferreting out the unhedged positions of (ironically) hedge funds in the share interest data and mobilizing a vast army of traders invisibly in plain sight. What had come to feel like a guarantee of endless surplus to mega-money investment firms was, in a matter of days, undone by a data overload in the form of digital buy orders sent by retail traders on desktop and smartphone trading apps. The amount of trading data was so great that it created liquidity problems for brokerages, who decided to block buying of some popular meme stocks at various times. Conspiracy speculation took root on the Reddit boards, which then passed to mainstream attention and finally to hearings in Congress.

As this case demonstrates, the actions of the masses are now a resource for capital. Robinhood, a trading app launched in 2015 that advertises a dark utopian mission to “democratize finance for all,” offers commission-free trading and became the popular vehicle for the retail traders who joined the GameStop mania.29 But, as Richard Serra and Carlota Fay Schoolman contended in their 1973 piece, Television Delivers People, producing a statement that has since become a foundational principle of media studies: when something is free, you are not the consumer, “you are consumed.”30 And sure enough, Robinhood makes much of its money from selling traders’ order flow data to market makers like Citadel, whose CEO had invested $2 billion in Melvin Capital, the very hedge fund that was caught in the short squeeze. Beneath the David and Goliath story of Main Street investors sticking it to Wall Street villains was a more nefarious revelation that the real surplus at work in the meme stock affair was reaped as data that helped shore up the more traditional forms of surplus among big institutional firms that control the very contours of a supposedly free market. Moreover, the qualitative, affective response to such market dynamics, as recorded on Reddit and Twitter, have now become a tactical resource of hedge funds, who have learned to profit from even the best attacks against them. Quantitative trading algorithms analyzing massive amounts of social media data using advanced natural language processing are deployed to perform sentiment analysis and opinion mining. And so the cycle of surplus continues from data to affect to data, ad infinitum—each derived from the last with the derivative more fundamental than the putative source of derivation.

Surplus Politics

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented portion of the population was confined to their homes, producing and consuming data in a state of hermetic globalism, straining the already overloaded bandwidth of global data transfer.31 On 6 January 2021, a group of right-wing supporters of Donald Trump attacked the Capitol building in Washington, D.C., fueled by the conspiracy theory of the group QAnon, a widespread online network surrounding a putative source high up in the “deep state” (the figure known as Q) and propagating racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic propaganda. As we see in Cullen Hoback’s documentary about the movement, Q: Into the Storm (2021), Q operates on the suspicion that the truth is in hidden byways of digital data, sometimes yielding deadly consequences. To witness Hoback accompany Jim Watkins—a businessman and the operator of 8Chan, the main platform on which Q, an alleged intelligence officer, posted his “drops”—laughing as the crowd breaks into the Capitol building is to see the conflation of the digital and the social all too directly.32 Q has created a semiotic world of clues that severs itself and its followers from the fabric of social reality altogether, gamifying it as Hoback suggests in a comparison to Cicada 3301, alternately characterized as an actual secretive organization or a fictional alternate reality game that has run complex digital scavenger hunts since 2012. 33 Q’s game indeed has rules, a perverse affective sense of fun, and easter eggs that provide domesticated surprise. QAnon’s slogan “‘do your own research’” might be taken as a command to surf your own surplus data channels.34And the Q movement has one thing right: data is worldly; digital channels do shape the world and are in excess of any heuristic intent. Events like the Capitol riot reify the data surround, among other things giving rationale to the increasingly datafied police to expand their quantitative vision.35 The events themselves are shocking and somehow predictable all at once: it is as though image boards (4Chan, 8Chan, 8kun) premeditate events by sniffing them out of the back alleys of data and insinuating them into reality.

This eruption of conspiratorial violence reminds us that data has inherited the legacy of biopolitics, particularizing its manipulation of society as a mass. As Rob Kitchin has argued, it is not just size that makes data big. Even speed of transfer and variety of format make up necessary but insufficient conditions for the revolution we were promised. Data deserving the name big also has to be “flexible” and “relational”—open to the inclusion of new fields—and, crucially, both “exhaustive” and “fine-grained.”36 The usefulness of data was traditionally attached to the precision with which it was gathered and defined. Sparse data, very exact, could create predictions to guide action by means of averages. The resulting categories, like those in an actuarial table, did not apply to individuals directly but at the level of the mass. This type of data was a crucial technique of what Michel Foucault called biopolitics, governance not of the individual body but at the level of generality. However, if biopolitics still relied on the assumed reality of demographic data, surplus data is something entirely novel. What was once a disjunction between individual and mean has become a partly automated loop between machine vision (or more generally, categorization) and its application to singular states of affairs. This logic stretches from FICO scores to healthcare data, from global logistics to finance capital.

Data has indeed become big and granular, and it has gained the ability to move from particulars to generalities and back again. Ecological fallacies emerging from large data sets now simply become new sources of value in both markets and politics. Without norms or quantifiable risks, we enter endless loops of uncertainty. David Bering-Porter, in his contribution to this issue, juxtaposes W. E. B. Du Bois’s data visualizations and speculative fictions with the famous case of Judge Schreber’s paranoid fantasies. Extrapolating into our present, we might imagine the paranoid conspiratorial politics of QAnon as occupying the space of paranoic dreams, ones of absolute counting, datafication, and control of the future, aspirations whose impossibility always drives violent forms of speculation and politics. But, Bering-Porter suggests, there are other pathways available. In the quantitative countermyths put forth by Du Bois to document racism in America, there was also an alternative aspiration “to reconcile the aims of visuality and data in two senses: as sight and apparition, evidence and aspiration.”37 Perhaps there is a future in which data stories offer evidence of a reality surplus data seems to foreclose in the present, the reality of the Black lives that Du Bois highlights and that have taken center stage in US politics today. It is the new task of a progressive politics to turn the endless extendable and colonizing frontiers of machine learning systems into something other than conspiratorial derivative instruments. In the surplus of data, any faith in the singularity of the real has been shattered—but these systems might harbor another way to encounter the world, one grounded in the experiences and data of the diverse multitudes. Our machines make technically visible what perhaps has always been there—the social nature of our technical lives. They need only be turned toward that future.

#### Liberal anti-trust is the process through which Western empire, colonialism, and environmental destruction cohere themselves– antitrust scholars’ idealized capitalism irreconcilably provokes competition between worker and owner, masking the structural failure of propertization.

Kwet 22, visiting fellow at Yale’s Information Society Project, PhD in Sociology from Rhodes University (Michael, “The Digital Tech Deal: A Socialist Framework for the Twenty-First Century”, *Race and Class*, Volume 63, Issue 3, 1-11-2022 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/03063968211064478>. Retrieved from KU Libraries)--js

Limitations of liberal and progressive ‘techlash’ reforms

In response to the rise of Big Tech, the intellectual classes in the Global North, led by American scholars, researchers and journalists, have formulated a liberal/progressive critique of Big Tech and a corresponding set of capitalist reforms they call the ‘techlash’. Their framework, informed by progressive-era figures like Louis Brandeis and Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR), aims to restore the Golden Age of Capitalism through enlightened state regulation. This circuit of intellectuals are drawn primarily from elite universities (Ivy League, MIT, Stanford, Oxford, etc.) and the corporate media. Money for their research is sourced from elite academia and media outlets, wealthy foundations, philanthropists and Big Tech itself. The techlash critics ignore or downplay the analytical and moral centrality of digital capitalism and colonialism, ecological context and the need for a socialist transformation. A de facto vanguard within the intellectual community tuned into tech, together with Big Tech itself, these elite intellectuals set the bounds of leftist discourse and exercise ‘tech hegemony’ over the broader narrative.37

There are two branches of critique put forth by the American techlashers: a legal branch which focuses on anti-trust as its centrepiece to reform digital capitalism and a human rights branch which focuses on discrimination, privacy, content moderation and workers’ welfare. These intellectuals are typically in agreement with each other and often weave their critiques and solutions together. Let us consider each in turn.

Legal reformers

Within the legal domain, a new wave of anti-trust scholars have occupied centre-stage to address the digital economy.38 At the leftmost end of the spectrum in the United States, ‘neo-Brandeisian’ anti-trust scholars draw inspiration from Louis Brandeis, who viewed a fair and just democracy as one without extreme concentrations of wealth and power into the hands of corporations. Neo-Brandeisians share with socialists the idea that socioeconomic inequality in part springs from the monopoly power of big corporations. However, anti-trust reformers depart from socialists in irreconcilable ways.

For one, they envision a ‘small business capitalism’ of private property owners kept intact by enlightened state regulators. Socialists, by contrast, argue that the capitalist system naturally concentrates wealth and objects to class inequalities and private ownership of the means of production. For another, neo-Brandeisians fetishise competition as a force for social good, rather than a force which pits owners and workers against each other in the battle for revenue, profits and market share.

Critically, the limits of economic growth are not acknowledged anywhere in the literature, nor are digital colonialism and American empire. This is an analytical failure because the fact that Big Tech corporations exercise global dominance should be evaluated in light of their international and environmental impact. It’s as if central features of the global tech economy – American empire and ecological crisis – don’t even exist. It is a moral failure because all parties affected should be involved in formulating and implementing remedies, but, instead, the United States’ scholars, lawmakers, courts and regulators are the ones making critical decisions about reforming American firms with global reach.

European counterparts share in the US anti-trust reformist agenda, with an added caveat: the Europeans are explicitly trying to cut down the American super-giants in order to build their own tech giants and colonise global markets.

In Europe, there are already tens of unicorns (privately held start-ups valued over $1 billion). Rich European countries dominate this race. The UK leads the pack and aims to produce its own trillion-dollar behemoth. President Emanuel Macron will be pumping €5 billion to tech start-ups in hopes that France will have at least twenty-five unicorns by 2025. Germany is attracting billions for its start-ups and spending €3 billion to become a global AI powerhouse and a world leader (i.e., market coloniser) in digital industrialisation. For its part, the Netherlands aims to become a ‘unicorn nation’. In 2021, the European Union’s competition commissioner, Margarethe Vestager, told the press in no uncertain terms that Europe needs to ‘build its own European tech giants’.39

Thus, the notion that European leaders are against Big Tech is demonstrably false. They are trying to shrink the American super-giants (GAFAM) so they can carve out market share for burgeoning European tech giants. It’s pure power politics – an inconvenient truth for America’s neo-Brandeisians, who laud and borrow ideas from their European counterparts.

The new anti-trust scholars erase these realities from within their own self-referential echo chambers, and instead act as if anti-trust is a matter of remedying harms to their own citizens. This is not a small point. Even if anti-trust reforms go through, the space created for new market entrants will almost certainly be dominated by the rich countries, who still have the most advanced engineers and resources to pay them high salaries and poach foreign talent.

Human rights reformers

Another branch of analysis and solutions comes from a human-rights-oriented crowd centring around the politics of big data. This genre of ‘critical data studies’ literature blossomed during the 2010s through a corporate-academic research nexus funded by Big Tech, wealthy foundations and philanthropists. To be sure, meaningful contributions were made to the field of digital, particularly with respect to algorithmic discrimination (such as racial bias in search engine results and facial recognition). Yet this came at the expense of narrowing the focus of consideration from who owns the digital ecosystem itself – prevalent in the Free and Open Source Software community beginning in the 1980s – to one in which discrimination and data policy became paramount.

A handful of other topics have been taken up by this ‘tech rights’ community, such as content moderation and worker welfare. Yet these conversations have also come at the expense of a focus on property. For example, the dominant literature on ‘content moderation’ addresses topics of who and what content companies like Facebook and Twitter will permit, amplify, or shadow-ban in their networks.40 Yet this area of concern fails to problematise why corporations – much less American ones – should own our social media networks in the first place, orienting them around profit, accumulation, wealth concentration, growth and market expansion. A more democratic option called the Fediverse – a set of public-owned and controlled, interoperable social media networks – is socialist in spirit and used by several million people every day.41 Yet content moderation scholars and media pundits virtually ignore it, at best calling for a ‘public option’ ostensibly in a mixed capitalist economy.42 As part of a non-profit industrial complex that waters down leftwing causes, donors like the Knight Foundation43 and even the Charles Koch Foundation44 are providing the funds needed to scale up this literature. Unsurprisingly, those who take the money fail to oppose American empire and capitalism proper.

Unions and worker welfare form another set of topics within the human rights branch of tech ethics. Thanks to neoliberal reforms, a drop in worker unionisation has led to increased worker exploitation and inequality. Yet the call for Big Tech worker unionisation seems rather vague and skirts major issues. While one should support gig and warehouse worker unions trying to improve pay, working conditions and support for marginalised workers, there’s also an uncomfortable tension: Big Tech is structured to be a colonial force of ecological destruction that needs to be dissolved as rapidly as possible.

Indeed, there’s a theme of ‘Big Tech exceptionalism’ that runs through the techlash community. For the Left, there are no calls to unionise or diversify Phillip Morris, Pfizer, Shell Oil, Goldman Sachs, Bayer/Monsanto, though there could be. Perhaps it would be justified for those corporations, too. But if so, the workers should be pushing to dissolve their own companies – and that’s not presently being done in tech. We also don’t have leading ‘ethics’ researchers from Pfizer, Shell Oil and the like, yet some of the most prominent techlash researchers work for Big Tech itself.45 There’s little discussion of either of these points.

#### The spectacle of antitrust refigures resistance away from structural action – it masks the *transcendental parasitism* of cybernetic capital hidden in hyperreal advertisements.

**ANON 18** (ANON’s description of themselves: “We are a collective of ‘Other.’ Some of us are sex workers, some immigrants, many of us queer. There are even a few privileged whites amongst us. Nevertheless, ANON is largely the work and brainchild of People of Color (PoC). Our social disciplines are as varied as our identities, from journalists to dominatrixes. ANON are the intellectual cousins of #BlackLivesMatter divorced from liberalism,” “Ultra-Œdipus//Sub(lime)space,” https://4roko.wordpress.com/2018/09/26/ultra-oedipus-sublimespace/)

**The oedipalization of post-disciplinary, control societies seduces or indulges the libido as opposed to the suppressing the individual’s desire.** Desire at all levels (e.g. impulsive, visceral, aspirational, social, and covert) weaponized against the subject as a Pavlovian, disciplinary instrument conditioning their libidinal investments, their wants and needs to serve and obey power mechanisms. They’re pushed into deeper and deeper submission to a point where you losing themselves themselves in rapture, no longer able to distinguish between ecstasy and agony, and acclimate to their own exploitation and abuse. The individual gets addicted to the libidinal high, the rush of dopamine—a side effect of transcendental parasitism—and they surrender their autonomy in exchange for pleasure to a sublime, master signifier (e.g. the domme, an oedipal symbolic figure representing the nexus of pain and pleasure) which colonizes and codifies desire at the base, subliminal level. **Hard power hides in plain sight and remains unchallenged because the individual is transfixed by the exciting soft power of spectacle, and their entire sense of reality is an overcoded simulation.** You might work tirelessly at a repetitive job, sacrificing years of your life to an 8 hour day/40 hour week cycle, eating microwaved leftovers or processed pink slime on your 40 minute lunch break, giving thankless labor to your supervisors so you pay off the mortgage for a depreciating piece of property, or so you can afford to go on a three day vacation with your estranged spouse and your alienated children who don’t really know you that well because you barely ever see them and you \*actually\* believe that this is what qualifies as success. **When you no longer notice that the cops in Times Square brandish automatic weapons because you’re entranced by hyperreal advertisements embedded into the architecture while everyone around you continues to shop in peace is when know you’re in deep sub(lime)space—the ultimate realization of atomized, liberal subjectivity.** Taken from Jeremy Bentham, the panopticon is an institutional building of control that was designed to allow for 24-7 surveillance of inmates. In it, there is a center from which a watchman can view all of the cells within the circular prison, and thus all of the inmates, without any of the inmates knowing for sure if anyone is in the cell. Also, inmates are partitioned off and can not see into neighboring cells. The idea behind this is that if inmates never know whether or not they are being watched, they will be incentivized to act in a proper manner. Foucault takes this and turns it into the idea of panopticism or panoptic surveillance. In Discipline and Punish, he tackles the idea of power and builds on Bentham’s idea. After explaining Bentham’s panopticon, he states, “All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy.” Thus, he replaces our rigid idea of “prisoner” and replaces it with a multitude of possible subjects that could be in that position. **The panopticon “reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap.”** He then supplants the idea of a prison guard with any “public officer” making the position in the center of the prison assumable by anyone who volunteers, “so to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action.” What’s more is this “is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power.” Throughout the book, Foucault traces a transition over time from a more obvious and visible kind of power to today’s form of soft power. He claims that, in the past, people had vested power in a sovereign and this ruler then had complete control over their lives, or the right to choose between life and death. A historical transition was made from this to modes of power that govern without bodies, disciplines that control without designated rulers: In physical torture, the example was based on terror: physical fear, collective horror, images that must be engraved on the memories of the spectators, like the brand on the cheek or shoulder of the condemned man. **The example is now based on the lesson, the discourse, the decipherable sign, the representation of public morality. It is no longer the terrifying restoration of sovereignty that will sustain the ceremony of punishment, but the reactivation of the code, the collective reinforcements of the link between the idea of crime and the idea of punishment.** In the penalty, rather than seeing the presence of the sovereign, one will read the laws themselves. A neighborhood policed by broken windows logic is arguably an attempt to create a city wide panopticon. Not only do the police look for mild offenses, but the citizens themselves are encouraged in this environment to become watchers. A deeper change happens on the level of the individual in this kind of society, and the assumption is that people will regulate themselves, for they can’t pinpoint exactly who is watching or when they are being watched. Times Square as we now know it today is credited for the most part Mayor Giuliani, who decided to target the sex industry in the area and altered the landscape dramatically. Under his watch, “Peep-shows could no longer operate within 500 yards of each other, allowing companies such as Disney to take over.” This and other actions Giuliani took during his time as mayor effectively altered this area and much of the city. Now, Times Square still seems like a fun time for some, though it’s a different kind of entertainment. Filled with broadway plays and gift shops, the area has become a hot spot for families and visitors. However, when we take different modes of power into consideration with an increasingly technologically advanced world, we must realize that this Disney-fied source of commercial growth comes at a potential price. The photo for this section shows police officers on duty in Times Square. In addition to the officers presented here, there is a police station placed firmly in the area, amidst the bustle and stores. Some officers resemble cops that most people encounter in urban settings often, others are more militarized, armed with helmets and large weapons. **The police here are an expected part of surveillance in the area, but the “potential price” I believe we are paying when we enter the area** (and some say, many streets all throughout the city) **lies with the types of surveillance that cannot be seen.** In March 2017 the New York City Council introduced a bill that attempted to increase “transparency and oversight over the NYPD’s use of sophisticated new surveillance technologies and information sharing networks. Dubbed the Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology (POST) Act, the legislation requires the NYPD to disclose basic information about the surveillance tools it uses and the safeguards in place to protect the privacy and civil liberties of New Yorkers.” While law enforcement and urban government officials would suggest that these measures help cut down on crime, the reality is “many law enforcement surveillance devices collect information about innocent citizens.” Aside from a plethora of cameras, some devices can track targets’ phones (sometimes trapping information from other citizens in the process) and facial recognition is becoming another technology that is becoming increasingly used. While some may advocate for the use of police technology, regardless of what it is, critics of these measures claim such tactics threaten our freedom without offering any transparency.

#### Cybernetics absorbs political movements in order to perfect the circulation of information – we must assume the possibility of impossibility of communication in order to orient ourselves away from capitalist informatics.

Tiqqun 1, they are a French collective formed in 1999! (“The Cybernetic Hypothesis”, http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/tiqqun-the-cybernetic-hypothesis#toc4)--js

It is no longer a matter — as PEOPLE could still pretend to believe in 1972 — of questioning capitalism and its devastating effects; it is more a question of “reorienting the economy so as to better serve human needs, the maintenance and evolution of the social system, and the pursuit of a real cooperation with nature all at once. The balanced economy that characterizes eco-society is thus a ‘regulated’ economy in the cybernetic sense of the term.” The first ideologues of cybernetic capitalism talked about opening a community-based management of capitalism from below, about making everyone responsible thanks to a “collective intelligence” which would result from the progress made in telecommunications and informatics. Without questioning either private property or State property, THEY invite us to co-management, to a kind of control of business by communities of wage-workers and users. The cybernetic reformist euphoria was at such extremes in the beginning of the 1970s that THEY could even evoke the idea of a “social capitalism” (as if that hadn’t been what we’ve had since the 19th century) without even trembling anymore, and defend it as did the architect ecologist and graphomaniac Yona Friedman, for instance. Thus what PEOPLE have ended up calling “third way socialism” and its alliance with ecology — and PEOPLE can clearly see how powerful the latter has become politically in Europe today — was crystallized. But if one had to refer to just one event that in those years exposed the torturous progress towards this new alliance between socialism and liberalism in France, not without the hope that something different would come out of it, it would have to be the LIP affair. With those events all of socialism, even in its most radical currents, like “council communism,” failed to take down the liberal arrangement and, without properly suffering any real defeat to speak of, ended up simply absorbed by cybernetic capitalism. The recent adherence of the ecologist Cohn-Bendit — the mild-mannered ‘leader’ of the May 68 events — to the liberal-libertarian current is but a logical consequence of a deeper reversal of “socialist” ideas against themselves.

The present “anti-globalization” movement and citizen protest in general show no break with this training by pronouncements made thirty years ago. They simply demand that it be put into place faster. Behind the thundering counter-summits they hold, one can see the same cold vision of society as a totality threatened by break-up, one and the same goal of social regulation. For them it is a matter of restoring the social coherence pulverized by the dynamics of cybernetic capitalism, and guaranteeing, in the final analysis, everyone’s participation in the latter. Thus it is not surprising to see the driest economism impregnate the ranks of the citizens in such a tenacious and nauseating manner. The citizen, dispossessed of everything, parades as an amateur expert in social management, and conceives of the nothingness of his life as an uninterrupted succession of “projects” to carry out: as the sociologist Luc Boltanski remarks, with a feigned naiveté, “everything can attain to the dignity of a project, including enterprises which may be hostile to capitalism.” In the same way as the “self-management” device was seminal in the reorganization of capitalism thirty years ago, citizen protest is none other than the present instrument of the modernization of politics. This new “process of civilization” rests on the critique of authority developed in the 1970s, at the moment when the second cybernetics crystallized. The critique of political representation as separate power, already co-opted by the new Management into the economic production sphere, is today reinvested into the political sphere. Everywhere there is only horizontality of relations, and participation in projects that are to replace the dusty old hierarchical and bureaucratic authority, counter-power and decentralization that is supposed to defeat monopolies and secrecy. Thus the chains of social interdependence can extend and tighten, chains which are sometimes made of surveillance, and sometimes of delegation. Integration of civil society by the State, and integration of the State by civil society more and more work together like gears. It is thus that the division of the labor of population management necessary for the dynamics of cybernetic capitalism is organized — and the affirmation of a “global citizenship” will, predictably, put the finishing touches on it.

After the 1970s socialism was just another democratism anymore, now completely necessary for the progress of the cybernetic hypothesis. The ideal of direct democracy and participatory democracy must be seen as the desire for a general expropriation by the cybernetic system of all the information contained in its parts. The demand for transparency and traceability is but a demand for the perfect circulation of information, a progressivism in the logic of flux that rules cybernetic capitalism. Between 1965 and 1970, a young German philosopher, presumed to be the inheritor of “critical theory,” laid the foundations for the democratic paradigm of today’s contestation by entering noisily into a number of controversies with his elders. Habermas countered the socio-cybernetician Niklas Luhmann, hyper-functionalist systems theoretician, by counterposing the unpredictability of dialogue, arguments irreducible to simple information exchanges. But it was above all against Marcuse that this project of a generalized “ethics of discussion” which was to become radicalized in the critique of the democratic project of the Renaissance. Marcuse explained, commenting on Max Weber’s observations, that “rationalization” meant that technical reasoning, based on the principles of industrialization and capitalism, was indissolubly political reasoning; Habermas retorted that an ensemble of immediate intersubjective relations escaped technology-mediated subject-object relations, and that in the end it was the former that framed and guided the latter. In other words, in light of the development of the cybernetic hypothesis, politics should aim to become autonomous and to extend the sphere of discourse, to multiply democratic arenas, to build and research a consensus which in sum would be emancipatory by nature. Aside from the fact that he reduced the “lived world” and “everyday life” — the whole of what escaped the control machine, to social interactions and discourses, Habermas more profoundly ignored the fundamental heterogeneity of forms-of-life among themselves. In the same way as contracts, consensus is attached to the objective of unification and pacification via the management of differences. In the cybernetic framework, all faith in “communicational action,” all communication that does not assume the possibility of its impossibility, ends up serving control. This is why science and technology are not, as the idealist Habermas thought, simply ideologies which dress the concrete tissue of inter-subjective relations. They are “ideologies materialized,” a cascade of devices, a concrete government-mentality that passes through such relations. We do not want more transparency or more democracy. There’s already enough. On the contrary — we want more opacity and more intensity.

But we can’t be done dealing with socialism (expired now as a result of the cybernetic hypothesis) without mentioning another voice: I want to talk about the critique centered around man-machine relations that has attacked what it sees as the core of the cybernetics issue by posing the question of technology beyond technophobia — the technophobia of someone like Theodore Kaczynski, or of Oregon’s monkey-man of letters, John Zerzan — and technophilia, and which intended to found a new radical ecology which would not be stupidly romantic. In the economic crisis of the 1970s, Ivan Illich was among the first to express the hope for a re-establishment of social practices, no longer merely through a new relations between subjects, as Habermas had discussed, but also between subjects and objects, via a “reappropriation of tools” and institutions, which were to be won over to the side of general “conviviality,” a conviviality which would be able to undermine the law of value. Simondon, philosopher of technology, used this same reappropriation as his vaulting stick to transcend Marx and Marxism: “work possesses the intelligence of the elements; capital possesses the intelligence of groups; but it is not by uniting the intelligence of elements and of groups that one can come up with an intelligence of the intermediary and non-mixed being that is the technological individual... The dialogue of capital and labor is false, because it is in the past. The socialization of the means of production cannot alone give rise to a reduction in alienation; it can only do so if it is the prior condition for the acquisition, on the part of the human individual, of the intelligence of the individuated technological object. This relationship of the human individual to the technological individual is the most difficult to form and the most delicate.” The solution to the problem of political economy, of capitalist alienation, and of cybernetics, was supposed to be found in the invention of a new kind of relationship with machines, a “technological culture” that up to now had been lacking in western modernity. Such a doctrine justified, thirty years later, the massive development of “citizen” teaching in science and technology. Because living beings, contrary to the cybernetic hypothesis’ idea, are essentially different from machines, mankind would thus have the responsibility to represent technological objects: “mankind, as the witness of the machines,” wrote Simondon, “is responsible for their relationship; the individual machine represents man, but man represents the ensemble of machines, since there is no one machine for all the machines, whereas there can be a kind of thinking that would cover them all.” In its present utopian form, seen in the writings of Guattari at the end of his life, or today in the writings of Bruno Latour, this school claimed to “make objects speak”, and to represent their norms in the public arena through a “parliament of Things.” Eventually the technocrats would make way for the “mechanologues,” and other “medialogues”; it’s hard to see how these would differ from today’s technocrats, except for that they would be even more familiar with technological life, citizens more ideally coupled with their devices. What the utopians pretended not to know was that the integration of technological thinking by everybody would in no way undermine the existing power relations. The acknowledgement of the man-machines hybridity in social arrangements would certainly do no more than extend the struggle for recognition and the tyranny of transparency to the inanimate world. In this renovated political ecology, socialism and cybernetics would attain to their point of optimal convergence: the project of a green republic, a technological democracy — “a renovation of democracy could have as its objective a pluralistic management of the whole of the machinic constituents,” wrote Guattari in the last text he ever published — the lethal vision of a definitive civil peace between humans and non-humans.

#### Technological expansion has become the nervous system of our dying world, presenting us with a new world -- a collective *global hallucination* that breeds our passivity and docility, machining us into cogs of an automated system of extraction.

Mbembe 19 (Achille Mbembe is a philosopher, postcolonial critical theorist, political scientist, and public intellectual from Cameroon. He is currently a member of the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, “Bodies as borders”)

My intervention is a set of urgent, fragmentary, and unfinished reflections on our global present. When I say ‘our global present’, what I truly have in mind is the sustainability and durability of our planet. As a matter of fact, this is an almost existential preoccupation, which is increasingly expressed in many different voices and shared by various people all over the world. Indeed, many are wondering how we should inhabit anew and share as equitably as possible a planet whose life-support system has been so severely damaged by human activities and that is in dire need of repair. In view of the deep state of fragmentation the planet finds itself in, they are asking: how should we re-member it, that is, put back together its different parts, reassemble it and reconstitute it as an integrated system in which humans and nonhumans, physical, chemical and biological components, oceans, atmosphere and land-surface are all interlinked in a grand gesture of mutuality? These questions of inhabitation and interconnection, of mutuality, sustainability and durability, of the interlacing of human history and Earth’s history are far from abstract concerns. In fact, the ongoing long-term planetary environmental changes have only further dramatized them, and there is little doubt that they will be at the centre of any debate on the future of life and the future of reason in this century. To properly attend to them forces us to refocus our attention on three mega processes that have an almost overwhelming bearing on what humanity and the planet we live on (the only one, so far, where life is known to exist) might become. Early 21 st-century corporate sovereignty The first mega process is the unprecedented consolidation of power and knowledge (political, financial, and technological) in the hands of private high-tech corporate entities whose sphere of action is not one country or one region, but the globe. ‘Corporate sovereignty’ has taken various forms throughout history. Take, for instance, the English East India Company and its political dominance in some parts of the Indian subcontinent in the 18th century. A composite, diffuse and hybrid entity, it exercised powers customarily associated with formal state institutions. It could acquire territories and exercise authority over people. It could engage in wide ranging operations such as tax collection and war making. In competition with the monarchical and national state, it was a key part of the different institutional and constitutional forms that shaped imperial expansion (see Stein 2011). The conditions that have enabled the expansion of privatized government in the first half of the 21st century are well known. Many of these have to do with the various legal frameworks behind international trade agreements, foreign investment treaties and other mechanisms that have turned markets into the single most undisputed forces of our times. Others have to do with the computational transformations of financial markets and the possibilities afforded by media technologies (see Beverungen and Lange 2018). Furthermore, whether the old distinction between the economic power of corporations and the political sovereignty of states still holds is more and more open to debate (read Barkan 2013). Most global corporations aspire to secede from everybody else while exercising surveillance on everybody else. Their big dream is to be exempt from taxes and to be free from accountability; in short, to enjoy the kind of immunity and state of exceptionality we used to recognize only to truly sovereign powers. In a recent book about what she terms “surveillance capitalism,” Shohana Zuboff argues that a global architecture of behaviour modification is under way. Driven by powerful states, high-tech corporations and military apparatuses, surveillance capitalism threatens what she calls “human nature” in the 21st century, just as industrial capitalism disfigured the natural world in the 20th. She shows the extent to which vast wealth is accumulated in what she terms new “behavioural futures markets,” that is, markets where predictions about our behaviour are bought and sold, and the production of goods and services is subordinated to new means of behavioural modification. Indeed, capital, especially finance capital, has become our shared infrastructure, our nervous system, the transcendental maw that nowadays maps out our world and its psycho-physical limits (Zuboff 2018). Around us, it looks as if nothing escapes its con-trol. Affects, emotions and feelings, manifestations of desire, dreams or thoughts – no sphere of contemporary life has been left untouched by the spread of capital. Capital now extends its grasp deep into the underbelly of the world. In its wake, it leaves vast fields of debris and toxins, waste heaps of humans ravaged by sores and boils. Now that everything is a potential source of capitalization, it has made a world of itself: a hallucinatory phenomenon of planetary dimensions. Early 21st -century corporate sovereignty is therefore an unprecedented form of power, whose main aspiration is to free itself from democratic oversight. As a result, we might no longer live in an epoch when sovereignty was exercised by the demos. The demos properly understood might no longer be the sovereign. Finance capital in the guise of a ubiquitous digital architecture might have definitely become the new Leviathan. We are witnessing the historical bifurcation between liberal democracy and finance capitalism, and the emergence of a new form of sovereignty – corporate sovereignty – which claims for itself the law of immunity and the powers of exception. The computational speed regime The second mega process I would like to invoke is technological escalation and the ways in which it has totally redefined the nature of speed, unshackled markets and the economy, and the way it constantly monitors our behaviour in an attempt at revealing how it could be modified and optimized. As a matter of fact, some of the fastest expanding markets in the world today are ‘markets for future behaviour’. They rely on better understanding incipient future intent. This “could be future voting intentions, the intent to commit fraud, the intent to buy life insurance, or the intent to stream a specific video,” argues Louise Amoore (2019, 4). These markets also rely on the extraction and mining of new forms of raw material, mostly consisting of information and details about individuals’ behaviour taken, as Zuboff writes, from the distant corners of our unconscious. It is raw material “plumbed from intimate patterns of the self” – “our personality, our moods, our emotions, our lies, our vulnerabilities, every level of our intimacy” (2018, 201). The purpose is not only to heighten the predictability of our behaviour. It is also to make life itself amenable to ‘datafication’. A key feature of our times is therefore the extent to which all societies are organized according to the same principle – the computational. We are surrounded with ubiquitous computing, technologies that weave themselves into the fabric of our everyday lives, devices, sensors, things we interact with and which have become part of our presence in the world all the time. How the boundary between us and these devices is enacted is a matter of open debate (Matzner 2019). But, what is the computational? The computational is generally understood as a technical system whose function is to capture, extract, and automatically process data that must be identified, selected, sorted, classified, recombined, codified and activated. Yet we shouldn’t forget that the computational is also a force and energy of a special kind, a speed regime with its own qualities and infrastructures. It is a force and energy that produces and serializes subjects, objects, phenomena; that splits reason from consciousness and memory, codes and stores data that can be used to manufacture new types of services and devices sold for profit. Whether operating on bodies, nerves, material, blood, cellular tissues, the brain or energy, the aim is the same, i.e. the conversion of all substances into quantities; the conversion of organic and vital ends into technical means; the capture of forces and possibilities and their annexation by the language of a machine-brain transformed into an autonomous and automated system. But the computational is also the institution through which a common world, a new common sense and new configurations of power, of perception and of reality are nowadays brought into being. The globalization of corporate sovereignty, the extension of capital into every sphere of life and technological escalation in the form of the computational are all part of one and the same process. The dialectics of entanglement and separation The third mega process is what we should call the dialectics of entanglement and separation. All over the world, the combination of fossil capital, soft-power warfare, and the saturation of the everyday by digital and computational technologies has led to the acceleration of speed and the intensification of connections, creating a new redistribution of the Earth and of population movements. To be alive, or to remain alive, is increasingly tantamount to being able to move speedily. In the process, the human race has come up against terrestrial limits. Such limits are not only the consequence of the sphericality of the planet. They are also limitations on the expansion of life as such. As the planet increasingly seems bound to burn, it is not only the individuated bodies that are imperilled. It is earthly existence, the fate of everything on earth, the fluidity of life which is at stake (Pyne 1997; Parisi and Terranova 2000). Meanwhile, we are, more than ever before at any other time in human history, not only in close proximity to each other but also exposed to each other. This close proximity and exposure is experienced less and less as opportunity and possibility and, more and more, as heightened risk. But entanglement and exposure to each other are not all that characterize the now. Wherever we look, the drive is simultaneously and decisively towards contraction, towards containment, towards enclosure and various forms of encampment, detention, and incarceration. Typical of this logic of contraction, containment, incarceration and enclosure is the worldwide erection of all kinds of walls and fortifications, gates and enclaves. In other words, various practices of partitioning space, of offshoring and fencing off wealth, of splintering territories, of fragmenting spaces, saddling them with various kinds of borders whose function is to decelerate movement, to stop it in some instances, for certain classes of populations, in order to man- age risks. Various reasons are mobilized to account for this renewed infatuation with borders taken as the best way to manage risks. Security and the preservation of one’s identity are some of these reasons. And as it happens, physical and virtual barriers of separation, digitalisation of databases, filing systems, the development of new tracking devices, sensors, drones, satellites and sentinel robots, infrared detectors and various other cameras, biometric controls, and new microchips containing personal details – everything is put in place to transform the very nature of the border in the name of security. Borders are increasingly turned into mobile, portable, omnipresent and ubiquitous realities. The goal is to better control movement and speed, accelerating it here, decelerating it there and, in the process, sorting, recategorizing, reclassifying people with the goal of better selecting anew who is whom, who should be where and who shouldn’t, in the name of security. As a result, borders are no longer merely lines of demarcation separating distinct sovereign entities. Increasingly, they are the name we should use to describe the organised violence that underpins both contemporary capitalism and our world order in general. But perhaps, to be exact, we should not speak of borders in general but, instead, of ‘borderization’, that is, the process by which certain spaces are transformed into uncrossable places for certain classes of populations, who thereby undergo a process of racialization; places where speed must be disabled and the lives of a multitude of people judged to be undesirable are meant to be immobilized if not shattered. Whatever the case, the technological transformation of borders is in full swing. In a sense, one of the major consequences of the acceleration of technological innovations has been the creation of a segmented planet of multiple speed regimes. A key development, of late, is the extent to which border security practices have taken a keen interest in the connection between the human body and identity, as a means to achieve detailed control over movement and speed. This being the case, the question we must ask is the following: what precisely is at stake in the extension of the biometric border into multiple realms of social life and, in particular, the human body? In other words, what explains the migration from the border understood as a particular point in space to the border as the moving body of the undesired masses of populations? The answer is a new global partitioning between potentially risky bodies vs. bodies that are not. It is in the nature of risk to be hidden from view. That which is hidden from view is generally unknown. For it to be known, it must be visualized. The screening of bodies at border checkpoints aims at making visible “that which is hidden from view, opening up new visualizations of the unknown, potentially risky body” (Amoore and Hall 2009, 444). In such a context, biometric technologies are supposed to fragment the human body in order to recompose it for the purpose of securitization, of elimination and neutralization of the risk. This happens because the human body is seen as an indisputable anchor from which data can be safely harnessed or extracted. As a result, we are witnessing a gradually extending intertwinement of individual physical characteristics with information systems – a process that has served to deepen faith in data as a means of risk management and faith in the body as a source of absolute identification. In this sense, biometric technologies should perhaps be best understood as techniques that govern both the mobility and enclosure of bodies (see van der Ploeg 2003). They are perceived as infallible and unchallengeable verifiers of the truth about a person – the ultimate guarantors of identity. They are supposed to produce the identification of a person beyond question, and lend authenticity and credibility to all of the data that are connected to that identity. According to this logic, the world would be safer if only ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty could be controlled. These technologies are assumed to provide a complete picture of who someone is, to fix and secure identity as a basis for prediction and prevention, leaving people to dispute their own identity. The three mega processes I have briefly sketched are driving the movement towards what I have called ‘planetary entanglement’, as well as its opposite, that is, enclosure, contraction, containment, encampment, and incarceration. Once again, they are shaped by the alliance between military power, the industries that surround it (contractors), and tech giants. They are also driven by corporate elites increasingly detached from their countries of origin and who store most of their capital in tax heavens (see Davis 2019). These elites can no longer be ‘forced to account’ through traditional means such as elections or protests. They defeat citizens’ scrutiny via complexity and secrecy, often under the pretext of national security or via an economic rationale that puts capital first, before people. This movement is erratic, uneven. But everywhere it heightens uncertainty and insecurity. Everywhere it institutionalizes the risks inherent in the misfortunes of reality. Life and mobility Part of what we are witnessing as a result is a novel imbrication, a symbiotic merging of life and mobility. To be alive, or to survive, is more and more co-terminus with the capacity to move. Just as living, movement, in turn, involves continual doublings, the incessant crossing of multiple lines and thresholds, multiple transitions across layers. Life itself is more and more taken as something that can be calculated and recombined rather than merely represented. Furthermore, we are witnessing a bifurcation between life on the one hand and bodies on the other hand. Nowadays, not every body is thought of as containing life. Discounted bodies are believed to contain no life as such. They are, strictly speaking, bodies at the limits of life, trapped in uninhabitable worlds and inhospitable places. The kind of life they bear or contain is not insured or is uninsurable, folded as it is in extreme and thin envelopes. Such bodies on the precipice are the most exposed to droughts, storms and famines, toxic waste and various experiences of effacement. Their livelihoods made impossible, they are the most likely to sustain the most ~~crippling~~ [incapacitating] wounds and injuries. Trapped human subjects often without escape, they bear the brunt of terrestrial life on a damaged planet (Tsing et al. 2017). At the same time, they exceed all attempts to contain them. These bodies are not simply in motion. Interactive and generative, they are movements and events. The inside of such bodies is not separated from their outward environments. From the perspective of discounted bodies, to be alive is always and already to breach boundaries or to be exposed to the risk of the outside entering the inside (read Litvintseva 2019). This disentanglement of life from discounted bodies, this redistribution of life on differential scales of insurability and non-insurability, is a key dimension of contemporary migration regimes. The latter aim either at slowing down the dynamics of people’s interactions, at creating distance or at shattering the chains of relations between them, so as to institute new patterns of separation. Contemporary movement restrictions are not limited to national boundaries. They are at work on a global scale. They are deepening the space and time asymmetries between different categories of humanity while leading to the progressive ghettoization of entire regions of the world. To a large extent, this is akin to a universalization of the Israeli model. In this model, the restriction of movement does not necessarily aim “to confine unwanted people territorially or to dissociate their movements from those of citizens, but to inscribe them into temporalities and spatialities that are disjointed to the point of giving these populations the illusion of being territorially separated” (Parizot 2018, 38). Furthermore, at a time when the material components and biological organization of the body can be reengineered and redesigned, the latter are more than ever based on the ideas of repressive selection, reproduction and the rejuvenation of species. Only what can potentially generate value counts as life. In this context, borders are meant to concretize the principle of dissimilarity rather than that of affinity. They are not only obstacles to free movement. They are boundaries between species and varieties of the human. As such, they play a crucial role in contemporary modes of production of human difference and relatedness. Human bodies are increasingly divided between those that matter and those that do not, those who can move and those who cannot or should not, or should only move under very strict conditions. Bodies that should not move are those that are uninsured. They must be tracked, captured, and dispensed of. Such bodies are kept shifting between invisibility, waiting and effacement. They are trapped in fragmented spaces, stretched time and indefinite waiting (Peteet 2018). As for the dream of perfect security, it requires not only complete systematic surveillance, but also a cleansing policy. This dream is symptomatic of the structural tensions that, for decades, have accompanied our transition into a new technical system of increased automation – one that is increasingly complex yet also increasingly abstract. One of the major contradictions of the liberal order has always been the tension between freedom and security. Today, this question seems to have been cut in two. Security now matters more that freedom. A society of security is not necessarily a society of freedom. A society of security is a society dominated by the irrepressible need for adhesion to a collection of certainties. It is one fearful of the type of interrogation that delves into the unknown, unearthing the risks that must surely be contained within. This is why in a society of security, the priority is, at all cost, to identify what lurks behind each new arrival – who is who, who lives where, with whom and since when, who does what, who comes from where, who is going where, when, how, why, and so on and so forth. Moreover, who plans to carry out which acts, either consciously or unconsciously. The aim of a society of security is not to affirm freedom, but to control and govern the modes of arrival. The current myth claims that technology constitutes the best tool for governing these arrivals; that technology alone allows for the resolution of this problem – a problem of order, but also of awareness, of identifiers, of anticipation and predictions. It is feared that the dream of a humanity transparent to herself, stripped of mystery, might prove to be a catastrophic illusion. For the time being, migrants and refugees are bearing the brunt of it. In the long run, it is by no means certain that they will be the only ones. The mega processes highlighted above leave us with foundational questions that will haunt us for most of this century. The first foundational question is related to what I called ‘borderization’, or the logics of containment, enclosure, and contraction. Perhaps more than at any other moment in our recent past, we are increasingly faced with the question of what to do with those whose very existence does not seem to be necessary for our reproduction; those whose mere existence or proximity is deemed to represent a physical or biological threat to our own life. Throughout history, and in response to this foundational question, various paradigms of rules have been designed for human bodies deemed either in excess, unwanted, illegal, dispensable, or superfluous. One historical response has consisted in putting in place spatial exclusionary arrangements. Such was, for instance, the case during the early phases of modern settler or genocidal colonialism in relation to Native American reservations in the United States, island prisons, penal colonies such as Australia, camps and Bantustans in South Africa. A late modern example is Gaza, and Gaza might well prefigure what is yet to come. Here, control of vulnerable, unwanted, surplus or racialized people is exercised through a combination of tactics, chief among which is ‘modulated blockade’. A blockade prohibits, obstructs, and limits who and what can enter and leave the Strip. The goal might not be to cut the Strip off entirely from supply lines, infrastructural grids or trade routes. It is nevertheless relatively sealed off in a way that effectively turns it into an imprisoned territory. Comprehensive or relative closure is accompanied by periodic military escalations and the generalized use of extra-judicial assassinations. Spatial violence, humanitarian strategies, and a peculiar biopolitics of punishment all combine to produce, in turn, a peculiar detention space in which people deemed surplus, unwanted, or illegal are governed through abdication of any responsibility for their lives and their welfare. But there is another, early 21st -century example, which consists in waging new forms of wars, which can be called wars on speed and mobility. Wars on mobility are wars whose aim is to turn into dust the means of existence and survival of vulnerable people taken as enemies. These kinds of wars of attrition, methodically calculated and programmed, and implemented with new methods, are wars against the very ideas of mobility, circulation, and speed, whilst the age we live in is precisely one of velocity, acceleration, and increasing abstraction and algorithms. Moreover, the targets of this kind of warfare are not by any means singular bodies, but rather great swathes of humanity judged worthless and superfluous. All of the above belongs to the current practice of remote borderization, carried out from afar, in the name of freedom and security. This battle, waged against certain undesirables and reducing them to mounds of human flesh, is rolled out on a global scale. It is on the verge of defining the times in which we live. Wars on mobility are peculiar wars on bodies. They have to do with two broad questions that confront us today and will haunt us for most of this century: on the one hand the question of life futures, that is, of the self-organization of being and matter; on the other hand, that of the future of reason. The future of life and the future of reason For a long time, the human race has been concerned with how life emerges and the conditions of its evolution. The key question today is how it can be reproduced, sustained, made durable, preserved and universally shared, and under what conditions it ends. Overall, these debates about how life on Earth can be reproduced and sustained, and under what conditions it ends, are forced upon us by the epoch itself, characterized as it is by the impending ecological catastrophe and by technological escalation. It is a fact that, today, unprecedented numbers of human beings are embedded in increasingly complex technostructures. The latter are increasingly intervening in the dynamics of the Earth system on a planetary scale. This has led to the transgression of planetary boundaries such as those related to anthropogenic climate change, degenerative land-use change, accelerated biodiversity loss, perturbation of the global biogeochemical cycles of nitrogen and phosphorus, and the creation and release of novel entities such as nanoparticles and genetically engineered organisms (see Donges et al.). Furthermore, both metabolically (for example in terms of their energy needs) and reproductively, technologies are becoming more and more tied in complex networks of extraction and predation, manufacturing and innovation. An example is recent developments in the domain of genes and molecules. As Margarida Mendes shows, the heyday of DNA study has allowed the cracking and public dissemination of the genetic codes of humans, plants, and animals. This, in turn, has given way to an exponential rise of biological patents, as currently nearly 20% of the human genome is now privately owned, in a context of a market logic that addresses life as a commodity to be manipulated and replicated under the volatility of market consumption. Studies after studies have shown for instance that corporations are intervening directly in the natural cycles of life and ecosystems through the widespread genetic modification of key elements in the food chain (see Mendes 2017). As patented GMO genes are absorbed into our bodies in a proprietary relationship of biological subjugation, the body itself becomes an expanded, multiple infrastructure, where intervention can happen at many different scales. It is therefore correct to argue that there is a shifting distribution of powers between the human and the technological, in the sense that technologies are moving towards ‘general intelligence’ and self-replication. They are being granted the powers of reproduction and independent teleonomic purpose rather than having them taken away. Over the last decades, we have witnessed the development of algorithmic forms of intelligence. They have been growing in parallel with genetic research, and often in its alliance. The integration of algorithms and big data analysis in the biological sphere does not only bring with it an increasingly greater belief in techno-positivism and modes of statistical thought. It also paves the way for regimes of assessment of the natural world, and modes of prediction and analysis that treat life itself as a computable object. Concomitantly, algorithms inspired by the natural world, and ideas of natural selection and evolution are on the rise. Such is the case with genetic algorithms – a subset of evolutionary algorithms that mimic actions inspired in biological operators, such as cells, seeking to optimize the responses to the problems of their environments by self-generating, and encompassing processes of mutation and natural selection. The latter are designed to evolve and further adapt to the environment, in a process of self-generation. The belief today is that everything is potentially computable and predictable. In the process, what is rejected is the fact that life itself is an open system, non-linear, and exponentially chaotic. These are also times when many are gradually coming to the realization that reason may well have reached its limits. Or, in any case, it is a time when reason is on trial – we are, in other words, in a sort of Dark Enlightenment. Reason is a faculty we used to recognize in humans and in humans alone. In the Western tradition we have all, willingly or not, become the inheritors of reason, always seen as the highest of all human faculties, the one that opened the doors to knowledge, wisdom, virtue and, most importantly, freedom. Although unequally redistributed among them, it was the prerogative of humans alone. It distinguished the latter from other living species. Thanks to their superior capacity to exercise this faculty, humans could claim to be exceptional. Today, reason is on trial in two ways. First, reason is increasingly replaced and subsumed by instrumental rationality, when it is not simply reduced to procedural or algorithmic processing of information. In other words, the logic of reason is morphing from within machines and computers and algorithms. The human brain is no longer the privileged location of reason. The human brain is being “downloaded” into nano-machines. An inordinate amount of power is gradually being ceded to abstractions of all kinds. Old modes of reasoning are being challenged by new ones that originate through and within technology in general and digital technologies in particular, as well as through the top-down models of artificial intelligence. As a result, techne is becoming the quintessential language of reason. Furthermore, instrumental reason, or reason in the guise of techne is increasingly weaponized. Time itself is becoming enveloped in the doing of machines. Machines themselves do not simply execute instructions or programs. They start generating complex behaviour. The computational reproduction of reason has made it such that reason is no longer, or is a bit more than, just the domain of human species. We now share it with various other agents. Reality itself is increasingly construed via statistics, metadata, modelling, mathematics.

#### In our dying world the only response is one of revolt -- a cognitive strike that attacks the foundations of our systems of knowledge. Rejection of capitalist informatics is a creative act that enables us to reimagine cybernetic forces of racial capitalism and create space for communist solidarities.

Beller 21 (Jonathan Beller = Professor of Humanities and Media Studies and Critical and Visual Studies at Pratt Institute, “Introduction:  The Social Difference Engine and the World Computer,” in *The World Computer: Derivative Conditions of Racial Capitalism*, Duke University Press, pp. 183-189 BEH)

Given the sea change in the nature of **languages and images** themselves— their wholesale transposition and transformation from a means of **representation to a means of production**— the difficulty here is both with the substrate of communication (its bits) and with the us- versus- them perspective: we want to ban advertisers, but today we must also confront the disturbing possibility that we are them. Remember, “they” **program** “our” language and “our” imagination, “we” speak **“their” thought**— indeed, that is our work, or rather our labor. What to do with the fact that “we have seen the enemy and he is us?” One could say, one could want to say, “I don’t care who you are: if you live in the first world, if you live in the Global North, then fuck you! You ain’t no victim, even if you’re sick.” But who would be saying that? Probably some other Northerner, writing about how culture or the Venice Biennale, as if it were, could or should be more than a lavish spectacle of global suffering staged for a cosmopolitan elite. As capital’s nations, banks, armies, schools, languages, newspapers, and films did to its colonies and colonial subjects, the current **institutions from states to computer**- media companies do to “us”: they command us to make ourselves over **in capital’s image** for their own profit through networked strategies of **expropriation and dispossession**. “We” do it to ourselves, and our representations of **self and other are designed to sell** a version of ourselves back to ourselves so that we can perform further work on what is now the raw material for the next iteration of images. Therein lies our ontological lack, an ontological lack of solidarity and of even the possibility for solidarity. Therein lies the desire for and indeed necessity **to become a plantation manager** — the word is overseer. Though it is beyond the scope of this essay, this digital neocolonialism that practically commands global Northerners to in one way or another accept Nazism and genocide with their cappuccino could be understood as being on a continuum with the internal colonization of Europe by the German banks— which depends of course on the **distributed production of a kind of neoliberal “realism**” that Mark Fisher (2009) called “**capitalist realism,”** and was only ever a hair’s breadth away from fascism. This fact of our investment in and by advertising, the conversion of the sign to what I call the “advertisign,” poses a genuine problem for theory— indeed an unprecedented one. This problem is particularly evident considering the material conditions (class, nationality, education, race, language, et c.) of the participants in the would-be counterhegemonic theoretical discussions of culture and policy that presuppose the books, computers, schools, and institutions that sustain these. Those within the circuit of these discussions have already passed through a homogenization process which **programs them in compatible systems languages**. **Without submitting ourselves** and our own aspirations to radical critique, without conducting a Gramscian inventory of our ostensibly internal constitutions, we run the risk of merely trying to set up a **competing corporation** with a new business model. The revolution will not **be televised**; decolonization **will not be a brand.** Any would-be anticapitalist “we” runs this risk of coopting and cooptation from the get-go, particularly if it does not think about the materiality of **social production** from top to bottom: class, yes, but also race, nation, gender, sexuality, ability, geolocation, historical stratification. The world’s postmodern poor, the two billion– plus living on two dollars a day, also lab or to survive in the material landscape organized by the post- Fordist social factory its **anti- Blackness, its Islamophobia, its endless and mutating racism** and imperialism. However, from the standpoint of capital, **the role of those at the bottom is to serve as substrate** for image- production and semiosis; not only in factories, cottage- industries, subsistence farming, and informal economies, but also as starving Advertisarial Relationshordes; “irrational,” criminalized or surplused populations; subject- objects for policing, encampment, and bombing; desperate refugees; and even as voids in the idea of the world—as sites of social death. Forgive me, but I’d wager that no one capable of understanding these words can claim full exemption from the indictment they issue regarding structural complicity with the production and reproduction of everyday life. Humans **are troped (via discourse and the screen) to organize military production**, national policy, internment camps and prisons, bourgeois imaginations, museum shows, corporate strategy, and market projections. Let us clearly state here that **any program** that does not admit this excluded **planet into dialogues** **that vitiate** the **monologues imposed by capitalist** informatics and advertisigns is still floating in the realm of the ruling ideas **and therefore participant in murder.** These ruling ideas are the ones whose density and weight, whose material support and very machinery, threaten to further crush the late- capitalist poor out of not just representation but out of existence. This erasure and disposability, imposed by systems of informatic inscription designed to absorbe very output of sense, is the achievement of the advertisarial relations endemic to computational racial capitalism. When information is an advertisement for itself that presupposes the operating system of the world computer as virtual machine, **banning what we recognize as advertising on the internet, even if an excellent beginning,** is just not adequate to address these issues of representation, social justice, planetary and climate racism, and emancipation. To summarize: the forms of sociality which are the conditions of possibility for the online, informatically organized r elations— best characterized as advertisarial — run through e very sector and register of planetary life. The internet, while recognizable as an effect and a cause of the current form of **planetary production and reproduction**, cannot be considered in isolation as a **merely technical platform or set of platforms if its historical role is to be properly understood.** To take the internet as an autonomous technological force results in a species of platform **fetishism that disavows both the histories and material conditions** of its emergence, conditions that are, in short, those of screen culture and racial capitalism; this is to say that it, the internet, is the very means by which the capitalist suppression of global democracy (which is emphatically, economic democracy as well) has been accomplished and continues. If the internet is autonomous, it is because it expresses the autonomization of the value form. As noted previously, **with the hijacking of communications** and **semiotic infrastructures** by racial capitalism, the medium is the message and **the message is murder.** To ban advertising on the internet would be a good start— but what if the whole thing is advertising? **One reading of** what I have said thus far might suggest that, giv**en the expropriation of the cognitive- linguistic, our volition is overtaken by capital logic;** and given our inability to cogitate in any way that is genuinely resistant to capitalist expropriation, coercion, strictly speaking, **is no longer necessary to impose cooperation for capitalist production.** We “want” to cooperate productively, our desire— which, from the dispossession of even language and mind constitutes ourselves as subjects in the media ecology of the capital is t technical image, that is, in and through the organization of digital information—**is itself an iteration of capital, a script of becoming predestined to become capital**. The old language scored by the new image machines and their extractive algorithms locally organizes cooperative subjects who want to cooperate with vectoral capitalization. **We want to provide content in order to derive currency and survive.** Our solidarity on the internet produces more internet. Thus, in a certain way— and particularly since **we no longer properly have any thoughts of our own—we all collaborate in a world organized by images and screens, thereby participating more or less mindlessly in the seamless realization and triumphant apotheosis of the programming business.** However, I am sorry to have to report that the dystopian vision **here is not quite as bucolic as even this** already dreary picture of unwitting and irredeemable pulverization and servitude. While I do see that representation and semiotics have been increasingly flattened à la Orwell and Marcuse by a vast internalization of the apparatuses of oppression ( in which “**thought” is the** [productive] thought **of the [capitalist**] Party and “**repressive desublimation**” is an engine of capitalist- fascist **production)** the “old problems” like the hierarchy of class have not gone away; neither have racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and fascist nationalisms ceased playing their roles to create vectors of privilege for white male– identifying aspiration. Indeed, most thought today, such that it is, is all about maintaining hierarchical society. **The thinking runs thus**: capital is nature, capital is eternal, capital is information is nature. Or, in a more pedestrian mode: **human beings are naturally acquisitive and competitive**, economic growth and technological advancement mean progress, **this tech provides**, **or almost provides,** a color- , gender- , and religion- blind society, and so on— and one must advance one’s place in it by any (crypto- or not- s o- cryptofascist**) means necessary.** Of course, there exists better thinking out there. Mia Mingus: “As organizers, we need to think of access with an understanding of disability justice, moving away from an equality based model of sameness and ‘we are just like you’ to a model of disability that embraces difference, confronts privilege and challenges what is considered ‘normal’ on every front. We don ’t want to simply join the ranks of the privileged; we want to dismantle those ranks and the systems that maintain them” (Mingus 2011, cited in Puar 2017: 16). However, there is **broad- band, ambient programming that facilitates assuming neo- liberal** and full-on **fascist subjective sovereignty**. This programming seeks triumphant brushes with plenitude (communion with the big Other, as distinct from the racial or otherwise other, becomes the ego- ideal) , and this same programming is violent, competitive, hateful, mean- spirited, and alienating when embraced—at the same time that it is also cooperative, simpering, and abject. Servitude, even when automatic and mostly unconscious, is unhappy and, as we can see any day from the daily news, utterly pathological and sick. Of course, this diagnosis represents a huge generalization, but despite its broad-brushing lack of subtlety we may find that such a schizoid oscillation between entitled adjudicator and abject supplicant sums up the contours of your average reality televisions how or comments section on YouTube. It is Bateson’s (2000) and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1977) schizophrenic, caught in the double- bind, who has become the capitalist norm— the one who struggles to negotiate in the form of contradictory signals the aporias of hierarchical society, while reproducing it, and all the while experiencing their own psychic dissolution as an injunction to create. 3 With this schizoid capture in mind, let me then develop my question about the internet— “ What if it is all advertising?”—in the framework of post- Fordist production. The argument is that, in the context of virtuosity and the expropriation of the cognitive- linguistic by computational racial capital, sociality itself has become advertisarial, a ceaseless waging of capitalized exploits designed to garner attention and value for oneself and one’s capitalistic. This situation represents— indeed imposes— a derivative logic, a logic **in which every action** is a hedge, a kind of risk management devoted to maximize a return. In addition to the fractalization of fascism, in which agency is manifest as a profile that has aggregated the attention of others, advertising has worked its way into the sign itself, into the image, and into data visualization, and it has generated the advertising . All signs become points of potential cathexis, derivative positions on the underlier that is social currency and ultimately value. This new type of sign is not simply the brand but also an element of vectoral language (Wark 2007): functionalized words in a production channel, engaging in the micromanagement of desire, the production of new needs, and the capturing of the imagination, all in order to induce linguistic and behavioral shifts in the attention of others while aggregating their attention for oneself— t urning their heads with an interface. This combination of the manipulation of market conditions (that is, everyday life) through techniques of risk management is no longer merely the province of advertising but of so- called tuman interactivity 188 Chapter 4(what was once just communication and before that culture), now become adversarial through and through. From Smythe’s claim in the “Blindspot” essay (1977) that all leisure time has become lab or time, to Virno’s (2004) notion of virtuosity, we have seen aspects of this model for the capitalist overdetermination of apparently unremunerated time before. However, here— with the financialization of expression—we clearly grasp that the financialization of everyday life means also the convergence of semiotics and financial derivatives. Given the thoroughgoing intensification of vectoral, and in fact matrixial, signs, we need to investigate its implications in the context of a discussion of radical media practice. I will make two additional points here before shifting gears and turning at the end of this chapter to what I identify as an aesthetics of survival—an aesthetics that emerges from within the matrix of adversarial, schizoid capture. The final chapter of this volume will endeavor to extend aspects of such socio aesthetic forms, those resistant to computational racial capitalism, to new notions of radical finance and the possibility of platform communism. If, as was already becoming true in the cinematic mode of production, the dominant means of representation have become the dominant means of production, the questions of and models for political agency are radically transformed, and the urgent need to decolonize communication and decolonize finance presents itself. Future communication will require a cybernetic approach, and, as wes hall argue, this cybernetic approach will necessarily be financial, though it will be reaching toward a different order and different mode of production. Like communism, because it will need to be communist, it will see economic transformation of the material relations of production and reproduction as essential to the revolution. It will draw on the repressed and extracted cognitive- linguistic resource of the racialized and other wise marginalized and configure ways to make our voices matter both as meaning and as tools for the reorginzation of the material world and the social relations therein prescribed. Language and images are neither inside nor outside; they are part of the general intellect— currently they are at once media of thought and of capital. We also know that languages and images are not isolable, meaning that they are not and have never been stand- alone entities but rather exist in relation to their media, their platforms, which are again inseparable from society and its institutions. Furthermore, each platform relates to another platform. Paraphrasing McLuhan, we could even say that the “content” of a media platform is another platform. Thusly the general intellect is inseparable from its media platforms and their financials. We see that the general intellect, once largely held in common, is increasingly being privatized; the very media of our thought belong to someone else . This expropriation of the media commons is precisely the precondition of the real subsumption of society 189 Advertisarial Relationsby capital. It is an extension of the ongoing expropriation begun by primitive accumulation and money as capital, and it has been accomplished through the financialization of media as platforms of extraction. The ramification of mediation by computation and information has resulted in its convergence into formats offering derivative exposure to underliers that are the expressive vitality and futurity of our communication. We therefore no longer have any organic relation to the materials for thought itself (sincerity has become a myth, at least in the medium- term of most circles)— t he words, images, and machines we require to think, to express ourselves, to interact, and to know have been ripped from the species and privatized via the longue durée of dissymmetrical exchange. We work on the words and images, but as numbers they belong to someone else. The media themselves have become forms of capital— forms of racial capital— and our usage of these media means that we work to add value that valorizes capital, for the capitalist and within a relation designed as much as possible to guarantee that our creative acts necessarily occur as dissymmetrical exchange with capital. I write this book in a discourse that does not just not belong to me because it is shared, but in a discourse that is increasingly the property of a set of institutions— publishers, journals, universities— that all have their eye on the bottom line. The means by which we most intimately know the world, ourselves, and our desires (our images and words) are themselves vectors of capitalization intent upon converting our very life- process into surplus value (which is to say value for capital). We need strategies that will seize the means of production and create a reverse subsumption of affect, intellect**, knowledge**, **capability, communication, and community.** When all media have converged as economic media, it is **economic media that must be re- engineered**. When all media have converged as economic media, it is economic media that must be re- engineered. Again, I think this subsumption of cognitive and affective capacity, the quasi-automating (scripting) of productive labor for capital, is what Stiegler means by the proletarianization of the nervous system—which would include the proletarianization of the pathways of feeling and thought. Our affective capacities are put to alienated and alienating work in the social factory, and their product too is alienated, producing ever-intensifying and ever-accumulating dispossession and disempowerment as the dialectical antithesis of its simultaneous production of unprecedented wealth and power for the cyborg avatars of the great media conglomerates. Intellect and emotional intelligence, the product of thousands of years of species- becoming, is being strip-mined so that extraction machines may continue their furious innovation to further discount people. I write this book aware of the pressure to think it just right, to at once extend thinking in order to command attention and produce new needs, but also to delimit it, to control myself, and to put the reins on whatever counterpower may rage within my body, because academia can tolerate only so much “bullshit” and no more. Yes sir, I’ll be careful not to cross that line, but a word to the woke: the bullshit is the best part. From a historical perspective, this encroachment on the means of representation—that Banksy and I and a billion others join the silenced majority in opposing—indicates that the individual subjective agent, itself a platform for sociality that developed with the rise of capitalism (as the subject who relates to other subjects in the market, the bearer of the commodity and thus its thought), is nearly **defunct.** As has been noted previously, in a world where life processes are stripped, ripped apart, rebundled, and sold as derivative exposures, the individual subject is an outmoded technology despite the fact that it still appears as a skeuomorph in certain updated technosocial apparatuses—like the latest forms of films, games, influencers, and versions of national politics that proffer invitations to momentary individualistic identification for the dividual purpose of providing a sense of familiarity and orientation. While palliative for some in small doses, such individuality is no longer a viable (which is to say, sustainable) fantasy. The real thought is that of the infrastructure, of the AI that codes our meat and scripts our sheets. Sure I take up the mantle for a few moments each day to appear as the agent of this text, suiting up as the operator of an intellect that might be adequate to the informatic shit-storm of racist, capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal, for-profit assaults, but then I drop off into an ocean of petty concerns, food shopping, and home repairs. And even when I say “I,” to perform as the nexus of all this insight, I also know that it’s hardly me talking. I’m just curating at the gates of shit that needs to be said, and hopefully titrating to let the right stuff through. That’s part of my politics though Dog knows that I could create a more lucrative named-professor type profile with just a little more discipline, a bit more self-interested adherence to the protocols of the academy’s factory code. Instead, there is the effort to overturn, to be or at least to live something beyond being the scribe of the world computer, to at once witness the drama of the emergence of the intelligence of commodification, testify to its outrage, and intimate the possibility of its overthrow. Such would be the art of this text, practiced at the limits of disciplinarity and of subjectivity, guaranteed by nothing and no one. The expiration of the subject form, imminent since the subject’s first intimation of mortality—and made structurally mandatory by Freud and especially, with the full-blown rise of the sign at the moment of it radical marginalization by visuality, by Lacan—is not necessarily a cause for lament, despite the increasingly intense fading of its incalculable beauty, its sad reduction to cliché. From a political perspective, it means that within each concrete individual body the presumed continuity of the individual is riddled with contradictory and indeed unassimilable indicators; it means also that there exists in differing quantities and qualities capitalist and noncapitalist striations or sectors. Hallways of emptiness, but also hallways of love. Like bundled assets, the mind-body is tranched by executable logics organized by a calculus of risk available to investors. There are, to be a bit simplistic, **aspects of desire that are** programmed (indeed farmed) to produce practices that function in perfect accord with capitalist accumulation strategies (individualizing or schizoid) and aspects of **desire that are atavistic or collectivist**, utopian, communist, or maybe even just plain lonely, and, in short, subprime. In reality, of course, desire is more singular than even such formalizations might indicate. Insert your favorite snippet of poetry here. Hortense Spillers in “All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother” (1997) invokes “the Dozens” and the music of and like that of Charles Mingus (152–3), to make present an “interior intersubjectivity”(140) testifying to the rich unaudited psychic life of what might today be called Blackness. There are vast resources beyond the easy resolution of hegemonic hermeneutics whether deployed by institutionally validated psychoanalysis or compressed by current systems of informatic extraction. In agreeing with Freud that consciousness makes up a small part of mental life when compared to the preconscious, the unconscious, dreams, and so on, but in rejecting the normative assumptions and disavowals (including his own Jewishness) that situate Freud and the psychoanalytic discourse that will become part of European and U.S. bourgeois society, Spillers recognizes a vast store of mental life and the possibility of listening anew. However, when speaking of politics now, we therefore necessarily speak of the abstract forms available for the conceptualization and deployment of concrete emergences whether referring to haecceities that are innumerable or collective forms of existence and psychic life actively mediating between “the one” and “the ‘masses’ ” (141). Let us listen anew. Acknowledging that we ultimately and if possible immediately want to “marry our thought” (Wynter 1994b: 65) to the wealth of subaltern forms of life and the care of the bios, allow me then to put the situation of the post- Fordist subject thusly: in Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin (1939) showed how imperialist dividends complicated class issues in England, since many people, otherwise part of the working class, got a share of the dividends of imperialism by clipping the coupons of their investments in racist, exploitative British enterprises across the globe. Today this race-based class fractionalization is fully internalized in the Global North; on our iPads built by Chinese slaves from blood metals extracted from the Congo, we may momentarily feel like biomorphically unmarked nobles in the global cosmopolis; while on the job market or when simply seen in our raced and gendered embodiments, we are abjects. Materially and intellectually we are nodal points on a global network. The signal oscillates between narcissistic megalomania and utter abjection and can be affected by a billion parameters taking us from melancholia to outrage. **Thus, even the concrete individual is composed of class fractions, race fractions, gender fractions.** In the form of signs, we clip coupons that validate our investments. The language of object-identification, we observe here, cannot really keep up with the fluctuations resulting from the throughput of code as we work to identify and disidentify our agency. Can we audit a different mode of emergence, a different futurity than one inexorably overcoded by capital? Of course this is still somewhat simplistic and also class-specific, as many (billions even) never get to participate as an enfranchised global citizen in any aspect or moment of life, even if the lived experience of these same billions is radically overdetermined by the class(es) from which they are excluded.4 The gilded poverty of the enfranchised, as opposed to the mere poverty of the rest, is now a measure of connectivity. A more complete view is that we are the product of the world system and thus everything we are has been produced vis-à-vis globalization, and therefore everything bears the trace of the system in its entirety (again, in varying proportions). This conceptualization of concrete individuals (bodies) as global communitarian products forced to varying degrees into templates of individualized risk by capitalist states, is not to erase class; however, it suggests that, just as Fanon saw the great European metropoles as the product of third world labor, we are all products of the worst conditions prevailing in the Global South and around the planet. Global inequality is internal to **our being**. It is us. How then does one (such a one who is relatively enfranchised by the derivative language of texts such as this one) inventory those relations and produce them as formations of solidarity rather than as disavowed residuum? Is there another data-sphere, a communist one? Can we build communist interfaces, networks, **and finance?** How would **we register,** track, amplify, and render actionable the communitarian affinities, **solidarities, obligations, and debts**, the resources in the wake of too many genocides to count, that in actual practice **underpin the official economy,** collective life, and whatever authentic hope is left to our species? Perhaps we have arrived at a question worthy of theory: Is there, could there be communist algorithms? Communist derivatives? Derivative communism? We are looking for that path. To add to my point about the shifting, distributed character of political actors—that goes so far as to suggest that we can no longer think only of actors but rather must think of vectors and fields in addition to thinking of the resources developed in cultures of survival—I will make a second observation. **A political intervention** in the advertisarial relations that have this planet heading toward environmental doomsday requires not only revolutionary policy but revolutionary culture. (I defer further discussion of a third requirement, revolutionary finance, to the final chapter.) This culture must take into account that, for many on this planet, Armageddon is not the future but an **ongoing constant**. My call here (which should not be entirely unfamiliar, as it gives petit bourgeois intellectuals something important to do) is to (re)politicize semiotic and affective structures and practices, including and perhaps especially those we might control, for example our own utterances—our expression. Of course, to call them “our own” seems to contradict what I’ve said about the expropriation of the cognitive- linguistic and the intensification of aphanisis by visual, verbal, and digital media derivatives, but it is here precisely that we confront one of the significant material contradictions of our time: who or what speaks in us? This question, which I shorthand using the phrase the politics of the utterance and which you can experience palpably right now (as you endeavor to think), seems to me to insist that **our idea-making** must actively produce its solidarity with the dispossessed. We must struggle for the **radical constellation.** The question concerning the politics of the utterance, asked here in a strange passage of this text through a beyond-academic terrain, a moonless forest the traversal of which may or may not at this point lead us back to the plot, also raises the question of becoming, as well as the questions of agency and of action within the capitalist image— programmable images, racializing and racist images that, in the terms we have set out, are functionally omnipresent. Continuous media throughput has generated a capitalist imaginary structuring both language function and imaging processes, coordinated at scales and by calculative logics that exceed individual comprehension. Though the occasion is upon us, **we must struggle for space and time to think. We must** open a spread on which to bet against the dominant order. We glimpse, and we feel, that to insist upon the unremitting relevance of both culture-making and of cross-cultural transnational solidarity helps **to avoid platform fetishism** because it sees the internet and its machines not as a set or collection of autonomous technologies but as a historically emergent system of value-expropriative communication and organization, built directly upon older but nonetheless contemporaneous forms of inequality, including but not limited to historically emergent techniques of gendering, racialization, and imperialism, and embedded in the living flesh of the world. All of this calculative interconnectivity and networked agency implies, contradictorily, in fact, that the internet is not all advertising—but neither is advertising all advertising. It is also murder and struggle. Banksy knows that. The advertisarial relation is the programmatic relation encrypted in the apparatuses of capital: the war of each against all, taken all the way from finance, computation, and surveillance to the speech act and the imagination in accord with the autopoietic algorithm of the distributed Leviathan. Marx himself saw capitalism as vampiric, and today’s processes of **capitalization are even more totalitarian**, more widely distributed, and more blood-, life-, and indeed soul-sucking than even in prior eras—though such comparisons **don’t do those killed by past iterations of capitalism any good.** Despite the disavowals to the contrary, we recognize that capital needs labor, needs metabolic time more desperately and more voraciously than ever before (what else is biopolitics?) and, furthermore, that it wages war on life-time on all fronts, in order to secure labor power, its product and basis, at a discount. The pyramids of inequality become internal fractals, and even as the base broadens, the tip with the all-seeing eye (that is not a subject) ascends ever higher. **We do not** yet **know what can be destroyed** or indeed built with the massive appropriation of Banksy’s rocks, but we do know that at present **there is** total war against our using them to build anticapitalist, nonhierarchical, horizontal, solidary sociality. The refusal or détournement **of capital’s encroachment** **is** itself a creative act. Perhaps we have only **begun to glimpse what** a total **refusal might achieve.**

#### Reject the current political horizon to resist the code’s commodification.

**Beller ‘17** (Jonathan; Jonathan Beller (Professor) is one of the foremost theorists of the visual turn and the attention economy. He works on the history of cinema and the way in which the screen-image has altered all aspects of social life. These alterations range from the lived experiences of gender, sexuality, and race, to the socio-economic reorganization of peoples, governments and the environment. His research and pedagogy is undertaken with a commitment to those struggling for social justice in what he calls “the world-media system.” Books and edited volumes include The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle; Acquiring Eyes: Philippine Visuality, Nationalist Struggle, and the World-Media System; and Feminist Media Theory (a special issue of The Scholar and Feminist Online). His current book projects are entitled The Rain of Images and Computational Capital. Beller also serves on the Editorial Collective of the internationally recognized journal Social Text and is the current director of The Graduate Program in Media Studies. He teaches Mediologies and a variety of electives, “The Fourth Determination”, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/85/156818/the-fourth-determination/>)

Analogous to the land- and water-based commons that was planet earth, the cognitive-linguistic, the visual-poetic, and the imagination have undergone massive colonial expropriations, following immediately upon their separation and “liberation” from traditional ties to the body, and have entered directly into capitalist servitude. Bernard Stiegler refers to this phenomenon of cognitive collapse and short-termist thinking, organized by what he refers to as mnemotechnologies (technologies of memory that include print, cinema, and computation), as the “proletarianization of the senses.” This follows upon and overlaps with the proletarianization of the masses by the long industrial revolution and the capture and unspeakable violation of designated bodies by the slave trade. These aggressive and oftentimes annihilating encroachments on corporality, the senses, and the linguistic commons, achieved by cybernetic means, are mediological and technical phenomena as much as they are sociopolitical ones. Put another way, the mediological and the technical have been sociopolitical all along—to such an extent that with the level of technical saturation present today, **“the political” has been lost.**3 The “loss of the political” is an acknowledgement of the subsumption of policies and programs by capitalized financial calculus that chains representation to the process of accumulation. **What indeed can “political” mean in a world increasingly characterized by algorithmic governance and platform sovereignty, that is, where capitalist power is increasingly automated, and discursive and affective labor is posited as a mere subroutine of capitalized computational processes—as engines of value creation?** **What of the political when “politics” has become a subroutine of computational capital and its discourses and actions are a modality of value extraction?** It is an old lesson but it still applies (and we can see it from Israel to Burma): **if subalterns use the same media and therefore modes of value extraction as oppressors in their struggles, then politics is simply a war over who will get the spoils of exploitation.** The expropriation of the cognitive-linguistic by capital reduces discursive production—including the discourse of politics—to the subroutine of an abstract machine. This “machine,” though abstract, is nonetheless functional and material—we recognize it as the increasingly ubiquitous, increasingly networked computer or discrete state machine, but we must not see it as mere technology. The universal Turing machine, which when unified posits what I call the World Computer **(“the invisible hand” codified as AI), has become the preeminent form of fixed capital.** Machinic enslavement, whether to the assembly line, to the “media,” or to the computer, is indeed enslavement by other means, though we must insist that many of the “older” methods of extraordinary servitude stubbornly persist and the pain, like the profit, remains unevenly distributed. Inequality, now sedimented into institutions and machines as materialized abstractions and designed into apparatuses, operationalizes historically variegated injustice, to produce and reproduce a planetary culture that at bottom is founded upon racism, gender inequality, national and cultural codifications, modern slavery, and a near total dispossession for billions. Machines, too, must be understood as racial formations. Given the data-logical nature of financialized systems underpinning “cultural” expression and iterated in and as machines, it is no surprise that Facebook’s machine-learning algorithm “Deep Face” imaged the minimally recognizable human face as that of a white man. Converting social life and social history into digital information and digital machines facilitates the as yet untranscendable program of quantification that runs parallel to social-historical processes of social differentiation for the purpose of accumulation. **The social emerges not as an abstract idea, but as a concrete substrate of computation.** Sociality is posited then programmed as a series of leveraged accumulation strategies operating above or below or explicitly in and through everyday consciousness. **Public faces are forms of data visualization and, circulating as images, are both programs and programmable.** Bodies become “necessary media” of machinic digital operations that require from us (us bodies) attention, cognition, neuro-power, virtuosity, and sheer survival. As the auto-enthnography that is critical theory in the West might indicate, the remainders—interiorities and isles of awareness that fall away from informatic throughput—are in large part melancholic, cynical, disaffected, and abject laments. The rise of actually existing digitality thus appears as inseparable from the development and intensification of capitalism, that is, of media technologies as *media* of capital, which is also to say as media for the leveraging of agency and representation, such that decisions are made hierarchically and systemically while many aspects of life become almost unrepresentable and thus also unknown and unknowable. The ordinary taxonomies of social history continue to index zones and inflection points of this total and in certain definitive respects totalitarian process of digital enclosure. Our situation is effectively one of platform totalitarianism in which (the social) metabolism itself is captured by a leveraged exchange with capital and our media and machines are not only social relations but racial formations. This leveraged exchange of metabolism for forms of currency at rates set by platform capitalism is managed by ambient and ubiquitous computation, an electro-mechanical network that is composed primarily of fixed capital. The skeins of accumulation by means of informatic uptake lay closely upon body, mind, and time, and what value is extracted are the products of these. **Thought and feeling are rendered quantifiable, computable, and indeed programmable. *However, it is always a mistake to imagine that the impact of technology flows only in one direction: technical form emerges in a dialectics of domination and struggle.***The global, technical evolution in the scale and granularity of the metabolic capture of what was once called labor power and social cooperation—a capture that fragments and cellularizes populations as well as bodies, minds, and neural networks—is not without its emancipatory potentials, as a Benjamin or a Brecht might remind us were they alive today. **“The bad new things” are built out of and in response to new forms of struggle,** and as Antonio Negri has always emphasized, the innovations of capitalist *techné* come from below, from the ways that the oppressed outflank domination and persist in living. How then to investigate the capture and neutralization of the political domain and its uncountable longings by media-interfaced Computational Capitalism? How to transform and reprogram the failing powers of analysis, sensibility, and action such that they may function beyond the horizon of capitalist control? Four main hypothesis can guide us: 1) Computational Capitalism is an ambient financial calculus of value extraction working through any and all media. 2) Computational Capitalism is a development of Racial Capitalism and is thus also Computational Colonialism: vectors of race, gender, nation, sexuality, and other forms of social difference have been configured by and as strategies of value extraction and, like “structural racism,” have been sedimented into the operating systems and machine architectures of our machines. 3) **The specter of revolution is everywhere visible if one knows how to see it.** 4) For the first time in history a thoroughgoing revolution is possible that does not replicate the failed strategies of the radical break so tragically characteristic of twentieth-century revolutionary movements, but instead works to decolonize computation by transforming the money-form from within. I take it as axiomatic that the items telegraphically listed in the previous paragraph have become inseparable. What we thought of simply as computation is in fact computational capital—a supple and adaptive machine-mediated calculus on the social metabolism, one that can be gleaned through a deeper reflection on the notion of convergence. To illustrate aspects of convergence, we note that **racialization and nationalization, along with regimes of gender, sexuality, borders, and incarceration, are part and parcel of the overall process of corporeal inscription, codification, and programmatic control endemic to digitization.** Niche marketing and profiling are but two of the ways in which **our bodies and practices are coded for capitalist and state-capitalist processing.** One could add here the attempted subsumption of entire demographics under codifications indexed by “thug” and “terrorist.” **Historical codes, including but not limited to race, gender, nation, class, and sexuality, are inscribed on our bodies, read, written, and rewritten by informatic machines.** This functionalization of social difference (representational, biometric), to say nothing of the branding and scarring of bodies that is both past and present at so many levels, serves both as a means and a medium of capitalization and value extraction and *as a necessary substrate to the development of computation*.4 Within and at the scenes of inscription, the code works us and we work the code—again with historically overdetermined statistical variance. This is how it is at both the micro and the macro levels of struggle and organization. IBM’s role in the Holocaust, to give but one example, must also be understood as the Holocaust’s role in IBM and in the development of Hollerith punch cards and computational architectures, including search engines. Sociality and global lifetimes themselves have become the conditions of possibility for what, writ large, is the totalitarian emergence of the World Computer. That is why **no existing political discourse can approach this horizon because current concepts and the activities of thought itself are fully circumscribed by it**—ideas themselves have become operators (media) fully functionalized by and in the matrix of information. Understanding the transformation of semiotic process by information functioning as a form of capital, we can take the general formula for capital M-C-M’ (where M is money, C is commodity and, M’ is a greater quantity of money) and rewrite it as M-I-C-I’-M’, where I is image and C is code.5 The commodity as a distributed social relation has, with computation, become both produced and distributed in nonlinear networked operations that, unlike the assembly line, depend upon digital forms of attention, cognition, images, and codes for full valorization. This dependence on transformed conditions of labor germane to the social factory is (now) true even of older forms of production (e.g., automobiles) inasmuch as they are also networked in the world of information, advertising, Instagram, and the like. The valuation of a commodity requires a calculus of the image that modifies code, as does any interaction that transfers rights and value to said commodity (what used to be called sales). Production, circulation, valuation are all mediated by image and code, and that mediation occurs on a global scale. As the Anthropocene and its derivative concepts might testify, little or nothing remains untouched by this process of computational capital that penetrates down to the level of atoms. Here I want to propose further that this formula can be further modified to read M-I-M’, where I is information. To put this modification simply, money becomes more money through the movement of discrete state machines, the motor force of which is ultimately the bios (what was once thought of as the human life-world) struggling to survive its informatic capture. Labor becomes informatic labor and, as I endeavor to show in *The Message is Murder*, M-I-M’ means less that the commodity is one form of information, and more that the domain of intelligibility known as **“information” directly emerges in the footprint of the value-form.**6 Data visualization by computational processes screen-interfaced with the bios is a fundamental condition of the current regime of accumulation sometimes called post-Fordism. In generating M’ from M, it also effects what Paolo Virno calls “the communism of capital.” The programmable image as a worksite transforms and colonizes nearly all mental, sensual, and neuronal process while submitting them to interoperable regimes of background monetization. This financialization of everyday life, where everyone is forced to continuously throughput information in order to manage volatility and risk, facilitates a machinic enslavement profoundly enabled by and integrated with inherited forms of oppression. **Navigating the matrix of capital-information is not an option, it is a matter of survival.** Somewhere along the way, “consumer society” and “conspicuous consumption” became a semiotic game of survival. In the dominant order, these encodings are among the terms of wealth and power and only those who strive to organize in accord with a different order (or disorder) altogether have more than an inkling that there are better ways to be. We are dealing with the failure of revolutions, the overcoding of bodies and practices, and the absorption of political energy by strategies of accumulation. Computational capital names the integration of discrete state machines with fixed capital and sociality such that Marx’s “vast automaton” has become a global financialized socio-cybernetic system. **“Politics” has been operationally reduced to a mere subroutine in the encroachment of this computationally integrated system on planetary life,** and as Harney and Moten have pointedly underscored, **“politics” and “policy” are today always on the side of the state—and the state is a state of capital.**

#### Debate is indebted to cybernetic datafication as teams are assigned significance and value through ballots, speaks, rankings, etc. To be a “good debater” one must conform to debates forceful attempt to create boundaries of engagement. The division of “useful research” is a mask for the drive to accumulate. The ballot can only signify a rejection of cybernetic datafication and promote ethical subjectivities and research within the system. Other responses are embedded in the feedback loop of cybernetic capitalism.

Jackson 20, Professor, Department of International Education @ Education University of Hong Kong (Liz, “‘But Is It Really Research?’ Mentoring Students as Theorists in the Era of Cybernetic Capitalism.” Educational Philosophy & Theory, vol. 52, no. 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 17–21. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/00131857.2019.1591150.)--js

As Michael Peters notes (2017, 2018), in this age of 'cybernetic capitalism', the global knowledge infrastructure is dominated by trillion-dollar multinationals. These forces are reshaping what counts as valuable knowledge, interpreting academic significance in terms of the capacity of research to directly lead to neoliberal market-oriented economic growth. An outgrowth of the rise of the age of cybernetic capitalism is the increased valuation and appreciation of big data over other kinds of evidence and bases for knowledge. As Kenneth Neil Cukier and Viktor Mayer-Schoenberger (2013) have noted, the subsequent rise of big data as the most valued currency can be characterised by 'the ability to render into data many aspects of the world that have never been quantified before'. To neoliberal institutions and nation-states, which provide public and private information infrastructure, such data is of tremendous use and power. Ordinary academics in this environment have tended to conform to capitalistic frameworks of value in this case, working to gather and analyse data in ways that benefit dominant social institutions and political economic actors. Some may assume there is a mutual benefit, as more funding will be granted, and greater significance ascribed, to researchers gathering data that is of more value under neoliberal growth models and agendas.

Educational researchers are far from immune to these pressures and these seductions. Major associations for educational research such as the American Educational Research Association celebrate their connections with government funders such as the National Science Foundation, which specifically funds 'scientific' research that aims to have an impact. By 'impact', it is implied that the research must agree broadly with the goals of institutions and the value of forwarding them, without major critique or investigation. By 'scientific', there is an emphasis on data. While one might say, following Peter Roberts ([ 7]), that all research is informed by data, as it is 'generated through human experience', in competitive environments in the age of cybernetic capitalism 'more data' is regarded as better data. Quantitative data becomes better than qualitative data, and so on.

There is perhaps no more vital task of educational theorists in this age than to understand and examine how economic growth models are shaping knowledge production agendas, as well as economic and information distribution, normally to benefit the visions of leading players in the age of cybernetic capitalism (Peters, [ 3]). Yet in this context, it would appear that academics researchers are more constrained than ever before by these political-economic forces when it comes to producing research, to be accountable to higher educational institutions and other funding bodies which follow the lead of multinational giants. Rather than setting agendas, most are complying, seeing little recourse and indeed lacking tools that have become devalued by, or may even now be regarded as inherently threatening to, the architects of neoliberal structures that frame information production agendas today.

In the context of ordinary higher education and research institutions, with the ability to gather more data has come greater possibilities for quantitative research. In education, as in other fields, quantitative research has retained a favoured status over qualitative and philosophical approaches for decades. Maths and sciences are still seen as the 'hard' and 'tough' sciences and fields, over the 'softer' arts. That this is senseless binary, particularly in education, has been argued by many philosophers of education (Pring, [ 5]). Qualitative researchers are not immune to the significance of numbers, and quantitative researchers should not be looking at numbers to the neglect of everything else. Yet today, one can see that this binary clearly does have a logic: to divide and differentiate research according to its value within the orientation to the world undergirding cybernetic capitalism. In this framing, educational theory, with its focus on ideas, is even more of a loser than qualitative research, not even deemed as research by some due to its lack of big data—and lack of neoliberal priorities.

This is just the latest challenge educational theorists have faced in defending their position in the academy, given the way their work does not tend to fit perfectly with traditional conceptions of educational research, or of applied philosophy (Roberts, [ 7]). Philosophers of education have expressed for a long time a sense of a minority status in teacher education institutions as well, which are normally focused mostly on educational practice, and on training students in qualitative and quantitative research methods. Philosophers and theorists may be feel further crunched today, in education and other fields, as the datafication era aligns with the push for competitive large-scale grants in higher education, which also makes empirical and quantitative research appeal more than ever before.

In this context, educational theorists can do more than simply try to conform, in vain. Instead, they can take responsibility to question neoliberal assumptions about value and significance, interrogate contemporary political-economic influences on academic research and social life, and provide alternative accounts of what is good, significant, and 'productive'. As Roberts ([ 7]) writes, they can also resist 'some of the demands of a performance-driven world', for instance by taking time to pay attention to what is happening in their institutions and in the field today: not to be pragmatic or 'relevant' for the sake of developing neoliberal 'impact', but to reconsider the way their values and ideas do and do not align with the processes and value orientations experienced in the world around them. Additionally, they can train fellow researchers to focus on these issues to a greater extent than they had been focused on in the past. This can also entail cultivating communities which are dialogic and supportive of alternative visions in research and social life.