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Foucault, Genealogy and Necropolitics — Foucault and Ivan Illich

Speciel Issue: Foucault, Our Contemporary

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EDITORIAL

Sverre Raffnsøe, Alain Beaulieu, Bregham Dalgliesh, Knut Ove Eliassen, Verena Erlenbusch, Alex Feldman, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, Thomas Götselius, Robert Harvey, Robin Holt, Leonard Richard Lawlor, Daniele Lorenzini, Edward McGushin, Hernan Camilo Pulido Martinez, Giovanni Mascaretti, Johanna Oksala, Clare O'Farrell, Rodrigo Castro Orellana, Eva Bendix Petersen, Alan Rosenberg, Annika Skoglund, Dianna Taylor, Thomas Lin, Andreas Dahl Jakobsen & Rachel Raffnsøe.

The editorial team is pleased to publish this issue of *Foucault Studies.* In addition to two original articles, the issue contains a special issue dedicated to the theme *Foucault, Our Contemporary* and a book review.

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

Tim Christiaens (Tilburg University, Netherlands) has written the first original article, "Ungovernable Counter-Conduct: Ivan Illich's Critique of Governmentality". Christiaens starts from the observation that there is little room for an ungovernable life if one follows Foucault's own conceptualization of governmentality. In so far as the notion of an ungovernable life seems to indicate forms of social conduct beyond and relatively unaffected by power relations, the idea of an ungovernable life seems to run counter to Foucault's basic assumption of the omnipresence and inescapability of power. However, Foucault conflates governmentality and power due to his exclusive attention to the history of Western power relations.

To prove this, Christiaens opposes Ivan Illich's critical history of government to Foucault's genealogy of governmentality. Whereas Illich wrote a history of government that resembles Foucault's genealogy of governmentality in surprisingly many ways, the former also showed how governmentalization undermined human autonomy and examined indigenous struggles to demonstrate how they fought against governmentality and sought to develop forms of ungovernable counter-conduct. As an advocate of anticolonial resistance to Western governmental regimes and to the Western development *dispositif,* Illich praises indigenous movements that resist governmentalization and seek to appreciate an ungovernable form of life in resisting decolonial movements.

Christiaens highlights the Zapatista movement in which Chiapas communities expressly cut ties to the Mexican government to affirm their own capacity for self-government as a

remarkable attempt to develop a politics of disalienation in which power-relations are less hierarchically fixed.

In the second original article, entitled "Sustaining Significance of Confessional Form: Taking Foucault to Attitudinal Research", Krystof Dolezal (Central European University, Austria) centers on the confession, which forms a crucial technique in Foucault's genealogical investigation. Without a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the historical and epistemological modalities of confession, it is difficult to adequately understand the procedures of subjectivation and the modern experience of the subject that form a core interest for Foucault which increasingly comes to the fore in his work towards the end of his life.

The article provides a survey of Foucault's account of confessional procedures as he pieces it together against the backdrop of his genealogies of modern man and the human sciences. Confessional procedures are developed in Greek philosophical schools, early Christian monastic practices, early modern judicial trials, Counter-Reformation pastoral practices and modern medical and corrective dispositifs; and they end up becoming integrated in truth production and theoretical knowledge concerning subjects and societies.

In contemporary society, confessional techniques are integrated into and made use of in quantitative attitudinal surveys, such as the *Czech Panel Research of Households*, where face-to-face interviews are carried out that focus on respondents' self-evaluation accessed through closed-ended questions concerning their left-right political identity. In the social sciences, epistemological strategies thus appear that draw upon and make use of the confessional model to constitute subjective identities at an individual level and on a mass scale.

SPECIAL ISSUE: FOUCAULT, OUR CONTEMPORARY

Written by Bradley Kaye (SUNY Fredonia, USA) and Corey McCall (Cornell University, USA), the special issue introduction draws attention to Foucault's ongoing fascination with the movement of Enlightenment. One reason why Foucault took a special interest in the Enlightenment was that European thought here for the first time began to reflect on the specific characteristics of the present and sought to determine how it distinguished itself from the past. In prolongation hereof, the special issue contains contributions that discuss Foucault's relevance for an analysis of the specifics of contemporaneity and challenges it presents.

The first article contributing to the special issue, "Inhuman Hermeneutics of the Self: Biopolitics in the Age of Big Data" is written by Patrick Gamez (University of Notre Dame, USA). It examines how one can use Foucault's work to better understand the role of data in contemporary society. Gamez examines recent research on Foucault and data to show how Foucault's work can help us understand the digital capitalism that forms a hallmark of the present. Countering Koopman's claim that infopower amounts to a new *episteme,* Gamez argues that data capitalism is in continuation with biopower.

The second article of the special issue, entitled "Accountability, Climate, Equity, Sustainability", is written by Ege Selin Islekel (Texas A&M University, USA). Drawing on a

Foucauldian approach, Islekel investigates the political impact of collective story-telling practices in the face of enforced disappearances in a high number of cases in Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Turkey. The aim is to examine what the insistence on story telling among the remnants does or performs. To address this question, the article utilizes two main theoretical frameworks.

On the one hand, the article draws on an analysis of necropolitics as a kind of power that is operative in the contemporary world and accounts for the regulation and management of death and the dead. Existing distinctly from but also together with biopolitics, necropolitics is a kind of power that, according to Mbembe under the name of war or terror, makes the destruction of its enemy its primary objective. Unlike Foucauldian thanatopolitics, which kills in the name of life, necropolitics works primarily on death. On the other hand, the article draws on genealogy as a type of historical examination that mobilizes subjugated knowledges that are buried and disqualified as a result of the workings of necropolitics.

The first part of the article focuses on the role of archival erasure in the context of necropolitics. Here, necropolitics effects a specific kind of fabulation in so far as the erasure of the archive confuses the distinction between the real and the fictional. The second part of the article focuses on the possibilities of narrating other kinds of stories by focusing on Foucault's analysis of archival genealogies but also argues that a genealogical approach encounters difficulties. Since necropolitics works through erasure and fabulation, archives remain incomplete and oblivious. Consequently, the last part asks what kind of archival approach is necessitated to counter this oblivion. To answer this question, one must examine what these kinds of counter-stories do and analyse their actors and events of time. What is at stake is the collective emergence of another kind of fable which Hartman characterizes as "critical fabulation"; a fabulation that multiplies the possibilities of the present and the past by telling stories of nothing.

BOOK REVIEWS

The book review section of the present issue contains the following book review:

- Mark Coeckelbergh, *Self-Improvement: Technologies of the Soul in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. Reviewed by William Tilleczek (McGill University, USA & Université de Montréal, CA).

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Since 2020, *Foucault Studies* has updated and clarified guidelines for footnote references and bibliography. Most important to note in this respect is that the journal articles have all text references in running footnotes with most of the bibliographical information about the source, while the list of references ending each article provides all bibliographical information about the source as well as the DOI of the given piece (if there is one).

With the introduction of these changes, Foucault Studies has significantly increased its service to its readers since they now have essential information ready to hand in both the article and on the page studied.

As a consequence, *Foucault Studies* kindly asks authors of future submissions to follow the updated guidelines before they submit articles. Complying with these guidelines makes the

submission and review process, as well as copyediting, a lot easier and more expedient. The details of the updated guidelines can be found on the homepage here: https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/foucault-studies/about/submissions.

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ARTICLE

Sustaining Significance of Confessional Form: Taking Foucault to Attitudinal Research

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ABSTRACT. This paper offers a conceptual reconstruction and empirical case study of an often-eclipsed concept of Michel Foucault's genealogical project, confession. Departing from Foucault's dictum that his core research interest rests in the experience of the subject, I argue that, without a detailed understanding of diverse modalities of the confessional form, various subjectivation processes and epistemological procedures could not be fully grasped. In the first part, I systematise Foucault's incoherent confessional account against the backdrop of his entangled genealogies of modern man and the human sciences. Subsequently, I introduce a case study of a quantitative attitudinal survey based on face-to-face interviews to test Foucault's model of confession in present-day circumstances and demonstrate its sustaining analytical significance by disclosing the cognitive technique of coding behaviour. Thus far, governmentality studies have confronted positivistic methods in social sciences to display their objectifying functions. In contrast, I use the technique of coding behaviour to immerse into these scientific practices. Such a perspective delivers a fine-grained exposure of epistemological strategies in social sciences that are enabled by the appropriation of the confessional model and that constitute subjective identities on an individual and mass scale.

Keywords: Foucault, Confession, subjectivation, surveying, coding behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of his intellectual career, Michel Foucault indicated that he always focused on three interdependent axes of research: power, knowledge, and subjectivity, but the heart of his inquiry rests in the experience of the modern subject (Foucault 1997, 225). By analysing subjectivation processes in diverse socio-historical contexts, Foucault unwrapped the 'local cynicism' (Foucault, 1978, 95) of power to demarcate practices and techniques that constitute subjectivity and fabricate "regimes of truths". In my essay, I recentre on

one crucial technique in Foucault's project of 'historical ontology' – the confession – in the "games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience' (1990, 7). Although the concern with confession runs through Foucault's writings during the last decade of his research, he never addressed it systematically (cf. Elden 2005, 2016; Taylor 2009; Büttgen 2021).

This paper provides a conceptual reconstruction and a case study that follows Foucault's account of the confessional form. First, departing from the assumption that Foucault's core interest rested in the experience of the subject, I explain that without a detailed and complex understanding of diverse historical modalities of confessional forms, it becomes difficult to understand the subjectivation procedures fully. Thus, I piece together Foucault's incoherent confessional account that he developed throughout his career against the backdrop of his entangled genealogies of modern man and the human sciences. I explain the former on the modes of subjective experience in Greek philosophical schools, early Christian monastic practices, early modern judicial trials, Counter-Reformation pastoral practices, and modern corrective and medical dispositifs; the latter on the processes that led to the integration of confessional technique to the truth production and theoretical knowledge about subjects and societies.

Second, I extend the genealogical discussion by bringing in a case study that discusses a cognitive approach to quantitative attitudinal research (Tourangeau 1992; Schwarz 1996; Watterbrink and Schwarz 2007; Crano and Prislin 2016) to explain how the confessional model as an analytical tool sustains its significance in present-day circumstances. I anchor my case study in Foucault's unfinished genealogical project of the formalisation process of Western consciousness, unveiling how the ritual of confession operates in the heart of modern social sciences and how Foucault's approach retains the analytical ability to irritate seemingly normalised everyday conduct. Hence, I extrapolate from Foucault's dictum that confession represents a pervasive technique in modern societies and remains an integral part of subjective experience (Foucault 1978, 59). I assume that the confessional technique represents a constant factor in the history of subjectivation, evincing continuities and discontinuities. I trace these transformations to account for the presence of confessional practices in modern scientific research designs, highlighting the intricate history that leads to one of the contemporary utilisations of the confessional model.

I defamiliarise face-to-face interviewing in attitudinal surveys that utilise the confessional model as a fundamental epistemological tool to establish individual self-relationships and theoretical and empirical knowledge of individuals and societies. I work with a concrete example of a quantitative attitudinal survey, the first wave of the *Czech Panel Research of Households* (2015-2018, CPRH), that rests on face-to-face interviews focused on respondents' self-evaluations based on explicit closed-ended questions concerning the left-right political identity.

I built on the governmentality studies marked by an oversight of the inner mechanisms of data collection that operate through confessional rationale (cf. Hacking 1982, 1991; Atkinson and Silverman 1997; Osborne and Rose 1999; Rose 2004; Miller and Rose 2008;

Dean 2010). So far, scholars have confronted various positivistic techniques to display their contingency, nominality and objectifying functions. I employ the positivistic coding behaviour technique against its grain to expose the inner confessional dynamics that inform epistemological conventions of attitudinal survey research. The *Panel Research* used the coding behaviour technique that, through audio recordings, records the interviewer-respondent interactions and helps to detect and fix the corrupt data to constitute a 'reliable' material for data analysis. But, simultaneously, this cognitive technique highlights the scientific apparatus surrounding the modes of interactions between interviewers and respondents; the confessional model disciplines subjects' responses, determines epistemological procedures and constitutes subjectivities *en masse*. Hence, I bring evidence to Foucault's observation that modern societies are obsessed with increasingly subtle techniques to control individual and populational truthful discourses through endless verifications (Foucault 1978, 159).

The coding behaviour as a positivistic method offers the possibility of entering the confessional situation on a mass scale through analysing the audio recordings and reveals how confession as a trans-historical epistemological mechanism fabricates and formalises individual self-relationships and empirical knowledge. This paper shows how the pedagogical process, through which the respondents are conducted and disciplined, establishes political attitudes and thus elicits positivistic knowledge about individuals and societies. In sum, the confessional form approached through the lenses of coding behaviour contributes to governmentality studies by establishing a bridge between distant scientific fields and injecting new evidence into the study of contemporary subjectivation modalities.

I organise the paper as follows. First, I reconstruct Foucault's understanding of the historical development of confession and subjectivation, then I examine the contemporary rendering of the confessional form to pinpoint its resilient features in the context of current sociological research.

FOUCAULT'S SUBJECT AND THE GENEALOGY OF A CONFESSIONAL FORM

I enter Foucault's complex work by explaining the development of his power-knowledge-subjectivity triangle to differentiate the varying positions he ascribes to the confessional form. Concerning subjectivity, Foucault operates with various approaches depending on the shifts in his power-knowledge perspective. I draw from Webermann's differentiation (2000) between the *relay* and *artefactual* models in Foucault's readings of the subject.

First, the *relay* model presupposes a subject as an active part of the system that reproduces only what it receives. The dimension of corporeality bestows on subjectivity a chimaera of unity situated at the intersection of power techniques (Foucault 1990b, 131). In this sense, subjectivity is deemed real because individuals believe in it and articulate it. This model is, in Foucault's work, imbued in *disciplinary* power research. The subject is derived mechanically from its 'fictitious' relationship to the panoptical gaze that

'induce[s] […] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault 1990, 201; cf. Jay 1996).

Foucault's succeeding concept of *biopower* binds together the disciplinary power and bio-politics of populations: 'The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organisation of power over life was deployed' (1978, 139). Populational governance is focused on both a bare life of individuals and the biological processes of masses accompanied by emergent scientific discourses. Subsequently, Foucault replaces the biopower perspective with an analysis of *governmentality* that determines how rationality is contained in governmental practices and relates to 'regimes of truth' (cf. Foucault 2008; Dean 2010). To govern refers to any effort to constitute, conduct, and, with subtle techniques such as confession, shape subjects' actions, emotions, and thoughts (Foucault 2008, 63; cf. Hacking 1991, 35; Rose 2004).

Further, Foucault searches for deeper historical roots of human individuation and modern political rationality through the genealogy of *pastoral* power (2009). Foucault accentuates that power is exercised over people, not the territory; the shepherd's gaze unites the flock, knowing its thoughts and guiding it towards salvation. In this context, Foucault accentuates two pastoral techniques in which confession reaches fruition: the *spiritual direction* that establishes a permanent bond between the 'governed' and the 'governing' and the *examination of conscience* that ensures a complete openness of the governed. Pastoral power expanded in Christian pastoral care and underwent deep transformations from the second to the eighteenth century, with "the great age of the pastorate extending from the tenth and eleventh centuries up to the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth century" (Ibid., 188-9). Between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the new judicial, secular model was injected into the general pastoral practice, where confession represented "a permanent court before which every faithful had to regularly present him or herself" (Ibid., 269). As Foucault shows, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries represent a critical struggle over who conducts the individuals' daily conduct (Ibid., 201). Another transformation in pastoral power occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as various pastoral practices began to be exploited by secular governments that began to exercise control over people's daily conduct (Ibid., 264). Notwithstanding, Foucault rejects that there was a "comprehensive transfer" of the pastoral practices from churches to state. On the contrary, reformation and counter-reformation intensified the pastoral control over spiritual matters, and the relationship between believers and their spiritual guides was ever more conducted (Ibid., 305).

Hence, the genealogy of pastoral power allows Foucault to expose the historical onset of governmentality in the context of pastoral revolts of the sixteenth century (Ibid., 279, 303). Foucault describes the beginning of governmentality through an analysis of Thomas Aquinas's concept of the "royal power" and "great continuum". In Foucault's interpretation, Aquinas explains the sovereign king's art of governing people by using "analogies of government". The government imitates God, natural order, and the pastoral or fatherly relationships to flock or family, respectively: "this great continuum from sovereignty to

government is nothing else but the translation of the continuum from God to men in the 'political' order" (2009, 309-11). In the sixteenth century, this "great continuum" that justified the sovereign government of men was broken and substituted by "principles". Governmentality, unlike pastoral power, is not reflected through analogies but through principles connected with emerging "classical episteme". Governmentality newly represents a specific function; not in the fashion of the cosmological analogies but a particular government over "state" (2009, 312-3). The autonomous governmental management supplements sovereignty: a single governmental model is absent and must be explored through governmental rationality (*raison d'État*) mixed with the principles of nature to facilitate the integrity and sustainability of the state (2009, 314, 321).

Webermann's second model refers to the *artefactual* subject that Foucault began to explore around the so-called 'ethical turn'.[1] Foucault focuses on the self-relation dynamics and micro-processes of intra-subjective governance and offers a genealogy of subjectivation techniques of a 'desiring man' (1986, 7) and judicial subject in Antiquity and early Christianity. Foucault seeks answers to independent subjectivation distinct from objectifying norms, strategies, and practices. Newly, the core concept is *technologies of the self* and *hermeneutics of the self*, in which the subject is an effect of both social forces and self-determination. With this scheme, Foucault approaches confession in a new way as a technique that examines and objectifies the subject while producing subjective veridiction and unblocks self-realisation or self-disposal (1978, 60; 2014, 90-114).

The Birth of Confessional Practice in the Greek Philosophical Schools

To anchor my case study in Foucault's genealogy of the confessional form and display the continuities and ruptures thereof in contemporary scientific methods, in the four following sections, I analyse different confessional procedures that Foucault diagnoses from Antiquity to modern scientific formations. To systematise the various forms of self-practice and to examine the function and position of confession in various ethical systems, in every section, I work with Foucault's fourfold analytical grid that features ethical substance, mode of subjectivation, ethical work, and moral teleology (1997, 263-265).

Foucault identifies roots of confession within the active forms of self-relations tied to the principle of *parrhesia*,[2] mainly in Sophocles' work (2012, 1-23; cf. Barker 2018) and

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[1] Although, we can find features of inter- and intra-subjective relations already in the Foucault's discussion of pastoral power (cf. Foucault 2009).

[2] Foucault differentiates four modes of veridiction that can operate simultaneously: parrhesia, teaching, philosophy, and prophesy, while he elaborates mainly on parrhesia (2021, 8-30). Parrhesiastic speech is a form of courageous speech (as opposed to bad parrhesia, which amounts to wilful speech); it is a modality of existence, not a technique; it is a risky truth-telling, tied to the ethos of critique (cf. Barker 2016, 361) and also gradually linked to martyrdom, the courage to manifest truth sanctioned by death, and the mode of being in monasteries. In the 12th century, the parrhesiastic way of life was enacted by the Walden movement in their life as a "scandal of truth" and by mendicant orders with their life in poverty (2012, 3-14, 48-66, 233-43, 252-63). Parrhesia was inbuilt into the practices of self-relation and self-creation. In cynicism, parrhesia exposed

subsequently in the 'golden age' of the culture of the self in Hellenism. Foucault inspects the latter to unpack the concept of *desire* as an ever more detailed observation of oneself. Through self-care techniques, the individual becomes an object of knowledge to transform, purify and cultivate oneself. Self-care is a mode of being that citizens choose freely. The 'self' is not objectified; it is the existence itself to which 'one must apply aesthetic values' and create a 'beautiful existence' (Foucault 1982, 271). The care of the self is a commitment that provides freedom and principles to attain truth and the ability to govern oneself and others.

Further, Foucault discusses the confessional principles in the Pythagorean school that sought to equip ethics with rules according to which one should act without losing self-control over one's body and pleasures (*aphrodisia*). The confessional principle is embodied in the relationship between the individual and his spiritual master. Based on the master's advice to the disciple, he instils the ethical code, while the apprentice's veridiction is sidelined. Notwithstanding, the disciple undertakes self-purifying practices: memorisation and mnemonic methods to reflect on his past (mis)conduct. Daily, one has to remember every act committed and compare it with the ethical code through various techniques: writing letters, exchanging moral and spiritual readings, and recording dreams (Foucault 2011, 1-22).

Second, Foucault identifies different confessional traits in the Stoic school consultation practice between the master and disciple that introduced an administrative character to the self-practice that no longer rests in purification but in self-control. The subject supervises oneself in terms of ethical progress and reflects upon past deeds and offences to his only temporal master. The self-practice trains memory so that the general moral rules are retained and applied (Foucault 2007, 100-101).

Finally, Foucault discovers the extension of the intersubjective relationship within the confessional techniques in the Epicurean philosophical tradition. The confessional technique employs analogical methods to medical consultations such as 'addiction inventory'. It resembles a daily questionnaire, composing a systematic and coherent type of truth-telling procedure about oneself. However, Foucault argues that the truth is tied to insignificant details of personal life. The master-disciple relationship remains temporary and does not imply the Christian 'definitive obedience'. The master sheds light on the truth, which serves as a force to transform conscience and knowledge to attain a 'perfect life' (2007, 163).

Through the perspective of Foucault's fourfold analytical grid, we can observe in his analysis of Greek philosophical schools the central place he ascribes to the confessional technique in the genealogy of the desiring man. Practices that nudged subjects to establish relationships with themselves and others; to understand, analyse and produce themselves in a particular fashion by discovering the truth about themselves as subjects of desire. Hence, sexual acts, passions, and desires form the ethical substance in the framework of

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one's truth; not through discourse but in life as such. In Christianity, parrhesia became identical with the attitude of "heart"; not necessarily manifested in speech but in faith as an apostolic virtue.

aphrodisia (Colombo 2021, 77- 78). The mode of subjectivation is temporal, and the confessional features are inbuilt into the individual and temporal submission to the master's discourse, who discloses the ethical code in the daily reflections of the disciple. Also, ethical work already entails core confessional practices: the examination of conscience, retrospection of one's actions, memorisation of the ethical code, and the exposure of ethical developments to the master and oneself. Moral teleology lies in 'beautiful existence', autonomy, and control of others.

Hermeneutics of the Self in Christian Monastic Practices

Foucault unfolds the confessional genealogy in the context of early Christian monastic practices to highlight its transformations and continuities with the Ancient philosophical schools (1980).[3] He shows how the practices of spiritual (self)direction, obedience, "nullification" of will, and confession replaced the self-mastery of Hellenistic self-care. The Greek philosophical imperative 'know thyself' evolves into the requirement to 'confess, to your spiritual guide, each of your thoughts' (2007, 156). The subject succumbs to constant transformations and self-exercises and must know and tell the truth about oneself and position oneself regarding the fundamental truths embodied in scriptures and dogma (2011, 170). The central element of self-knowledge is 'thoughts' (*Cogitationes*) as interpretable subjective data that must be endlessly entrusted to the other. As I will explain, for Foucault, Christian hermeneutical practice, unlike the Hellenistic self-care (cf. Foucault 1997; O'Leary 2002), remains very much present within modern science and its subjectivation technologies.

According to Foucault, the newly established link between truth-telling and forgiveness has affinities with the Stoic practices. It is connected to four subjectivation practices: *repentance*, *baptism*, *spiritual guidance* and the act of *confession* (2014, 93-114). In the ritual of repentance, the Christian novice must excavate the 'mysteries of the heart' and manifest them to his spiritual guide. Repentance extends the antique philosophical notion of *metanoia* ('a change'), referring to a soul's turn from illusion to the truth (2014, 93-103). It is a separation from sins and the old self, for which one receives conditioned impunity. Foucault notes that, through repentance, sin is newly embedded in the constitution of the relationship between subjectivity and truth; between wrong-doing and veridiction (2014b, 125-163).

Metanoia, notes Foucault, was initially dependent on the unity of conversion and

[3] Foucault also explores early Christian *lay* confessional practices that emerged prior to monastic discipline. The subject's responsibility for sins, accusatory verbalisation of sins and self-knowledge procedures were present only in 'all-encompassing and dramatic expressions of the sinner's state' (2014, 224). It is *exomologesis* ('the recognition of an act'; *confession* in Latin, cf. 2007, 174); an exceptional act of penance through which individuals expressed with both their body and their way of life their repentance and the aim to re-join the Church (2014, 208-9). Exomologesis, as a non-verbal exposition of truth, was transformed in monastic ascetic practices into the verbal analysis of thoughts under the supervision and direction of the other. Nonetheless, the "speechless confession" is retained, for instance, in Augustin's concept of the self-propelled motions of the flesh that defines the character of human nature (Büttgen 2021, 9-10).

illumination concentrated in baptism: a single event of conversion that facilitated the access to truth that overcomes the original sin. However, this unity gradually disappeared, while Christian communities faced the problem of re-establishing the relationship between subjectivity and truth to create a system that endlessly 'sanctions the repeatable events of transgression' (2014, 195).[4] Foucault observes this change in Tertullian, where the subject's relationship to transgression is permanently monitored and controlled. The objective of Christian spiritual guidance is a 'perfect life' that rests in self-control and virginity. The novice must report every thought and decision to the master constantly. The disciple is related to the master by obedience as a way of being that aims to nullify one's will and libidinal desires (2014, 273; 1997, 178).

To account for the technology of the confessional act, Foucault looks at the patristic regime of truth that operates with the idea of evil conceiving the illusion and the impossibility to differentiate between good and evil. The soul needs to recognise whether the thoughts come from Satan or God. Christian confessional procedures bring ceaseless spiritual uncertainties into the truth-subjectivity relationship, facilitating the practice of *exagoreusis;* a permanent analysis of thoughts and their revelation to the other establishes the vanishing point of spiritual guidance (2014, 288-321). Exagoreusis in Christian monastic practices is concerned, according to Foucault's reading of Cassian, with immediate thoughts (not with past conduct, as in the Stoic school), which are to be endlessly examined so as not to deflect the soul from a road to contemplating God (Foucault 2021, 101-102). Hence, through examination, the soul is directed toward the ultimate Truth. The discernment between the thoughts does not aim at falsehood or truthfulness, as in the Stoic consultation practices, but at the "quality of the thoughts", rendering them real or illusory. The constant confession, the verbal exposition to the other and oneself, is combined with an examination in the framework of general and unquestionable obedience to the other with a performative function to tell, show, expel, and liberate.

Nonetheless, as Foucault argues, the ultimate concern lies not in the thoughts'

[4] Foucault analyses in depth the development of *metanoia* linked to the ritual of baptism. He studies how repentance relates to the remission of sins and access to truth. First, he looks at the second-century writings of Hermas, for whom purification and illumination happen at once, and remission of sins and access to truth is conditioned by penitence concentrated on the manifestation of the soul's transformation towards truth and its commitment to the truth. One consciously and willingly separates from his old self and renunciates oneself to be born into new life. The third-century Tertullian proposed transformation and enlargement of *metanoia* concerning baptism, and he emphasised the prior practice of repentance and purification of oneself. The baptism keeps its efficacy, but the preceding purification practices are insufficient. Tertullian reacted to those who did not repent fully before receiving baptism or to those who delayed the baptism, so they may sin and wash away all the sins at once before their death. Catechesis and the teachings of truth and rules are newly coupled with a discipline of ethical purification, while *metanoia* is situated already in these practices. The sinner must renounce his misdeeds before he is pardoned in the baptismal ritual. Metanoia is not only the movement through which the soul is illuminated and detached from its old self and its sins but also the conduct of oneself in which the soul must be examined; the soul has to manifest its truth before receiving baptism. In other words, Tertulian changes the temporality of conversion towards the discipline of baptism that Foucault relates to the development of catechumenate (Foucault 2014, 128-135; 2021).

truthfulness but the truth about the subject. And the only escape from the paradox of illusory self-examination is possible through confession. If the thoughts' quality is in line with truthfulness, the sinner can confess them. If not, the subject expresses them with difficulty. Another mechanism presupposes that evil thoughts disappear when they are poured out during a confession because the devil, as a fallen angel, cannot survive in the light into which a subject enunciates her thoughts. The last mechanism of the confessional act is the fact of speech itself: 'What is now on the tongue is already no longer in the heart' (2014, 305). In Foucault's interpretation, the eventual success of these conversions and purifications depends on the spiritual guide and God's grace.

In Foucault's account of monastic practices, the ethical substance is informed by thoughts, will or libido in the framework of the flesh as a mode of self-knowledge, self-experience, and production of truth. The accent is newly put on exagoreusis: thoughts' exploration and discernment ("hermeneutics of the self") and their verbalisation in the confessional act that facilitates conversion in terms of ethical work.[5] It is no longer objectivation of desire as with Stoics. In Augustine's definition of libido, desire becomes a core feature of human nature and not only an isolated subjective feature that has to be controlled (Colombo 2021, 80). The subjectivation mode lies in unconditional obedience to the spiritual guide and God. The teleology of the ethical system consists of attaining perfection, chastity, illumination, self-disposal, and salvation. Foucault notes that the truth-telling ascetic techniques lie in the middle of the relationship between the subject and the truth, crucially oriented towards self-transformative practice and spiritual purity in Greek philosophical schools and Christian monasteries.

Juridification of Confessional Form

In the *Confessions of the Flesh* (2021), Foucault observes the onset of the reflection of man as a subject of law based on reading Augustine's treatment of marital sexual relations entangled with consent, accountability, and responsibility. As Harcourt shows, legal norms are not imposed on subjects by legal bodies. Still, they are produced as rights and responsibility-bearing individuals through subjectivation practices and ethical work that regulates marital sexual relations (Harcourt 2021, 49). In fact, Foucault began his investigations of the confessional form's development and juridification in the late Middle Ages (cf. 2004). The confession newly structures the relationship between subjectivity and truth in terms of evidence and rigorous method to secure knowledge about subjects (Foucault 2006, 1-25). The monastic forms of auricular confession are 'transformed into a general pastoral function to be exercised by any priest, bishop, and anyone who had general responsibility for the community' (Foucault 1997, 177). As a repeatable act, Foucault contends, confession is 'encouraged, deployed, and strengthened' (2014, 226) whenever one

[5] In this respect, Büttgen observes Foucault's inability to sufficiently account for all dimensions of confession, not only of sins but also of faith. In Foucault's genealogy of the self, one becomes oneself by confessing his thoughts or past deeds. Still, in his lectures from the 1980s, he turns to a genealogy of veridiction, not necessarily tied to penitentiary practices but *parrhesia* (Büttgen 2021, 6, 11).

sins, while the form of repentance becomes fixed to a particular sin. The subject declares guilt in an interrogation conducted by the authority granting repentance by knowing the moral and theological code through which sins can be forgiven. Here, the act of verbalisation guarantees the dimension of shame, which represents the first instance of satisfaction. The confessional function is to reduce punishment vis à vis the Last Judgment (Foucault 2004, 181–192).

Another significant moment in Foucault's confessional genealogy is located between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries when the confession was established as a sacrament and became compulsory (2014b, 184). The transformation of the subject is not central anymore but rather the performance of the confessional act itself. Foucault notes that several institutional apparatuses emerge with the *Canon XXI* of IV. The Lateran Council in 1215 sets out procedures surrounding the confessional act and mandates compulsory confession for every Christian at least once a year. Further, the priest acquires a prominent position because he absolves and grants the form of repentance at his discretion. He is stripped of the altruistic quality previously ascribed to the spiritual master. The confessional act itself is formalised and has a rigid structure and composition. It begins with an act of faith; then, the penitent confesses his conscience, followed by a standardised confessional pattern organised by the Ten Commandments, the seven deadly sins, and the Twelve Articles of Faith (Foucault 2014b, 189).

Moreover, Foucault shows how the late Middle Ages' legal institutions become gradually contaminated by confessional mechanisms and vice versa. As pastoral care integrates the legal model into the heart of the church organisation, the 'relationship between God and man is of a legal nature' (2014b, 187; cf. 2021). Foucault employs *avowal* as a term that emphasises the function of confession aimed at objective knowledge. Avowal penetrates judicial procedures, and its importance grows in the practice of torture, where knowledge is extracted from the suspect's soul and body, creating essential evidence for the judicial system. Foucault describes that the core of the indictment procedure, where the proof feature is established, concentrates on the 'inquisitorial test of truth' (2014b, 204).

Foucault shows that the avowal follows a similar Christian confessional pattern; it constitutes a truthful discourse that enables the authority (the judge) to operate with unquestionable knowledge and to punish. Nonetheless, unlike in Christian pastoral practices, the defendant confirms the already existent truth established by the court to legitimise a punishment. Eventually, the judicial apparatus can certify the veridiction as the crime is publicised in its truth through public execution and annulled in the culprit's death. The avowal shows how legal subjects are implicated and implicate themselves by veridiction in the social order and self-relations and how they co-produce them.

The ethical substance in the context of legal procedures entails deeds and thoughts; the mode of subjectivation is refocused on obedience to the other who defines the truth; and the ethical work is conducted in terms of case exposition based on precise methods, both corporeal and verbal. The subjectivation teleology consists of rendering an individual into an object of empirical knowledge.

Confessional Human Sciences

Foucault discusses the confessional practice in the genealogies of various modern human sciences that retain the Christian pastoral functions from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The confessional form becomes a ubiquitous 'perverse machine' (2014b, 200) because the legal-political system requires an individual who confesses to establish an empirical subject. In *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault enriches the analysis of examination that acts on silenced bodies, emphasising the enunciations of autonomous truth (1978, 18). The confessional configuration allows the subject to find the most profound truths in oneself and establish an adequate self-relationship. Foucault looks at the confessional technique predominantly from the perspective of *scientia sexualis* and traces its development from Reformation and Counter-Reformation to the 'explosion' of sexuality discourses. Through confession, the Christian pastoral incites the subject to confess the 'temptation of the flesh' to limit desire by constantly transforming it into discourse. Foucault is also attentive to the post-Tridentine tone of the confessional manuals, which are increasingly chaste. The confessor should not investigate the details of the sexual act as manuals no longer offer a detailed itinerary of the sexual intercourse. Foucault observes the appeal for an intense frequency of confession in which the Church reserved greater importance to the temptation of flesh than other sins. Foucault also reflects upon the introduction of the confessional booth in the sixteenth century, which renders the relationship between penitent and confessor even more intimate and secretive.[6]

However, in the eighteenth century, the apparatus of sexuality newly problematises 'sex' at the expense of flesh: 'an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail' (1978, 18). As Foucault argues, the confession newly examines the correlation between body and soul not from the perspective of the sexual deeds themselves but through its ramifications in the senses, thoughts, or dreams of the subject, reinvigorating the minute examinations already present in monastic practices (1978, 19-20). According to the pastorate, sex per se should not be verbalised but rather its subtle effects to transform desire into discourse to limit it: "[a] twofold evolution tended to make the flesh into the root of all evil, shifting the most important moment of transgression from the act itself to the stirrings – so difficult to perceive and formulate – of desire" (1978, 19-20).

In this respect, Foucault argues, the sexuality dispositif secularises Christian confession into a scientific procedure that entails consultations, questionnaires, correspondence, or autobiographical narratives collected and included in 'a field of scientifically acceptable observations' (1978, 65). For Foucault, confession newly represents 'a clinical codification of the inducement to speak' (1978, 65). The sexual discourse was translated into acceptable medical language. The medical dispositif thorough examination requires patient

[6] Taylor (2009, 29) proposes an analogy to this transformation by comparing the concept of the self between Augustine, who understands the subject's inwardness as a roofless courtyard of a palace, and John Locke, who depicts the self as a private darkroom that resonates with the design of a confessional booth.

confession through exams, continuous observation, and a set of questions. These practices exposed patients' latent sexual practices and imaginations. Moreover, the intimate relationship between the priest and the penitent transforms into a relationship between an expert and a patient. The confessional interpretations require an expert who can extract the truth based on corresponding scientific rationality. Through confession, Foucault infers that the subject is defined under a concrete identity marker and is guided to accept this identity as authentic.

Foucault ties the confessional technique with *examination* understood as a 'political detail'; a feature of disciplinary technologies that will be very much present in the exposition of my case study. The subject is a product of physical discipline and science-imposed norms. Examination techniques are focused on the hidden details of the inmates' daily conduct to discipline and correct them, constituting the 'orthopaedics' of individuality (1990b, 10). The examination mechanism includes a micro-regime of punishments and normalising techniques of 'notation, of registration, of constituting files, of arranging facts in columns and tables' (1990b, 190). Examination fixes individual differences and particularities so that every individual can be described. In synergy with the documentation apparatus, the examination authorises the comparison of subjects to decide what is (ab)normal.

Hence, modern humanities cannot detach themselves from the initial power embeddedness as they, in Foucault's view, originate in corrective institutions (prisons, hospitals, schools). The subject begins to confess thoughts and deeds to new authorities, especially psychiatrists or doctors, that subsequently transform them into scientific discourses (cf. 1978), and humanities employ the confessional form as a decisive epistemological vehicle to extract and construct the truth about the private lives of individuals and populations (2007, 189–190).

Regarding the sexuality dispositif, the ethical substance is the desire and volitions of a subject; the mode of subjectivation is assured by the authority of a doctor or an expert; ethical work lies in endless confession and submission to the authority not through constraints but by the promises to attain freedom (Foucault 1978, 15-51). In the case of the human sciences surrounding the corrective institution, Foucault approaches confession as an exposition of a case. The ethical substance is the individual's soul and body; the mode of subjectivation is facilitated by examination; the ethical work lies in the training of the body, thoughts, and desires; a moral teleology rests in the scientific construction of a describable and disciplined subject.

What is Confession?

As we have seen in the first section, the modern shift of focus from self-surveillance (the confessional model) to institutional surveillance (the panoptical model) also discloses how the confessional technique is integrated into Foucault's ever-changing methodological apparatus and in his analysis of pastoral, disciplinary, and governmental power relations. The confessional model is not entirely divested from institutional surveillance in

Antique philosophical schools and Christian monasticism, representing self-surveillance and a form of external guidance related to the power of the other. The panoptical model exposes the subject to an outward, objectifying gaze, and Foucault leaves only a little space in his analysis concerning subjective self-examination and self-transformation. The confessional technique ties together objectifying technologies (observations and examinations) and active self-relation and self-expression technologies. As a 'meticulous procedure' (1997, 85), the confession is embedded within institutionalised relations and makes the relationship between individuality, discourse, and truth visible. In Foucault's reading, the power-knowledge nexus is accepted if it 'masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms' (1978, 86). This concealment is secured by the seemingly neutral 'regimes of truth', 'dispositifs', or human sciences that operate through confessional techniques (1980, 194).

In Foucault's work, confessional praxis is the epistemological constant *sui generis* as it represents the central truth-producing ritual that obsesses the Western mind (1978; 2007, 148; 2014b, 28-29). It establishes a personal obligation to know, express, and authenticate the truth about oneself. Only knowledge distilled from intimate confession permits proper conduct guidance regardless of whether the goal is salvation, well-being, or mental health. To confess also presupposes faith in certain truths, religious dogmas or scientific standards (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983). In Foucault's historical narrative, endless confessional enunciations facilitate power irrigation, without which the power-knowledge network dries up (Hacking 1991, 84). Thus, the confessional practice dovetails with Foucault's concept of dispersed power, where the subject is already positioned within a network of multiple relationships and fixes them by speaking, acting, and thinking.

For Foucault, confession is a technique of both gaze and audit interweaved with examination procedures. The verbalising element of confession inserts the subject into the social order and makes the subject visible to oneself and others. The confessional configuration assumes both subject's truthful enunciations and an instance of controlling audit of the authority (a priest, a judge, a scientist, or an imaginary other) that imbues the relationship with power dynamics (Kelly 2009, 99). The appropriate confessional act incites subjects to establish the possibility of self-interpretation and self-control while learning the rules of subordination. The authority collects subjective enunciations and subsequently governs them through hermeneutical intervention and independent interpretation, deciphering and formulating the complete truth about the subject (Foucault 1978, 66). The authority conducts the confessor through evaluation, punishment, pardon, or comfort based on these resources.

CASE STUDY: THE CONFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN ATTITUDINAL SURVEYS

In this case study, I first examine Foucault's genealogy of contemporary neoliberal forms of rationality by outlining the genealogy of statistics and public opinion research. Subsequently, I indicate how the confessional model is inbuilt into the contemporary

standardised questionnaire survey mechanisms. I delineate the intervention of the cognitive approach to statistical data collection processes to tease out the epistemological tool that relies on the confessional practice of the face-to-face interviewing. I demonstrate how the strategies of scientific apparatus collect data from respondents rooted in entangled operations of self-examination, confession of one's immediate thoughts to the other, the production of subjective veridictions, examination by others, and transformation of subjective veridiction into objective scientific truth.

In his genealogical account, Foucault showcases that statistics penetrate the human sciences in the eighteenth century, producing a new field of visibility, a numerical form of reality, and the new rationality of government. The government of numbers through statistics is born primarily in *police science*, introducing a new type of state self-knowledge regarding populational variables (Foucault 2009, 256-283). The nineteenth century witnessed a significant accumulation of data primarily due to industrialisation and urbanisation (Hacking 1991). Statistics promised to enhance the scientific character of humanities by quantifying the social facts. Statistics have become regarded as a 'moral science' designed to assure the highest possible happiness for as many people as possible by studying the moral behaviour of each individual and the population to administer and conduct life (Rose 2004, 209).

The phenomenon of public opinion emerged in the twentieth century with the democratisation of 'opinion' itself that begins to be seen as an aggregate of individual, rational and self-reflexive stances. Public opinion research is bolstered by the emergence of the survey and a representative sample. Gradually, public opinion is legitimised as a constitutive feature of democracy, promoting a simplification of fundamental socio-political issues translatable into language that the general public could be responsive to. Based on individual confessions, surveys produce data concerning the respondent's subjectivity while numerically objectifying these enunciations and reporting them in a representative sample that allows projecting the survey results to society. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of public opinion 'is an artefact of the technical procedures that are designed to capture it' (Osborne and Rose 1999, 382).

I focus on the confessional situation between the interviewer and respondent built into the questionnaire survey. I will show that, despite the confession's inconspicuousness or apparent banality in data collection procedures, it forms the survey's critical epistemological instrument. The survey represents an administrative form in which individual interviews are combined with the totalising technique of statistics, thereby granting society a self-hermeneutical ability. The frequency of individual questionnaires is analogous to the repetitiveness of other historical forms of confession. The individual is continuously interviewed about the same elements of his life as in the Pythagorean school (Atkinson and Silverman 1997). The questionnaire assumes a concealed truth about the subject from which a scientific truth can be inferred. In this sense, the confessional practice incites respondents to reveal their traits and confirm their identity according to the proposed questionnaire possibilities. The goal is to translate the individual veridictions through the self-

examinations of respondents. The case exposition is facilitated by the questioner-respondent interaction traced by coding behaviour or through the paper and online questionnaires to produce scientific discourses concerning subjects and societies. The scientific presumption is that if the research design properly filters the respondents' statements, it guarantees validity and reliability. In what follows, I will expose how the confessional practice is situated within the data collection framework.

Cognitive Approach to Confession

The prevailing mathematical-statistical approaches of contemporary social sciences to the concept of subjectivity correspond with the behavioural psychology paradigm (Vinopal 2008, 11). The behavioural approach does not problematise the relationship between the subject and the apparatus; it merely measures the subject as a passive component whose sole purpose is to listen to the question posed by the interviewer or virtual interface and answer it. The interviewer, who is the mediator between the respondent and the scientific apparatus and guides this relationship, also holds an uncontested role. If the respondents cannot answer – concerning mainly abstract themes – these attitudes are defined as non-attitudes (cf. Converse 1970). However, in the 1990s, the cognitive approach advanced a critical approach towards behavioural ontological and epistemological assumptions. Importantly, it challenged (among other things) the neglected and, therefore, hidden process of interaction between the interviewer and the respondent and underlined the respondent's self-relationship, elaborating on issues such as memory organisation, modes of decision-making, or answer editing, concluding that these variables may systematically alter and subvert the research results and validity.

In particular, the cognitive approach contests the concept of attitude as an object of measurement and the idea that attitudinal research records pre-existing, rational positions (Watterbrink and Schwarz 2007). For the cognitive approach, attitudes are – to varying degrees – constructed during the confessional situation: to a known topic, the attitude is recalled from memory; to an unknown issue, it is made from scratch. Thus, cognitive research fails to capture 'real attitudes'. Responses to the research design are constructed preferences because several cognitive schemes related to the subject matter may be available to respondents at a given time (Tourangeau 1992). In short, the cognitive approach holds that surveys do not measure public opinion but co-create and co-guide it (Zaller and Feldman 1992, 600-606).

The cognitive approach ascribes a central place to the structure of long-term memory and formalises the research apparatus's confessional situation between respondent and interviewer into four stages. First, the process of comprehension and interpretation of the question establishes the relation of attitude with the researched issue. Second, the relevant resources (assumptions, existing evaluations, emotions) are recollected from long-term memory and constitute considerations. Considerations are strongly influenced by the question-wording, previously drawn conclusions and evaluations, incentives from the interviewer and the interviewer's traits. The cognitive approach is based on the premise that

interviewing is a specific type of communication as there is no 'common ground' regarding values, beliefs, or attitudes between the participants in the interrogation. Thereby, the interviewer is forbidden to clarify the research question, for there is no assurance of a mutual understanding of the question. The third stage traces the response process, a derivation of an answer from what was evoked from memory. Revoking memory contents is superficial and generates a small number of relevant considerations. In the final stage, the response is limited by the pool of possible answers or the context of already answered questions. The attitudes are created only in the enunciation that is further restrained by auto-correction based on societal desirability and acceptability of the attitudes and by the self-presentation of the respondent as he conceals or softens his views on politically sensitive questions (Tourangeau 1992, 36; Crano and Prislin 2016, 43, Schwarz 2004, 43).

Hence, the cognitive approach deems subjective attitudes as unstable. Individuals generally do not have prepared attitudes but create them in this fourfold process; immediate experiences and questionnaire features establish attitudes. The attitudinal research designs only "reflect consideration most accessible in the memory in the moment of answering" (Zaller and Feldman 1992, 585). The attitude is a mental construct captured at a certain point in time, and the attitudes most susceptible to the context are the issues to which respondents have ambivalent answers. The cognitive approach is not vested in the source of thoughts, as in Christian confession, but in aligning the individual consideration and intentions of the survey with the formal and nominal procedures surrounding the confessional act.

A branch of cognitive science seeks to surpass these contextual factors by implicit measurements that resemble what Foucault calls *exomologesis*. These indirect measurements encompass techniques such as measurement of pressure, eye motion, and sweat and withdraw from observing intentional recollection of commiserations and responses as they want to detect attitudes, the truth about individuals, that respondents have difficulties enunciating (Schwarz 2004, 43; Vargas, Sekaquaptewa, Hippel, 180).

In this respect, the cognitive approach's ultimate interest lies in analysing possible sources of error, thereby elucidating the unreliability of self-examination and the confessional relationship between respondent and interviewer within the data collection process. Therefore, the cognitive approach carefully controls the whole confessional process and formalises it to overcome the context-dependency of the interviewing and enhance the methodology. As I will demonstrate in the following section, such an approach epitomises what Foucault saw as the modern obsession with controlling individual and populational truthful discourses through endless confessional verifications.

Coding Confessions

The last section charts how the cognitive approach to the confessional technique operates within the *Czech Panel Research of Households 2015-2018* to unearth its function and makeup. The author of this paper participated as a research assistant in the data cleansing process and had access to all the panel interviews, which are otherwise private and

considerably expensive. I depart from the first wave (7.7.2015 – 10.11.2015) of the data collection that encompasses a broad battery of questions. I focus on a question concerning the left-right political identification in which the cognitive approach is employed; concretely, the coding behaviour technique.[7] This technique records and monitors the confessional interviewer-respondent relationship and allows researchers to see its dynamics. Behaviour coding covers every individual interview based on line-by-line transcripts of audio recordings. Generally, this method is used in experimental or laboratory conditions; however, in this case, it is applied directly to the field research (Fowler and Cannell 1996).

The *Panel Research* was conducted by significant state-funded research institutions, the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and Masaryk University. The data collection was executed by the most credible public opinion research agencies, MEDIAN and STEM/MARK, which collected the data in 5159 households using address-based sampling (ABS). The panel survey utilised a standardised face-to-face interview with a standardised paper questionnaire and CAPI. The data collection was administrated by 308 experienced interviewers who undertook specialised training for *Panel Research* (Röschová 2015). The question under scrutiny had the following wording: 'The left and the right are often discussed in the context of politics. Use this card and tell me where you would place yourself on this scale when zero means left, ten right?' The controlling audit of recordings was performed in 82% of surveyed households by a scientific team in the Czech Academy of Sciences.

The coding behaviour recordings disclose the actual course and configuration of the relationship between the respondent and interviewer and between the subject and the scientific formation. It gives access to a situation that represented a secretive space in historical forms of Christian or scientific confession. At the same time, coding behaviour exposed how the self is formalised through detailed techniques and how it strives to legitimise survey research by surpassing the face-to-face interviewing unreliability. I argue that the fundamental epistemological procedure in surveys constitutes a further development of the technique of confession, albeit with various modifications.

Based on the coding behaviour technique, the research design formalised the confessional situation by four dichotomous variables to study the modes through which individual respondents were disciplined by interviewers' interventions to relate, examine, and confess their political positions in a certain way. Subjects were offered a limited field of options for expressing their own choice of political identity in a quantified way. The first variable charted an 'answer offered', which captures a situation when an interviewer proposes to the respondent a specific answer. It is recorded in 888 cases (19.3%). The level of incitement varies from the situation when the interviewer fills the answer on behalf of the interviewee to cases where he recommends a specific position on the scale to the

[7] The cognitive approach has developed several other methods of verifying the attitude measurement, such as *cognitive interview* or *reaction time measurement*.

respondent.[8] The second variable traces a 'question explanation' when the interviewer interprets the left-right scale while giving examples or translates the scale with the help of words such as 'extreme' and 'absolute' or confirms the respondent's interpretations. Such a situation is recorded in 387 cases (8.4%).[9] The third variable maps a 'differently asked question'; the situation when the interviewer retells, in her own words, the standardised question and possible answers. It is recorded in 1186 cases (25.8%).[10] Finally, the fourth variable is a 'reverse change' in which the interviewer comments on the respondent's answer and the respondent subsequently changes the answer.[11] It occurs in 78 cases (1.7%). In sum, the coding behaviour exposes that the political self-identification is affected by the interviewers' transgression of the survey standards in 42.5% of all the cases (IS–CAS 2017).

The coding behaviour goal is to buttress the legitimacy of the confessional form through which it gains knowledge about the individual ability of political self-reflection. Coding behaviour also describes how the respondent is, in the confessional procedure, pedagogically guided and trained and learns how to properly deliver political self-identification in a formalised manner and co-produce public opinion.

There are multiple forms through which the subject is brought to himself by different regimes of truth or discursive formations. In what follows, I focus on how the subject is conducted to define his political identity through cognitive approaches to surveys based on face-to-face interviews. I understand interviewing as an extension of the confessional technique because that stands for a core epistemological tool in the survey apparatus. The coding behaviour technique exposes the confessional situation and the relationship between individuality, discourse, and truth. It presupposes that individual considerations are produced in the experience of the questioning that disciplines subjects on how to think about themselves. The coding behaviour applied to the survey interviewing apparatus can operate on the individual and on a mass scale by asking, auditing, transcribing, verifying, standardising, examining, and coding the interviews' interactions.

Although Foucault designed his genealogy of subjectivation and the fourfold ethical grid to analyse various ethical systems, it can be fruitfully applied to face-to-face survey

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[8] Variable 1. Example: *Respondent*: 'I should lean somewhere, right? Not to give five, I would be a divided personality. I wouldn't go to the communists.' *Questioner*: 'A little to the right from the middle, so six?' Respondent: 'OK.'

[9] Variable 2. Example: *Questioner*: 'Now left-right, where are you situated?' *Respondent*: 'Well, I don't know.' Interviewer: 'In the middle?' *Respondent*: 'I don't want to go to the communists.' *Questioner*: 'So rather, the right?' *Respondent*: 'I don't know if the Civic Democrats are left or right.' *Questioner*: 'The Civic democrats are on the right-wing.' *Respondent*: 'Really?' *Questioner*: 'So, eight? Or how much do you want?'

[10] Variable 3. Example: *Questioner*: 'Left, right - does that mean anything to you?' *Respondent*: 'Yeah in politics? I thought –.' *Questioner*: 'This is a controversial thing because right-wingers can behave the other way around and leftists can do the opposite.' *Respondent*: 'Yes.' *Questioner*: 'But let's assume that where would you place yourself right-left. Zero ultra-leftists, ten ultra-rightists?' *Respondent*: 'Five, like half, you see? Because I really don't know.'

[11] Variable 4. Example: *Respondent*: 'Probably to the right.' *Questioner*: 'Really? Or in the middle?' *Respondent*: 'Then put some centre in there.'

interviewing, in which a scientific form of confession brings individuals to political self-relationship. The cognitive approach defines the long-term memory structures as the substance – the domain of the self – from which the considerations as interpretable data are derived and exposed for examination.

The ethical work is determined by the respondents' immediate examination of their memory; this process produces considerations based on past choices, and the apparatus demands immediate disclosure to the interviewer and the questionnaire interface. The cognitive approach requires truthful enunciations, meaning they are to be aligned in the best possible way with the recollections and considerations and that the enunciations are aligned with the intentions of the research design. That is why interviewers must conduct respondents to ensure their openness and sincerity in the examination process and structure the possible space of their thoughts concerning the political space. The research design critically organises the order of significant and insignificant questions to guarantee the most authentic statement, free from negative influences. Interviewers are set to emphasise the anonymity of the confession marked by the respondents' intimate home surroundings where the survey takes place and explain the respondents' irreplaceability in the survey, given the sampling requirements.

Concerning the mode of subjectivation, the figure of the other is both individual (interviewer) and collective (a scientific team), which assures the 'truthfulness' of the confessional situation. The rationality of the research filters the individual enunciation that, in effect, guarantees objective, scientific truth. It renders the self-interpretations and truths into corresponding scientific rationality. Surveys employ the confessional form as a decisive epistemological vehicle to extract and construct the truth about the private lives of individuals and populations. The subject is not created as a legal or desiring subject but as a scientific subject capable of producing political identities. The subject is inserted into the visible social and political order field through normalising practices of the scientific apparatus.

The coding behaviour reveals that almost half of the cases are submitted to the interviewer's authority, who directs the respondents' answers. The cognitive approach is suspicious of what happens between the one who confesses and the other. It tests the techniques of self-examinations and the exposition of the individual cases to generate reliable scientific results of political subjectivity. Through the core epistemological confessional procedures, the survey collects and publishes all the utterances that initially operated in an anonymised way but, in the end, are made public and massified. Based on these discourses, subjects are translated to the scientific semantic field that claims legitimacy to describe the political, allow for spatial and temporal comparison, and represent a domain to be governed. In other words, the expert team formalises and collectivises the individual veridictions and translates them into the scientific language to calibrate and quantify political identities (cf. Rose 2004, 199).

The subject certifies his consideration in the interaction with the other (interviewer, research apparatus) and temporarily succumbs to the empirical discursive formations by

defining himself on a numerical scale and acknowledging that the scientific apparatus can ask sensitive questions. The subject is defined under a concrete identity marker through confession and is guided to verify this identity. Through surveys, the confessing subject becomes both the subject of his interpretations and the subject and object of the discursive formation. In this sense, the confession is very close to Foucault's concept of *avowal* as the survey apparatus is designed to secure knowledge and evidence about the subject. However, in this case, the confessor's authority is multiplied by the scientific team that evaluates individual cases, determining what a scientific standard is and what deviates, establishing hegemony over the researched topic.

Confession represents the root epistemological tool of surveying, a technique of audit connected with procedures of (self)examination and case exposition. The verbalising element of confession inserts the subject into the social order and makes the subject visible to oneself and others. The confessional configuration assumes both the subject's truthful enunciations and an instance of controlling audit of the authority that imbues the relationship with power dynamics. The appropriate confessional act incites subjects to establish the possibility of self-interpretation and self-control while learning the rules of subordination.

The teleology on the respondent's side lies in a self-presentation or financial incentive and is detached from self-mastery, apatheia, contemplation of God or health considerations. Each household received a financial reward for the research participation (from EUR 20 to EUR 40), depending on the number of completed questions and the timely completion of all the interview tasks. The financial objective also lies on the side of the interviewer. The teleology of the cognitive approach strategy rests not in the actual evidence of respondents' self-knowledge but in the purification of the confessional procedure to elicit research validity – scientific truth. The purity of the confessional procedure itself is more important than its content.

CONCLUSION

In my essay, I offered a comprehensive reading of Foucault's genealogical project of different subjectivation practices through the perspective of the confessional technique. The reconstruction illustrated how various modes of confession shape the subjective experience of oneself, others and truth both in history and today. I demonstrated how the confessional technique and its function developed throughout history and acquired a strong position as an epistemological tool within different regimes of truth and human sciences that endeavour to relate to man and produce him in a desired fashion.

Subsequently, I presented a case study to supplement Foucault's research on the confessional modes of subjectivation from the perspective of today's human sciences. I tested the model of confession as a persisting hermeneutical key that can help deconstruct contemporary positivistic research, such as the cognitive approach to data collection in an attitudinal survey. Ironically, a cognitive, positivistic method can be utilised to unmask

the hidden confessional procedure that fabricates and formalises a concrete scientific type of the contemporary self. The coding behaviour technique facilitated a way to problematise the confessional epistemology of the survey research. My analysis re-confirmed Foucault's suspicion and critique of the reductivity of modern human sciences that seeks to improve the ability to relate and capture subjects in their finality through persisting confessional practices.

This paper contributed to the governmentality studies by demonstrating how a positivistic method can be used in fruitful combination with Foucauldian hermeneutics to disentangle contemporary subjectivation practices and interpret how a particular discursive formation operates. By employing the coding behaviour technique against its intentions, I exposed the relationships established by the confessional form, from which the modality of the subject's self-relationship and relationship towards scientific formations concerning political self-identification can be inferred. That is, the confessional form approached through a coding behaviour perspective can enhance the tradition of critical hermeneutics since it enables a fine-grained insight into the delicate forms of governmentality that operate in omnipresent forms of interviewing and data collection.

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ARTICLE

Ungovernable Counter-Conduct: Ivan Illich's Critique of Governmentality

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ABSTRACT. Within Michel Foucault's own conceptualization of governmentality, there is little room for something like 'ungovernable life'. The latter seems to hint at a form of social conduct beyond power-relations, which would offend Foucault's basic philosophical postulates. I argue that this identification between governmentality and power as such demonstrates a one-sided focus on the history of Western power-relations. By opposing Foucault's genealogy of governmentality to Ivan Illich's critical history of government, I delineate indigenous struggles against governmentalization as a form of ungovernable counter-conduct. Throughout his books from the 1970s to 1990s, Illich wrote a critical history of government surprisingly similar to Foucault's, from the pastorate to modern political economy. However, rather than merely describing this history, Illich argued governmentalization alienated human beings from their autonomy. As a former missionary priest, he criticized the Church's and modern governments' attempts to subsume populations under a conduct of conducts. He advocated anticolonial resistance to subsumption under Western governmental regimes. In Illich's appreciation of decolonized life, an ungovernable form of life can be discovered, which I defend with the example of Zapatismo and indigenous self-government through *mandar obedeciendo*.

Keywords: Governmentality, Counter-conducts, Ivan Illich, Decolonization, Zapatismo

INTRODUCTION

> *The US way of life has become a religion which must be accepted by all those who do not want to die by the sword– or napalm.*
>
> – Ivan Illich

The uptake of Michel Foucault's legacy in the post-colonial tradition has been somewhat mixed.[1] On the one hand, Foucault is one of the most-cited Western authors and has greatly influenced the methodology of post-colonial thought. On the other hand, Foucault's own work is remarkably silent about the intersections of power, knowledge, and subjectivity beyond Europe, and the philosopher has often overlooked the role of the colonies in shaping Western modernity.[2] One area of Foucault's philosophy where this omission of non-Western territories is eye-catching, though rarely acknowledged, is the treatment of governmentality. While Foucault develops the concept through a detailed study of European and American discourses about government, he presents governmentality, or the conduct of conducts, as the main prism for the study of power as such in his 1982 essay *Le sujet et le pouvoir*. From a post-colonial perspective, this rhetorical artifice represents 'the West' as a universal *telos* for the rest of the world. Foucault has extrapolated his analytics of power from a particularly Western genealogy that moves within the Judeo-Christian pastorate and the modern State apparatus. However, a sense for the 'plural history of power' beyond 'the West' is missing.[3] Other regions in the world have their own genealogies of power and knowledge which are more diverse than what fits into the framework of governmentality studies.[4] Is it then necessary to 'provincialize Foucault'?

In this paper, I focus on one particular area where Foucault's privileging of Western histories might lead him astray: resistance as counter-conduct. Foucault defines the motivating force behind counter-conducts as a will "not to be governed *like that*".[5] This description assumes that governmental power-relations are an ineluctable given, which has been true of most Western contexts, but it says little about the territories where the hold of governmentality might be less firm. How should we conceptualize counter-conducts that struggle against their subsumption under Western governmental regimes? Some of Foucault's followers, like Giorgio Agamben, have attempted to conceptualise an 'ungovernable' beyond governmental power.[6] However, since these attempts mostly lack grounding in concrete practices of resistance, they are often highly abstract and politically

[1] For an overview of the post-colonial reception of Foucault, see Stephen Legg, "Beyond the European Province: Foucault and Postcolonialism," in *Space, Knowledge and Power*, ed. Stuart Elden and Jeremy Crampton (2007), 265–89; Ranabir Samaddar, "Michel Foucault and Our Postcolonial Time," in *The Biopolitics of Development: Reading Michel Foucault in the Postcolonial Present*, ed. Sandro Mezzadra, Julian Reid, and Ranabir Samaddar (2013), 25–44.

[2] Edward Said, "Michel Foucault, 1927-1984," *Raritan Quarterly* 4:2 (1984), 10; Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995), 51; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (2006), 288.

[3] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2007), 15. See also, Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 207.

[4] See, for example, Partha Chatterjee, "More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), 351–90.

[5] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," [1978], in *Qu'est-ce que la critique? Suivie de La culture de soi* (2015), 37. Translation from Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?," [1978], in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (2007), 44.

[6] Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory* (2011), 65.

uninformative.[7] In Agamben's case, the quest for the ungovernable is pursued firmly within the Western Canon, and it comes eerily close to a messianism that would move humankind beyond *all* forms of power. Agamben deviates sharply from a Foucauldian approach to power-relations as ubiquitous and inevitable. He does not help in exploring how non-governmentalised forms of power operate beyond the borders of Western governmentality. In this paper, I approach the issue of 'ungovernable counter-conducts' via Ivan Illich's critique of modern governmental power and his advocacy for indigenous peoples to resist their subsumption under Western development programmes.

Illich might be a surprising vantage point for 'provincializing Foucault'. He was a Catholic missionary-turned-critic who read and admired Foucault's work and criticised some of the same institutions that were on Foucault's research agenda.[8] But he never wrote about 'governmentality' – he lived in Mexico during most of Foucault's career at the *Collège de France* – and he is generally not considered a post-colonial thinker. However, those who scan the footnotes of Latin-American post-colonial authors, like Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Arturo Escobar, find frequent references to Illich. Sousa Santos credits Illich as one of the main inspirations for the 'epistemologies of the South'-paradigm and Illich, in turn, credits a young Sousa Santos as a helpful collaborator in the acknowledgements to *Tools for Conviviality.*[9] Illich was also personally involved with major figures in liberation theology, like Paulo Freire and Helder Camara, even if his appreciation of liberation theology was ambiguous.[10] From a Latin-American perspective, Illich is one of the key inspirations of post-colonial thought. Moreover, his own genealogy of modern government runs surprisingly parallel to Foucault's. For both thinkers, modern government derives from Christian pastoral regimes and both view it as a series of rationalities forged to increase the economic productivity of populations with the help of statistics and political economy.

I will develop how Illich's critical history of governmentality leads him to a position that explicitly delimits the reach of governmentality and supports the claims of indigenous peoples to resist their governmentalisation. To that purpose, Illich uncovers a reality of 'ungovernable counter-conducts' underexplored by Foucault. I start, in section 1, by highlighting how Illich takes a different stance than Foucault in describing the medieval struggle between the pastorate and antipastoral counter-conducts. While Foucault merely describes these antagonisms, Illich actively sides with the antipastoral movements and

[7] Arne De Boever, *Plastic Sovereignties: Agamben and the Politics of Aesthetics* (2016), 189; Tim Christiaens, "Destituent Potential and Camus' Politics of Rebellion," in *Agamben and the Existentialists*, ed. Marcus Antonio Norris and Colby Dickinson (2021), 181.
[8] For a biographical overview of Illich's work, see Todd Hartch, *The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West* (2015); David Cayley, *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey* (2021).
[9] Boaventura De Sousa Santos and Steve Brett, "A Process of Learning and Unlearning: A Dialogue with Boaventura de Sousa Santos," 3rd Space. https://3rd-space.org/a-process-of-learning-and-unlearning-a-dialogue-with-boaventura-de-sousa-santos/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=a-process-of-learning-and-unlearning-a-dialogue-with-boaventura-de-sousa-santos (accessed March 28, 2023).
[10] Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 57.

argues that the institutionalised pastorate constitutes a betrayal of Christianity's original ungovernable ethos of care for the other.[11] In section 2, I discuss how Illich's opposition to pastoral power informs his critique of modern governmentality and how that differs from Foucault's. Whereas Foucault seems not to imagine social life beyond the government/governed-divide, Illich explicitly attempts to differentiate between different regimes of power, of which governmentality is just one that can subsequently be negated in favour of other power regimes. With this theoretical manoeuvre, Illich carves out a space for post-colonial, anti-governmental practices.

As I continue in section 3, Illich deems modern governmentality alienating for human populations. By surreptitiously steering human conducts in a 'conduct of conducts', governmental elites pursue their own aims by manipulating the desires of the governed. Individual conducts become vehicles for superimposed governmental projects. People are thereby nominally free, but their free choices are always already inserted in government programmes beyond their control. In section 4, I argue that this critique of governmentality leads Illich to endorse indigenous counter-conducts that resist subsumption under governmental development programmes. From his experience as an educator for Catholic missionaries in Latin America, Illich observed the downsides of well-intentioned development programmes from the global North imposed on indigenous communities. Indigenous forms of resistance are 'ungovernable' in the sense that they reject Western governmentality in favour of more egalitarian forms of self-government where power flows more fluidly throughout the community. Rather than accepting the government/governed-divide and demanding to be governed differently, they strive for a withdrawal from governmental oversight.

1. PASTORAL POWER AS BETRAYAL

Before we move to the impact of the disagreement between Foucault and Illich on post-colonial conduct, it is best to closely study the source of this disagreement: their different stances toward the pastorate. According to Foucault, modern governmentality derives primarily from the Christian pastorate.[12] Pastoral power in the Church assumes a dividing line between clergy and laity explained as pastors leading their flock.[13] Pastors are benevolent guides helping sinful souls to find salvation in God. This task requires intricate knowledge about the inner conscience of all followers *omnes et singulatim* and extensive yet caring power to intervene in the economy of their desires. Christianity consequently establishes between clergy and laity "the shepherd-sheep relationship as one of individual

[11] *Ivan Illich*, 29.

[12] See Sverre Raffnsøe, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, and Morten S. Thaning, *Michel Foucault: A Research Companion* (2016), 258–65; Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (2016), 95–100.

[13] Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population: cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978* (2004), 128.

and complete dependence".[14] Believers are suspected of being too morally corrupted to adequately evaluate the moral worth of their own thoughts.[15] The pastorate subsequently necessitates rituals of veridiction, like the confession, to make believers speak the truth about themselves. Thusly, pastors can judge the conformity of believers' conducts to the will of God.[16] The pastor thereby ensures the alignment of the believer's will to the will of God. He guarantees the 'mortification of the will' as an independent force.[17] Foucault does not mean that pastors actually "kill off" the human will, but they attempt to denude it of its autonomy. God rather than the sinful individual should determine the will's impulses. Pastoral practices continually undermine the innate yet corrupt individual will so that the believer can openly receive the will of God. The goal is to make the will of God operative on Earth. God himself stays in the heavens, but His will can realize itself in world-history if believers voluntarily put aside their own petty desires in favour of enacting the will of God. People govern their personal conduct on God's behalf, thereby becoming the instruments through which God achieves the world's salvation.[18]

As Lorenzini highlights, this configuration of power, subjectivity, and truth grants a pivotal role to the human will: "the field of [the subject's] freedom is defined and structured by his/her acceptance or refusal to be conducted *by this particular mechanism,* to let him/herself be conducted *in this specific way*".[19] The pastorate requires believers' wilful submission to rituals of veridiction and pastoral authority. In Lorenzini's reading, the will also lies at the source of pastoral counter-conducts.[20] When individuals choose to suspend their acceptance of pastoral authority, their conduct becomes recalcitrant and resistant.[21] Counter-conducts arise from a wilful refusal to submit to the pastorate, which is a form

[14] Michel Foucault, "Omnes et singulatim: vers une critique de la raison politique" [1979], in *Dits et écrits II. 1976-1988*, n. 291 (2001), 964. Translation from Michel Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of Political Reason" [1979], in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (1981), 237.

[15] Daniele Lorenzini, "The Emergence of Desire: Notes Toward a Political History of the Will," *Critical Inquiry* 45:2 (2019), 468.

[16] Michel Foucault, *Du gouvernement des vivants: cours au Collège de France 1979-1980* (2012), 298–99; Michel Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair* (2018), 138.

[17] Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 181; Foucault, *Les aveux de La chair*, 368.

[18] This instrumentalisation as part of God's government of the world is central to Agamben's genealogy of *oikonomia.* See Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty* [2012] (2013), 21–22..

[19] Daniele Lorenzini, "From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude: Michel Foucault and the Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much," *Foucault Studies* 21 (2016), 10. See also, Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 66.

[20] Lorenzini, "The Emergence of Desire," 468.

[21] For Foucault's theory of counter-conducts, see Carl Death, "Counter-Conducts: A Foucauldian Analytics of Protest," *Social Movement Studies* 9:3 (2010), 235–51; Arnold Davidson, "In Praise of Counter-Conduct," *History of the Human Sciences* 24:4 (2011), 25–41; Matthew Chrulew, "Pastoral Counter-Conducts: Religious Resistance in Foucault's Genealogy of Christianity," *Critical Research on Religion* 2:1 (2014), 55–65; Lorenzini, "From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude,"; Martina Tazzioli, "Revisiting the Omnes et Singulatim Bond: The Production of Irregular Conducts and the Biopolitics of the Governed," *Foucault Studies* 21 (2016), 98–116.

of 'voluntary inservitude'.[22] This approach to resistance, which defines it primarily as a "will to be against",[23] still leaves ample room for diversity among counter-conducts. Foucault hence discusses multiple, mutually divergent anti-pastoral counter-conducts in *Sécurité Territoire Population*.[24] He deliberately leaves its scope broad to describe a wide array of practices from mysticism to millenarian popular movements. What these medieval counter-conducts have in common, for Foucault, is a wilful rejection of ecclesiastic dimorphism.[25] The power-relations between clergy and laity had, by the late Middle Ages, become so rigid that parts of the community suspended their wilful submission to the Church hierarchy. Agamben adds to Foucault's diagnosis of ecclesiastic government that the institutionalisation of the Church implied the eclipse of its messianic promises.[26] The early Church was founded on the belief that the end of times was imminent. The Church's duty to govern the Christian community would merely be a temporary regime for "the time that time takes to come to an end".[27] During the Middle Ages, however, the pastorate kept postponing the end of times to the indefinite future and shifted its focus toward a providential theology that authorised the priesthood as a quasi-permanent representative of God governing the community in His name. The antipastoral movements of counter-conducts were, from this perspective, varied attempts to disestablish the power of the clergy as the sole mediator between God and the community.

Illich's critical history of pastoral power resonates with these late-medieval insurgencies, which hints at a difference between his and Foucault's genealogical projects. For Foucault, the task of critical philosophy is to write the genealogy of particular configurations of knowledge, power, and subjectivity, in order to defamiliarize readers from today's status quo.[28] By showing the history of the present in all its complexity and contingency – with its struggles, discontinuities, and roads not taken – Foucault's approach shows that people could be governed differently. For every regime of power and knowledge, there are resistant counterpowers and counterknowledges.[29] Foucault himself, however, only delivers the instruments for upsetting the *status quo*.[30] The goal of genealogical research is

[22] Saul Newman, "'Critique Will Be the Art of Voluntary Inservitude': Foucault, La Boétie and the Problem of Freedom," in *Foucault and the History of Our Present*, ed. Sophie Fuggle, Yari Lanci, and Martina Tazzioli (2015), 59.

[23] See also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (2000), 215.

[24] See Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 195–232.

[25] *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 206.

[26] See especially Giorgio Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom* [2010] (2018).

[27] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* [2000] (2005), 67.

[28] Michel Foucault, "L'intellectuel et le pouvoir" [1981], in *Dits et écrits II. 1976-1988*, n. 359 (2001), 1569. For more on Foucault's approach to critique, see Ben Golder, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights* (2015), 33–37; Thomas Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality: A Critique of Political Reason* [2010] (2019), 363–88.

[29] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (2010), 21.

[30] Golder, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights*, 37. Admittedly, Foucault did take sides in, for instance, the struggles of some social movements, like the gay rights movement or the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*. He was, however, careful to keep his political activism out of his academic research, even if they concerned the same topics.

to destabilise the present and allow subjects to develop an 'experimental attitude' toward the government of themselves.[31] If there is any direct denunciation of the Christian pastorate in Foucault's work, it is in *L'usage des plaisirs* in 1982, where Foucault specifies that Christianity tends to emphasise an ethics based on moral codes rather than an experimental care of the self.[32] It is an ethics built around conformity to pre-established laws and rules of conduct expounded and policed by the clergy. By writing the history of the Church's conduct of conducts, Foucault wants to empower his readers to let go of their morally encoded selves (*se déprendre de soi-même*) to elaborate new forms of life.[33] His concern is hence not with taking sides in struggles of conduct like those of the late Middle Ages but with showing the potential variability of conducts showcased in these struggles. Foucault remains agnostic about which side in the pastoral struggles represents 'true Christianity' because he merely wants to show the contingency and contestability of the pastorate.

Illich's interest in the antipastoral struggles is very different from Foucault's. He sides with the antipastoral movements and argues that the strict division between clergy and laity betrayed the founding ethos of Christianity, which is why he pleads for a full declericalisation of the Church.[34] Illich is not interested in destabilising the present or fostering experimental subjectivities. He claims a religious potential has been lost and needs to be re-activated.[35] Although Illich also opposes the Church's predilection for moral codes, his focus is not on an experimental ethics of the self but on a salvific ethics of the other. According to Illich, Christianity stands for an ethics of care and radical freedom rather than institutionalised submission to the priesthood or libertine self-stylisation. He illustrates this claim with the parable of the good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke.[36] A vulnerable Jew, left for dead by the side of the road, directly calls upon a Samaritan to come to his aid. This ethical encounter is a visceral experience that puts the Samaritan before a radically free choice.[37] The Samaritan does not act automatically through some form of abstract duty legislated by the Church as a moral code. Nor can the Jew force him to care. Nonetheless, the Samaritan feels the other's appeal in his 'gut' (*splagkhnon*). For Illich, "this 'ought' is not, and cannot be reduced to a norm. It has a *telos*. It aims at somebody, *some body*; but not according to a rule".[38] By affirming the encounter with the other, a visceral community, or mystical body, emerges between both individuals. Two porous and

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[31] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?," [1984], in *Dits et écrits II. 1976-1988*, n. 339 (2001), 1393. For a recent discussion of the limits of Foucault's ethics of the self, see Mitchell Dean and Daniel Zamora, *The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution* (2021).

[32] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'usage des plaisirs* (1982), 42. See also Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality*, 287.

[33] Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs*, 15.

[34] Ivan Illich and David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich* (2005), 84; Ivan Illich, *Powerless Church and Other Selected Writings, 1955-1985* (2018), 108.

[35] Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 272.

[36] Illich and Cayley, *Rivers North of the Future*, 50.

[37] Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 263.

[38] Illich and Cayley, *Rivers North of the Future*, 52.

permeable beings let their guard down to establish a relation with each other. According to Illich, the Church is originally the community of everyone who has responded to the call for ethical freedom in the care for the vulnerable other. It is a community of care-relations, independent of ethnic bonds or moral laws.[39] The believers form a relational web of interdependencies and mutual care. This is a Church that has neither a strict hierarchy between governing priests and a governed flock nor a pre-established moral code to legislate the conduct of conducts.

Illich presents a 20th-century insider's critique of pastoral dimorphism more akin to the medieval critiques Foucault researched than to Foucault's own approach. They write about the same pastoral regimes but from a different standpoint with different aims. A hierarchical Church institutionalises care with pastoral professionals but destroys the Samaritan ethos at its own foundation, according to Illich.[40] It grants undue powers to pastoral elites. The clergy/laity-divide corrupts the priesthood by putting priests into positions of power that hinder their commitment to self-weakening. They acquire a monopoly on the allocation of divine grace insofar as all believers have to go through them to access God's salvation. Rather than aligning the flock's conducts to the will of God, Illich claims that the pastorate aligns conducts with the will of God *as interpreted by the clergy.* Ecclesiastic dimorphism thus also turns believers responsible for care-relations into passive recipients of sacramental services. One attains salvation not by committing oneself to the presence of God in the vulnerable other but by wilfully submitting oneself to the rules and guidelines of institutionally sanctioned clergymen. Instead of, for instance, providing shelter to a pilgrim at the door, one can refuse this embodied encounter and point the pilgrim to the nearest Church-managed hostel.[41]

Sin, in this perspective, is not a transgression of God's will laid down in Church dogma or expressed in pastoral moral codes but a failure to live up to one's commitment to the ethos of care.[42] For Illich, faith does not depend on the obedient submission to a pastor but on freely chosen loyalty to the human web of dependencies into which one is thrown. If the Christian mystical body is born out of care-relations, then a failure to commit to care-relations signals a breakdown of the mystical body. Belonging to this community depends not on sacramental rituals of veridiction but on persistently enacting a self-weakening that opens up the borders of the self for the call of vulnerable others. There is here a notion of equality missing in the pastorate: everyone is simultaneously a committed caretaker and vulnerable subject embedded in the same web of care-relations. As in Foucault's rendition of pastoral power, Christianity necessitates an ethics of self-renunciation but by submitting to vulnerable others rather than a pastor.[43] Rather than mortifying the

[39] *Rivers North of the Future*, 178.

[40] *Rivers North of the Future*, 47–48.

[41] *Rivers North of the Future*, 54–55.

[42] *Rivers North of the Future*, 82.

[43] Illich, *Powerless Church*, 160.

will, this requires the activation of the will to actively choose to care for the other. No one but the individual can make this choice.

2. THE CRITIQUE OF MODERN GOVERNMENTALITY

The notion of modern governmentality plays an ambiguous role in Foucault's intellectual development.[44] In his governmentality lectures, Foucault clearly distinguishes governmentality, or security dispositifs, from other power regimes, such as disciplinary power or sovereign power. The genealogy is squarely focused on Western Europe and the United States. Governmentality constitutes just one among many different power regimes with each their own particular histories and scope. The concept of 'government', however, becomes broader as time progresses and starts to overtake Foucault's overall depiction of modern power. In *Le sujet et le pouvoir* from 1982, for instance, Foucault criticizes his own earlier war model of power by writing that "basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government".[45] Foucault here takes his description of governmentality as the paradigm for power as such, without any clear distinction.[46] Power and governmentality terminologically slide into each other with governmentality and the 'conduct of conducts' operating as a theoretical prism for power-relations as such.[47] This terminological shift also impact Foucault's understanding of counter-conducts. The focus turns to the emergence of the modern 'critical attitude', which is more than a mere will to be against.[48] The critical attitude is not just a refusal that leaves the scope of alternative conducts open. Foucault attributes to the critical attitude the search for alternative sources of truth to criticize governmental practices and propose new governmental rationalities. If governmentality is the horizon of power as such, then any form of resistance can only be resistance against *one* kind of governmentality in favour of *another*.

[44] I leave aside the discussion about the historical affinities between pastoral and state government. Foucault himself argues for a strict break between medieval and modern government (see Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 238–42.). Governmental rationality becomes detached from its theological context, which locates the normative source of government in the nature of the universe and the goal of otherworldly salvation. The aims of modern governmentality are more secular, focusing on economic prosperity and the well-being of populations. However, there are grounds to doubt Foucault's plea for discontinuity. Foucault-inspired researchers in the field of economic theology in particular have suggested that there might be more continuity between theological and statist notions of government (see Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*; Mitchell Dean, *The Signature of Power: Sovereignty, Governmentality and Biopolitics* (2013); Stefan Schwarzkopf, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Economic Theology* (2021); Tim Christiaens, "Agamben's Theories of the State of Exception: From Political to Economic Theology," *Cultural Critique* 110:1 (2021), 49–74.).
[45] Michel Foucault, "Le sujet et le pouvoir" [1982], in *Dits et écrits II. 1976-1988*, n. 306 (2001), 1056. Translation from Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power" [1982], *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (1982), 789.
[46] Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality*, 323.
[47] Foucault, "Le sujet et le pouvoir," 1056. Foucault conflates governmentality and power as such also elsewhere. See, for instance, Foucault, "L'intellectuel et le pouvoir," 1570.
[48] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 60; Lorenzini, "From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude," 8.

This approach works very well for European history but not necessarily for struggles to governmentalize non-European peoples. When Foucault, for instance, provides European liberalism as an example of the critical attitude, it does not oppose the hierarchical divide between government and governed but elaborates an alternative, critical governmental rationality.[49] There is no disagreement on whether the population should be governed at all (like there was in the colonies). The liberal attitude finds a space of veridiction in the free market from which it can produce knowledge to criticize governments' counterproductive economic interventionism *and* articulate a better governmental strategy.[50] Liberalism does not question the government/governed-hierarchy as such but the actions of *this or that* specific government. It does not reject governmentality as such.[51] Taking the 'critical attitude' as his vantage point, Foucault's attention thus shifts from resistance to government *per se* to quarrels within the governmental paradigm itself.[52] By the end of *Naissance de la biopolitique,* Foucault presents the political as an internal affair between rivalling governmental rationalities: "What is politics, in the end, if not both the interplay of these different arts of government with their different reference points and the debate to which these different arts of government give rise? It seems to me that it is here that politics is born".[53] Foucault's critical philosophy primarily shows this space of contestation and potentialities for new governmental rationalities.

Once governmentality defines modern power-relations and counter-conducts become a competition among opposing governmental rationalities, the notion of 'the ungovernable' or resistance to governmentality as such becomes difficult to imagine. At the end of his lecture on *Qu'est-ce que la critique?,* Foucault briefly acknowledges the possibility of resistance against governmentalisation as such, but he immediately breaks off the lecture after mentioning this option.[54] If these forms of resistance were to be interpreted as a revolt against governmentality in general, they could easily be misunderstood to oppose power itself. In this reading, counter-conducts would aim to organise a power-free society, which is absurd in Foucault's philosophy.[55] If 'ungovernability' means 'beyond power', then ungovernable counter-conducts are unimaginable. The hypothesis of anti-colonial resistance does not come up. It consequently would make more sense to view resistance as the will not to be governed *thusly;* the will for an alternative government:

> I do not think that the will not to be governed at all is something that one could consider an originary aspiration. I think that, in fact, the will not to be governed is always the will

[49] Mitchell Dean and Kaspar Villadsen, *State Phobia and Civil Society: The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault* (2016), 149; Daniele Lorenzini, "Governmentality, Subjectivity, and the Neoliberal Form of Life," *Journal for Cultural Research* 22:2 (2018), 6.

[50] Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique: cours au Collège de France, 1978-1979* (2004), 33–34.

[51] Death, "Counter-Conducts," 240.

[52] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 65.

[53] Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, 317. Translation from Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (2010), 313.

[54] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 65.

[55] Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality*, 319.

> not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price. As for the expression of not being governed at all, I believe it is the philosophical and theoretical paroxysm of something that would be this will not to be relatively governed.[56]

Illich stays relatively closer to the will to be against of medieval counter-conducts and the aspiration of a society not subsumed under the governmental regime of a priesthood or its secular descendants.[57] This attitude reflects his divergent critical project. Illich wishes to uncover an ethics of care lost under institutionalised governmentality rather than facilitate a struggle between competing arts of government. Though Illich breaks with the Vatican by the end of the 1960s, his criticisms of modern governmental institutions mirror his anti-pastoral concerns. He argues that modern government is the secularised offspring of the sinful, institutionalised Church.[58] On the one hand, modern institutions move the focus from salvation to the provision of this-worldly goods. Illich's references to salvation hence disappear in his critique of modern government. On the other hand, the nefarious clergy/laity-dimorphism recurs in the division between governmental professionals and the governed population. Illich subsequently rephrases his concern for Christian freedom and community into a critique of the destruction of the 'vernacular domain', a term less laden with salvific baggage and more easily applicable to non-Christian or non-Western contexts.[59] The latter concept derives from the Latin '*vernaculus*', which means 'homebred' and 'produced for proper rather than market use'.[60] In everyday life, people produce use-values through directly embodied social cooperation. Individuals need the support and feedback of others to attain their own ends, but this does not necessarily require top-down service provision or governmental steering from official institutions. Workers can directly coordinate their labour with each other, households can manage their affairs largely without governmental interference, and friends can give each other advice without mediation by government experts. There are obviously power-relations present in all these scenarios, so Illich is not pleading for a messianic salvation from government like Agamben, but they are not *governmental* power-relations.[61] Government regulations do not exhaustively determine interpersonal conducts. People immanently calibrate their interactions, mediated by power-relations. But they affect each other's conducts without the mediations of external institutions. Co-workers might, for instance, exercise power over each other, but these actions are not necessarily part of some governmental programme. People form and readjust their conducts in constant negotiation with their peers. Through their embodied

[56] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 65. Translation from Foucault, "What Is Critique?," 75.
[57] Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 65.
[58] Ivan Illich, *Gender* (1982), 151; Ivan Illich, *Disabling Professions* (1987), 15; Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (2002), 24.
[59] See, Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (1981), 9 & 29.
[60] Illich, *Gender*, 68.
[61] Admittedly, Illich himself tends to describe the vernacular domain without any mention of power-relations. This can, however, mean two things: he thinks it is genuinely power-free or he focuses on other dimensions of the vernacular domain while remaining agnostic about the non-governmental power-relations at play. I opt for the second reading.

co-presence, they gradually learn to adapt to each other mimetically. Illich refers to the example of everyday language to illustrate this point:

> Language was drawn by each one from the cultural environment, learned from the encounter with people whom the learner could smell and touch, love or hate. The vernacular spread just as most things and services were shared, namely, by multiple forms of mutual reciprocity, rather than clientage [sic] to the appointed teacher or professional.[62]

Especially when people sustain their interactions for extended periods, they develop tailored tactics and procedures to expertly influence each other's conducts without recourse to professional mediators. Long-standing co-workers instantly know how to work together, old lovers instinctively know how to express their affection or annoyance – even without saying a word – and life-long friends know the thin boundary between funny and inappropriate teasing. Over time, people develop vernacular practices through which they understand how others encounter the world and how to influence their conduct.

Illich calls this skill to judge the appropriateness of conducts in immanent human relations 'probity'.[63] Social cooperation based on vernacular probity fosters communities that immanently and spontaneously coordinate their conducts through porous interpenetration. Probity is the skill to adapt one's conducts to a particular relation with its own unique quality and history without having recourse to a conduct of conducts. Rather than relying on expert guidance, people often develop their own intuitions about how to relate to others. One does not interact with everyone in the same way, and probity is the capacity to judge how to cultivate these human relationships. One optimises use-values for all participants in the relation by carefully probing what everyone wants to get out of the relationship. The 'vernacular' names the web of these localised and personal interdependencies, while 'probity' is the skill to navigate this web.

According to Illich, modern governmentality corrupts vernacular culture by subsuming vernacular interactions under governmental steering. An example Illich often mentions is the governmentalisation of everyday language in early modernity.[64] Until the 16th century, people commonly communicated in 'vernacular languages', i.e., languages that possessed no certified grammar nor even a clear demarcation between different tongues. In Columbus' times, there were no clear boundaries between Portuguese and Genovese as separate linguistic entities. People often spoke mixtures of multiple languages depending on the circumstances and their conversation partners. Speech and writing were determined by probity not policy. They used languages as toolboxes to pursue their personal goals in whatever way worked within specific human relations. Languages were consequently created and recreated through the immanent interactions between different language users through an incessant play of words and phrases. People easily switched

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[62] Illich, *Shadow Work*, 66.

[63] Illich, *Gender*, 112.

[64] Illich, *Shadow Work*, 33–51; Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind* (1989), 65–70.

registers depending on circumstances. Language was a fluid repertoire of stock phrases and words that could be deployed and modified to fit the particular web of conducts in which they were used. Successful speech did not depend on obedience to State-sanctioned rules but to the probity of adequately judging which speech acts fitted best in particular settings.

Governmental agencies were, however, worried that 'wild, untaught vernacular reading' beyond the State's purview would lead to popular insubordination.[65] 'Ungoverned speech'[66] was allegedly speech conducive to anti-governmental sentiment. To tame the spread of ungoverned speech, intellectuals, like the Spaniard Antonio de Nebrija, developed official grammars that put language under government regulation. Nebrija proposed a grammar of Spanish to Queen Isabella in order to stop the dangerously ungoverned proliferation of language beyond the State's managing efforts. To make language governable and foster national unity, one had to impose a single State-sanctioned grammar that individuals had to learn and obey to 'speak properly'. The governmentalisation of language standardised speech across national territories with significant governmental advantages; not only in terms of economic productivity and efficiency but also of governability. It was a building block for the rise of the modern economic governmentality. The cost was, however, an introduction of governmentalised dimorphism in language learning. A class of State-sanctioned professional educators emerged that taught people to speak 'proper language'. Vernacular, ungoverned speech was, on the other hand, discredited. One no longer learned language by directly speaking to others but by submitting to the education programmes of language instructors. The human subject was redesigned as a speechless individual in need of professional service-provision to become a communicative (and governable) agent. One had to memorise and repeat programmatic rules of spelling and grammar to render one's speech efficacious. The immanent calibration of conducts among individuals was thusly subsumed under the top-down conduct of conducts where State-sanctioned professionals determine the scope and modalities within which individuals are allowed to speak freely.

3. GOVERNMENTALISATION AS ALIENATION

Though Illich does not deny the benefits of governmentalisation, he emphasises the concomitant collateral damage.[67] Not only language but also education, public medicine, technology, and the economy have purportedly been put under professional management over the last centuries. Especially in (post-)colonial territories, the outcome has been a dimorphic split between experts and laypeople that, according to Illich, is detrimental to both groups. He writes, for example, about Latin-American villages visited by North-American health professionals that

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[65] Illich, *Shadow Work*, 40.
[66] *Shadow Work*, 39.
[67] *Shadow Work*, 15–16.

> In many a village in Mexico I have seen what happens when social security arrives. For a generation people continue in their traditional beliefs; they know how to deal with death, dying, and grief. The new nurse and the doctor, thinking they know better, teach them about an evil pantheon of clinical deaths each one of which can be banned, at a price. Instead of modernising people's skills for self-care, they preach the ideal of hospital death. By their ministration they urge the peasants to an unending search for the good death of international description, a search that will keep them consumers forever.[68]

The incoming professionals discredited vernacular health practices to then defectively impose governmentally standardised health services. Illich does not deny the benefits of public medicine but argues that these projected benefits often carry hidden side-effects that skew human relationality toward a dimorphic split between government and the governed.

Modern dimorphism grants governmental professionals a 'radical monopoly' over social goods, similarly to how the clergy monopolised access to divine grace. It puts professional elites in charge of securing goods essential to social life, leaving citizens no alternative but to submit to expert-run governmentality.[69] People subsequently lose the ability to acquire these social goods on their own through vernacular relations without professional mediation. Like the medieval clergy hoarded access to divine grace, the modern governmental class concentrates access to education, language, or public health. In the pastorate, this division led to undue gatekeeping competences for the clergy. The latter aligned the conducts of believers with the will of God *as they understood it*. Similarly, the professional class in modern governmentality imposes its own 'hidden curriculum' on the population under the guise of governmental care.[70] "Professionals tell you what you need and claim the power to prescribe. They not only recommend what is good, but actually ordain what is right".[71]

According to Illich, the education system, for example, provides access to social positions of status through its accreditation system. This makes the education system inevitable for individual citizens and grants educators a radical monopoly on the acquisition of diplomas and certificates. Educators use this monopoly to align pupils' conducts with governmental norms. Governments make projections about what knowledge and skills the population is supposed to acquire, while educators are the middlemen tasked with modifying the conducts of citizens to steer the latter toward the fulfilment of these governmental aspirations. Just like the clergy ultimately imposed the will of God *as they understood it*, the schooling system implements the will of the government *as understood through the mediation of professional educators*. To that purpose, educators claim 'secret knowledge' to scrutinize students' minds *omnes et singulatim* to discriminate 'right' from

[68] Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (1982), 204–5.

[69] *Medical Nemesis*, 42.

[70] Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 11.

[71] Illich, *Disabling Professions*, 17.

'wrong' thoughts and judge who has the 'proper attitude' to merit high grades or access to higher education.[72] "The teacher-as-therapist feels authorized to delve into the personal life of his pupil in order to help him grow as a person. […] He persuades the pupil to submit to a domestication of his vision of truth and his sense of what is right".[73] School thereby provides a secular rendition of the pastoral rituals of veridiction that submit student populations to procedures that reveal the truth about themselves. Educators enact a secular variant of the pastoral mortification of the will: pupils have to voluntarily submit to teachers to acquire the right kind of thoughts and attitudes such that their conduct becomes the vehicle for governmental education programmes. Only students that willingly align their conduct with the conduction of conducts mediated by professional educators are allowed to progress; the others fail and drop out. Social inequalities subsequently persist but are given governmental sanction. Governments decide what pupils are supposed to know, and educators modify the will of their students such that the latter come to spontaneously enact these governmental projections.

The same applies to other governmental institutions. Economic experts, for example, establish economic government by aligning people's conducts to economic governmental norms *as they understand these norms*. This entails a mortification of the will, i.e., an instrumentalization of individual conducts to fit governmental projects, and an implementation of governmental projects through professional middlemen who use their radical monopoly to impose their own hidden curriculum. Neoliberal governmentality, for instance, promotes economic growth by, first, rendering individuals 'eminently governable', [74] i.e., ensuring that their individual wills align to the will of the government to encourage growth through entrepreneurial free market competition. Neoliberal governmentality, secondly, empowers economic experts to implement governmental policies according to their own understanding of neoliberal governmentality.[75] The strenuous implementation of the Washington Consensus in non-Western territories showcases this issue.[76] Institutions like the IMF and the World Bank mobilise neoliberal economic experts to redraw the economic policies of impoverished post-colonial States. They rely on nations' dependency on foreign creditors to impose their own views on how to enhance the economic productivity of the population. By introducing measures to promote international free trade, free market competition, and individual entrepreneurship, they re-align the conduct of people to their own governmental projections. Programmes issuing from the Washington Consensus are not meant to render post-colonial nations independent but to leverage this dependency in order to restructure their markets in a way more fitting to neoliberal governmentality.

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[72] *Disabling Professions*, 19.
[73] Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 31.
[74] Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, 274.
[75] *Naissance de la biopolitique*, 249.
[76] On the contested history of the Washington Consensus, see Narcís Serra and Joseph Stiglitz, eds., *The Washington Consensus Reconsidered: Towards a New Global Governance* (2008); Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People* (2011); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2014).

Illich believes this governmentalisation of human conduct leads to the alienation of the governed.[77] This accusation entails a rejection of governmentality itself in favour of human conducts not conducted by governmental institutions. For Illich, the subsumption of conducts under governmental steering suppresses the potential of vernacular relations. He relies on Marx' argument that workers are alienated by losing control to capital over the labour process. By claiming ownership over the means and products of living labour, capital allegedly takes control over the conduction of the labour process. Illich generalises this schema to the conduct of life itself.[78] All members of a governed population are allegedly alienated insofar as governmental professionals take control over the conduction of people's everyday conducts. The secularised mortification of the will practiced under modern governmentality incites individuals to enact the will of an alien force. Even if they make free choices, the latter are always already embedded in governmental programmes that mobilise these free choices to enact governmental projects. Once modern governmentality claims authority over the conduct of conducts, an alien force coordinates the interaction of human conducts. Just like capital mediates between cooperating workers in the capitalist factory in the service of capital accumulation, modern governmentality has the professional class mediating between free individuals and the government in the service of promoting government projects. The immanent social collaboration characteristic of the vernacular domain is subsumed under government regulation.

Foucault might have objected that reintroducing the discourse of alienation obliges Illich to anthropological essentialism.[79] Marxist theories of alienation often postulate an ahistorical notion of human nature as *homo faber* to subsequently argue that capitalism hinders the actualisation of human nature.[80] But, for Foucault, human subjectivity is the contingent product of historically variable power-relations and discursive regimes. It cannot be fixed in a transhistorical metaphysical essence. Subjectivity is the outcome of laborious processes of subjectification. A closer reading of Illich's work, however, shows that he does not diagnose a perversion of human nature but of the human will. When Illich, for instance, praises Queen Isabella's rejection of Nebrija's proposal to govern the Spanish language, he links her decision not to respect for human nature but for human autonomy.[81] Some forms of conduct should be left ungoverned, according to the Spanish sovereign, not because human nature commands it so but because this carves out a space for individuals to determine their own conduct. Illich's theory of alienation questions the

[77] Ivan Illich, "An Expansion of the Concept of Alienation," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 4:1 (1973), 1; Ivan Illich, *Toward a History of Needs* (1978), 71; Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 46.

[78] Harry Cleaver, "The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From Valorisation to Self-Valorisation," in *Open Marxism, Volume 2; Theory and Practice*, ed. John Holloway, Werner Bonefeld, and Kosmas Psychopedis (1992), 119; Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 142.

[79] See Foucault's debate with Noam Chomsky: Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *Human Nature: Justice vs Power; The Chomsky-Foucault Debate*, ed. Fons Elders (2011).

[80] David Cayley, Illich's principal biographer, also interprets Illich along essentialist lines (Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 129).

[81] Illich, *Shadow Work*, 50.

government of human conducts insofar as it displaces the moving force of conduct from the level of vernacular human relations to the level of government. This mortifies the will and subsumes it under governmental programmes, even if it is still notionally free. By conducting people's conducts, governmentality pursues its own goals *through* the wills of the subjects it governs. Individual wills are aligned to the governmental will through the mediation of governmental experts that steer popular conducts toward the enactment of government programmes.

> In the new era, the characteristic person […] is someone who has been gathered by one of the tentacles of the social system and swallowed. For him the possibility of sharing in the bringing about of something hoped for is gone. Having been swallowed by the system, he conceives himself as a subsystem.[82]

Individuals become absent in their own conduct as if steered by an alien power. They become passive conduits for the enactment of governmental projects. The governmental will expresses itself *through* the conduct of individuals' conducts, who are thereby reduced to the status of subsystem to an all-encompassing system.

4. RESISTING GOVERNMENTALISATION: THE DECOLONIAL OPTION

Despite his criticism of modern governmentality as a total subsumption of human conduct under governmental schemata, Illich does not deem the governmentalisation of life an inescapable fate. For that purpose, he highlights the arduous diffusion of governmentality in post-colonial territories, a topic on which Foucault remains silent.[83] While for Foucault the critical attitude advocates alternative governmental rationalities without questioning the governmental paradigm itself, Illich praises indigenous movements that resist governmentalisation as such.[84] Just like some medieval counter-conducts attacked the clergy/laity-hierarchy itself, Illich emphasises the indigenous struggles that question the expert/laypeople-divide without proposing new governmentalities with new classes of experts. Illich does not thereby reject experts' skills or competences but their radical monopoly on the conduct of conducts. He questions governmental experts' authority when they organise the conduct of conducts at the cost of vernacular human relations. This project leads Illich to support movements that render human conducts ungovernable. Illich does not claim society could ever be free from all power-relations but pleads for the cultivation of power-relations more fluid and horizontal than the hierarchical divide between government and the governed. As Illich writes, "while no men are completely free, some

[82] Illich and Cayley, *Rivers North of the Future*, 162–63.
[83] Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 2; Partha Chatterjee, "The Disciplines in Colonial Bengal," in *Texts of Power*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (1995), 8; Samaddar, "The Biopolitics of Development," 26.
[84] Ivan Illich, "Development as Planned Poverty," in *The Post-Development Reader*, ed. Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree (1997), 96.

are freer than others".[85] The defence of vernacular practices in indigenous movements is one such example of protecting enclaves of non-governmentalised counter-conducts.

Illich stresses that modern governmentality has a Western history foreign to and incompatible with other parts of the globe. This makes non-Western communities ideally positioned to withhold the global diffusion of governmentality. However, just like the pastorate reduced the foreign other to pagans awaiting conversion to Christianity, modern governmentality reduces non-Western nations to the status of underdeveloped countries in need of Western development aid.[86] Though international organisations like the IMF or the World Bank claim to offer underdeveloped countries economic aid, they also purportedly act as governmental mediators to export Western governmentality to foreign nations. Illich argues that communities can and should resist their developmentalisation.[87] Illich thereby agrees with decolonial post-development theory.[88] For both, indigenous peoples cultivate their own vernacular subsistence practices that are unduly ignored or undermined by development experts. Colonisation and post-colonial development programmes undermine vernacular subsistence practices in favour of governmentally mediated economic activity that favours "development *as defined by the rich*".[89] The production of wealth through immanent self-coordination of local communities is undermined in favour of governmentally increasing economic productivity *as understood by development experts*. Communities that had previously ensured their own survival through self-organized activities are made dependent on global markets and governmental services.[90]

Illich and decolonial thinkers like Arturo Escobar question the alienating dimorphism of the development *dispositif*.[91] Indigenous peoples are dispossessed from the vernacular customs they use to immanently determine their conducts in negotiation with each other. Local knowledges, or 'epistemologies of the South',[92] are silenced in favour of governmental rationalities from the global North.[93] Developmentalisation recruits the conducts of indigenous peoples into governmental projects that pursue their own aims and integrate

[85] Illich, "Development as Planned Poverty," 101.

[86] Illich, *Shadow Work*, 18–19. For an application to pastoral power, see Dotan Leshem, "Embedding Agamben's Critique of Foucault: The Theological and Pastoral Origins of Governmentality," *Theory, Culture & Society* 32:3 (2015), 93–113.

[87] Illich, *Shadow Work*, 9.

[88] This agreement is not surprising given Illich's direct influence on post-development's theory. See Serge Latouche, *La planète des naufragés* (1991); Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (2012); Arturo Escobar, "Degrowth, Postdevelopment, and Transitions: A Preliminary Conversation," *Sustainability Science* 10:3 (2015), 451–62; Wolfgang Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (2019).

[89] Illich, "Development as Planned Poverty," 95. (My emphasis)

[90] David Scott, "Colonial Governmentality," *Social Text* 43 (1995), 193; Arturo Escobar, "Imagining a Post-Development Era? Critical Thought, Development and Social Movements," in *Power of Development*, ed. Jonathan Crush (1995), 24; Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (2012), 77.

[91] See Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (2020), 70–72.

[92] Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (2016).

[93] Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics*, 67.

populations as subordinate subsystems in the accomplishment of those aims. Human conduct becomes the conduit for fostering governmental projects imagined elsewhere. Subsistence practices and subjectivities are reconfigured to fit these governmental projects. Escobar quotes a critic of the World Bank saying,

> How narrow the World Bank's vision is, if it can be a radically new idea to understand what happens at the local level. Thus I learned something very important about the World Bank in Nepal. To work there you cannot set foot in the real Nepal. Literally. Being in the World Bank office assumes you live in a house with running water and that you have a driver to take you from door to door.[94]

Even with the best intentions, the governmental hierarchy of experts and laypeople produces counterproductive outcomes. Through their radical monopoly on government, development experts impose governmental norms inapt for local circumstances. They discredit and replace vernacular practices and probity that have emerged over centuries of close social coordination and with ill-fitting projects that make populations dependent on foreign influxes of money.[95]

To combat governmentalisation, decolonial thinkers call for 'the art of not being governed', 'becoming-indigenous', 'resurgence', or what I would like to call 'ungovernable counter-conducts'.[96] It names indigenous peoples' wilful refusal to align their conducts with a governmental will to reach its own goals through a conduct of conducts. By suspending one's will to be governed, one affirms vernacular traditions as an alternative form to coordinate popular conducts against the developmentalised conduct of conducts. I do not have the space here to fully explore all forms of indigenous resistance, but one illustration might show a glimpse of what the Illichian approach to alienation and disalienation depicts: the Zapatista principle of *mandar obedeciendo* among the indigenous peoples of Chiapas in Mexico.[97] In 1994, an alliance of Marxist *guerilleros* and indigenous communities revolted against the Mexican State and its attempt to subsume the local population under a neoliberal trade regime legislated under the new NAFTA agreement with the United States.[98] Vernacular subsistence practices would have to adapt to neoliberal incentives for competitiveness to assure the continued subsistence of these communities. If the

[94] Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 164.
[95] Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 74.
[96] See James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009); Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World* (2017), 122; Glenn Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014), 157.
[97] For a history of Zapatismo, see Neil Harvey, "Rebellion in Chiapas: Rural Reforms and Popular Struggle," *Third World Quarterly* 16:1 (1995), 39–73; Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (1998); Alex Khasnabish, *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global* (2013).
[98] See Neil Harvey, "Globalisation and Resistance in Post-Cold War Mexico: Difference, Citizenship and Biodiversity Conflicts in Chiapas," *Third World Quarterly* 22:6 (2001), 1045–61; Richard Stahler-Sholk, "Resisting Neoliberal Homogenization: The Zapatista Autonomy Movement," *Latin American Perspectives* 34:2 (2007), 48–63; Leandro Vergara-Camus, *Land and Freedom: The MST, the Zapatistas and Peasant Alternatives to Neoliberalism* (2014), 63–91.

latter would have failed to adapt, they would have been outcompeted by foreign industrial farming corporations. According to the Zapatistas, this reform was the outcome of centuries of indigenous peoples being discursively framed as underdeveloped yet obedient workforces.[99] With NAFTA, the not yet civilised would purportedly be introduced into global civilisation. The trade agreement concerned hence not only the acquisition of governmental economic growth targets but also the reconfiguration of subjectivity to fit into a neoliberal system of governability.

After the 1994 insurgency, the Chiapas communities cut ties to the government and affirmed their own capacity for self-government. The Zapatistas even rejected government aid.[100] They carved out a decolonial autonomous space where the State would be deprived of its authority to determine the conduct of conducts.[101] Zapatista self-government would be a form of direct democracy without a hierarchical divide between government and governed, experts and laypeople. Vernacular coordination of conducts would form the basis of government or '*kuxlejal* politics':

> *Kuxlejal* as a term is but a mere point of anchor granted meaning when used as part of term for the concept of expressing living as a collective, *stalel kuxlejaltik,* a way of being in the world as a people, and as part of the term for a daily aspiration to live in a dignified manner, *lekil kuxlejal*. The horizon of struggle for *lekil kuxlejal* […] as a good way of living refers not only to an individual being but to that being in relation to a communal connection to the earth, to the natural and supernatural world that envelops and nurtures social beings.[102]

These traditional practices are cultivated over centuries of close collaboration among each other and with the environment. Indigenous communities have thereby developed the probity to determine how to autonomously adjust their conduct to local circumstances without any need for governmental interference.

In opposition to governmental dimorphism, the Zapatistas plead for 'command through obedience' (*mandar obedeciendo*).[103] Rather than the population owing obedience to purportedly benevolent governing classes, Zapatismo institutes a social order where governing elites owe obedience to their constituents. Leaders would be elected on imperative mandate, which entails that the local community could, at any time, revoke leaders' mandates.[104] Rather than the population readjusting its conducts to fit governmental projects, the government is forced to enact the people's will. I am not saying that Zapatismo heralds a future of power-free utopianism but rather that it allows for a politics of

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[99] Zapatista National Liberation Army, *Voices of Fire* (1994), 53.

[100] Neil Harvey, "Practicing Autonomy: Zapatismo and Decolonial Liberation," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 11:1 (2015), 17.

[101] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (2011), 217.

[102] Mariana Mora Bayo, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (2017), 19.

[103] Mora Bayo, *Kuxlejal Politics,* 189.

[104] Marta Duran de Huerta, "An Interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos," *International Affairs* 75:2 (1999), 269.

disalienation in which power-relations are less hierarchically fixed.[105] *Mandar obedeciendo* facilitates the cultivation of power-relations in a more flexible arrangement in which individuals are not dispossessed from the ability to determine their own conduct. Every leadership decision is supposed to emanate from the vernacular coordination within the collective itself. Governing elites 'walk while asking' (*caminar preguntando*) in the sense that their political decisions are the ephemeral effects of asking the collective what should be decided.[106] This makes government a collective learning process in which horizontally calibrating conducts immanently produce government decisions that are then represented by governing leaders without the latter being able to conduct the conducts of their so-called subjects.[107] Politics is, for the Zapatistas, not a struggle among governmental rationalities that equally subject populations to the conduct of conducts but an immanent deliberative process that lets power circulate horizontally within the collective to determine the group's self-government.

Pre-programmed governmental projects to which popular conducts have to conform are actively discouraged through multiple tactics. Political representatives are often deliberately disempowered to ensure they do not stabilise their power-position vis-à-vis the collective. The aforementioned imperative mandate system, which enables communities to divest anyone whose governing decisions they believe misrepresents the community's deliberations, is one example. Most famously, however, is the Zapatista practice of obliging leaders to wear ski masks in public appearances.[108] Leaders have to remain anonymous to the general public so that they cannot claim sole ownership over the representation of the group. They are the merely temporary representative emanations of the collective's effort at self-government. Levelling practices like the wearing of ski masks ensures leaders are unable to transcend the community. Zapatismo thereby installs a non-alienating form of self-government: by divesting governing elites from their authority to determine political projects and impose these on the population, Zapatismo carves out a space for local communities to establish their own conducts through vernacular interaction.

5. CONCLUSION

Foucault's genealogy of governmentality and counter-conducts is firmly based in Western history, yet, around the year 1980, Foucault starts presenting it as the main framework for all power and resistance. Because he sometimes conflates governmentality with power as such, the scope of modern counter-conducts gets unduly restricted to a 'critical attitude' that undermines specific governmental rationalities in order to establish alternative governmentalities. What is missing is a clear view on struggles against the imposition of governmental power as such, which Foucault himself found in antipastoral struggles and we

[105] John Holloway, *We Are the Crisis of Capital: A John Holloway Reader* (2017), 128.
[106] Khasnabish, *Zapatistas*, 84.
[107] Holloway, *We Are the Crisis of Capital*, 122.
[108] Zapatista National Liberation Army, *Voices of Fire*, 47.

today observe in indigenous struggles. By the end of *Naissance de la biopolitique,* the realm of the political is identified with only a struggle among different governmentalities. To unravel a sphere of ungovernable counter-conducts helpful for the study of post-colonial politics, I have turned to Illich's critique of modern governmental institutions. Though Illich is engaged in a form of social critique that is very different from Foucault's, his perspective allows us to render the dynamics of governmentalisation and ungovernability visible that remain obscure in Foucault's project. As a sympathiser of medieval counter-conducts, Illich attacks pastoral power-relations directly as a sinful betrayal of the Christian ethics of self-renunciation and care for the vulnerable other. Illich tries to recover a form of human relationality antithetical to governmental steering – though still infused with its own unique power-relations. He mostly found it in non-Western forms of local self-government, but he expanded this idea into a defence of vernacular practices against governmental steering by professional classes. He argues that the latter alienate populations from control over their own conducts. By manipulating the choice architecture of individual subjects through governmental interventions, professional experts pursue their own goals *through* the steering of human wills. The latter are voided of their own force and moved, as it were, by an alien power. This wilful refusal to be governed is clear in Illich's rejection of international development and the resistance practices of indigenous communities against their developmentalisation. The Zapatista counter-conduct of *mandar obedeciendo*, in particular, provides a prism for thinking differently about power-relations and self-government. Rather than criticizing one form of governmentality in favour of another, the local communities of Chiapas rely on indigenous traditions to establish a form of self-government that rejects the government/governed-hierarchy. Government decisions are not projects imposed on populations and pushed through via a conduct of conducts. They are rather the emanations of communal deliberations to which governing elites are subjected. Through the imperative mandate and practices that hinder the stabilisation of their decision-making power, governing elites have to listen to their communities and enact nothing more than what was established through their vernacular deliberations.

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REVIEW

Mark Coeckelbergh, *Self-Improvement: Technologies of the Soul in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. Pp. 144. ISBN: 978-0-231-20655-6 (paperback).

I think that it would be no exaggeration to say that 'self-improvement' has become a pressing ethical and political problem in the 21st century. Thankfully, it has also been problematized recently across numerous academic disciplines and in both specialist literature and popular writing. Mark Coeckelbergh's *Self-Improvement*, belonging somewhere between the latter two registers, addresses this serious and complex issue and strives to offer a clear analysis for a general public, using short sentences and simple prose.[1] The moment is right for such a work. As Coeckelbergh writes, "self-improvement is no longer optional; it has become an imperative. […] We are self-improving ourselves until we have to give up. We are burned out by our jobs and family lives but also, ironically, by the self-improvement work that was meant to do something about that" (p. 3). We seem to be at an impasse. We do not (or should not) wish to continue "improving" in this way, but we are not free simply to opt-out if we wish to remain competitive – and therefore survive – in our neoliberal economy.

Quite often now, the response of our various professional institutions to a crushing work environment built on an expectation of constant and constantly improving performance is to proffer more "wellness": wellness newsletters, ten-minute chair messages for employees, meditation app suggestions, cat and dog petting sessions, etc. As it becomes increasingly clear that we are now (sometimes literally) killing ourselves in and for our self-improvement culture (p. 2), these responses seem to many to be, at best, highly ineffective and, at worst, complacent or complicit responses. This wellness culture provides something akin to food and sleep in the classic Marxist theory of labour: a merely necessary moment in the cyclical reproduction of our productive forces. Or, as Coeckelbergh puts it, wellness capitalism now "exploits people doubly: first as workers who try to improve their performance during the working hours, then as consumers of 'wellness' during their leisure time, when they try to recover from their work" (p. 47).

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[1] Indeed, the prose might at times be too simple to be entirely effective. The reader may also find themselves at times frustrated by persistent typos.

For those who find this state of affairs frustrating or frightening, this book will provide and combine many easily graspable insights that will make the situation — and what we might do about it — even clearer. And for those who have not yet noticed this problem or who are suspicious as to whether there really is a problem here, *Self-Improvement* just might change that.

While the analysis is at times uneven in its depth and rigour, the primary argument of the book is lucid and compelling, and it is organized around several key claims. (α) Self-improvement is not a purely personal, private, or psychological matter, but can and must be understood in its historical and socio-political context. (β) Specifically, self-improvement has become entwined with the neoliberal economy and a culture of radical individualism in such a way as to render it dangerous. It is an unavoidable tool in our competition culture that exhausts its practitioners while generating immense wealth for the self-help industry and its entrepreneurs. (γ) Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, technology has an important role to play in all of this—and in particular contemporary AI technology, which has made the surveillance of self and other more efficient than ever. AI has thereby contributed to the acceleration of self-improvement but also to our feeling of helplessness, that is, our feeling that we cannot 'opt out' of self-help.

Coeckelbergh's response is measured: it is likely neither possible nor desirable to throw away this technology wholesale, nor to cease to improve ourselves entirely; but we can and should radically rethink our relation to technology *and* to self-improvement in productive ways. His argument proceeds as follows.

After a brief introductory chapter, the primary task of which seems to be to make clear the urgency of the problem of our self-improvement obsession, the book continues (Chapter 2) with what the author refers to as a search "for the intellectual sources of our ideas about self-knowledge, self-care, and self-improvement in the history of ideas" (p. 6). He traces the development of the notion of self-improvement in various philosophical movements, following sources that will be familiar to readers of Foucault: Socrates, the Stoics, and the early Christians all have their role to play as so many versions of programs of *askesis*—that is, of training or exercise, in the Foucauldian and the Greek-etymological sense. Indeed, while Foucault's influence is visible throughout the pages of this book, this chapter is the most clearly indebted to his late work on the genealogy of the practicing self in antiquity.[2]

Chapter 3 paints an image "of the modern society that resulted from these developments" (p. 6) in the history of self-improvement, paying special attention to the 1960s counterculture movement and the imperative – both in philosophical and popular discourse – to be an 'authentic' self. The author does not fail to notice the extent to which the discourse of authenticity has been commodified; nor the extent to which this

[2] Perhaps precisely because it follows on the heels of Foucault in such a promising way, I also suspect that historians and genealogists might find the historiography of this chapter unsatisfying. It reads more like a list of self-improvement schools and hence like an introductory textbook to philosophy as a way of life than a compelling historical account of the origins and development of self-improvement.

commodification arose from out of that Californian 'cult of the self' which Foucault found so fascinating in the 1980s.

Chapter 4 undertakes to critique the political economy of our contemporary culture of the self, drawing on both Nietzsche and Marx to show (α) that "neo-Stoicism" or "the turn inward" (p. 7) can have de-politicizing effects by drawing attention to the self rather than the social order; and (β) that the wellness economy is exploitative in the Marxist sense: it extracts surplus value from our self-improvement, not for those who practice but for owners of (technological) capital. This occurs in the form of data sales and also simply via the commercializing and promoting of self-help products as such. In true Foucauldian form, then, we must recognize that far from inhibiting our work on ourselves, contemporary capitalism "stimulate[s] self-improvement" (p. 46).

Chapter 5 addresses the question of technology directly. The work of the self on the self is increasingly being taken over by technologies that efficiently track us, compile data, and generate profiles: "New technologies of the self are ready to tell us who we are, what we want, what we should know about ourselves and, of course, how we can improve ourselves" (p. 55). The self on which we work is no longer what it once was, nor is it known in the same way—no longer the "dark, mysterious, and complex self" (p. 62) of the humanist past but, in a word, data. "I am *many numbers*," Coeckelbergh writes (p. 63).

The final two chapters propose and explore possible solutions to the economic, political, and ethical crises in which self-improvement has become enmeshed and which it enables. They ask, "how can we find a way out of these problematic self-improvement cultures, without abandoning the idea of self-improvement altogether and without rejecting technologies" (p. 8)?

Like any good book written for a general audience and in the shadow of a real contemporary danger, *Self-Improvement* offers both a diagnosis and a potential solution to the problem it diagnoses. Coeckelbergh proposes, in the first place, that we shift our efforts away from "*working* on the self" or "self-*optimization*" and towards a different modality of *souci de soi* that he calls "growth" (p. 80). The self for which we care ought to follow Lacan in accepting that it is an "extimate self" (p. 81), that is, a self permeated by the other: by the city, by other people, by our language, by our technologies, etc. This self is not a fully transparent one, and, in any case, it is not at our disposition in the way that an artifact is. Hence, we should look to intervene more directly in the environment in and by which the self is informed. We should also abandon some of the impulse for *control* of the self; the intensity of such an impulse having long since exceeded its usefulness and become *anxiogène* and self-defeating.

To save ourselves – and, at the same time, to rediscover our political agency – we must, paradoxically, let go of the self. "Living beings can grow and flourish only in and through their connectedness with other beings and with their environment" (p. 85). A growing plant, then, more than an aesthetic object on which we 'work' in the mode of artists or craftspeople, is the right image for the self-shaping efforts with which we should

be engaging. Coeckelbergh's ideal is a self and a practice of the self that, without submitting to social engineering and technological control, refuses the illusion of pure autonomy; a self that accepts its sociality without regret and yet resists being transformed into, manipulated as, and sold in the form of data. It is also a self that, bound up as it is with its contemporary social, economic, and political conditions, knows that a radical change of the self must actually pass through systemic change. For Coeckelbergh, "true self-improvement is only possible if we end exploitative socioeconomic relations" (p. 99). And in this vein, rather than reject technology as such, we can (and should) develop technologies that are less individualizing and less dominating, that are oriented towards an improvement of our social world, and that can aid us in connecting with others and in "understand[ing] ourselves in a relational way" (p. 107).

This approach has stakes that will be immediately apparent to readers of Foucault, but which extend well beyond his works and touch a nerve in the contemporary political-theoretical moment. Michel Foucault, who along with Pierre Hadot put 'self-improvement' on the philosophical agenda of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, has often been accused of being a neoliberal theorist, not only because of his (apparently sympathetic) approach to neoliberalism as such but because of an (apparently) anti-political interest in self-care that is (apparently) complacent in the individualist market-society.[3] We cannot enter into this charged debate here. But we should note that this book gives us resources with which to revisit it. As Coeckelbergh argues, we ought to be careful about demonizing self-care as such: "trying to know yourself and improve yourself are not themselves problematic; they become problematic when they go together with self-obsession and individualistic competition" (p. 26). In other words, there exists self-care *before*, *beyond* and, we can hope, *after* the neoliberal moment. With this insight in mind, Coeckelbergh poses what I take to be precisely the right question: how do we access and develop a form of self-care which is politically productive and not simply reproductive of existing relations of domination?

I am not sure that this book will suffice to radically transform our ways of thinking about technology, society, and self-improvement; and the popular format chosen by the author has likely limited the precision of the analysis and the proposed solutions given in these pages. However, precisely by drawing on and synthesizing a large body of literature (both contemporary popular works and philosophical writings from Aristotle to Zuboff via Arendt, de Beauvoir, Epictetus, Foucault, Lacan, Rousseau, Sartre, and many more), and by simplifying and compressing a potentially overwhelming problem, the author has done concerned citizens – both inside and outside of academia – a real favour. *Self-Improvement* offers an extensive roadmap to a problem that requires our attention now.

The book can stand on its own as an accessible introduction to the problem of the politics of *ethos* today. It can, however, also serve as a spur towards and a precious aid in

[3] On this problem, see Mitchell Dean & Daniel Zamora, *The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution* (2021), a review of which is forthcoming in this journal. Note that Coeckelbergh has read and cites this book (e.g., p. 131 n. 4).

reformulating rigorously and philosophically some of the major questions posed by the Foucauldian research agenda that still matter today: is care of the self inherently un- or anti-political? Has care of the self been coopted beyond recovery by the neoliberal economic order? I would suggest that Foucault's research agenda enabled, at least to a certain extent, the reflections in these pages; and now, I think, these reflections have opened exciting avenues through which to deepen and 'update' Foucault in turn.

References

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SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

Foucault, Our Contemporary

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One of the reasons that the Enlightenment so fascinated Foucault is because, he claims, it was the first time European thinkers reflected on the present by asking "What difference does today make?" In other words, one of the basic questions Enlightenment thinkers asked was how their present related to their past. The Enlightenment is thus the condition for the possibility of Foucault's history of the present.

Foucault understood the Enlightenment as a reflection on the present. If he is right about this, then we must understand his work both in terms of its interrogation of the Enlightenment and its interrogation of a particular conception of the Enlightenment as a reflection on today and its difference from yesterday.

Foucault scholars and critical theorists alike have been reconsidering Foucault's relationship with the Enlightenment for a long while. The two essays in this issue propose to reconsider Foucault's question anew: what difference do Foucault's various reflections on the Enlightenment make for understanding today? They thus take up the question of Foucault's contemporary relevance in fascinating ways.

Patrick Gamez focuses on how we can use Foucault's work to better understand the role of data in contemporary society, while Selin Iskekel looks at Foucault as a theorist of what goes unsaid by archival sources as a way to begin to think the omissions and lacunae that haunt the archive.

Gamez's paper examines recent work on Foucault and data in order to show that Foucault's work can help us to better understand what he terms "digital capitalism" as a hallmark of our present. Contrary to Colin Koopman's claim that infopower amounts to a new *episteme*, Gamez argues that data capitalism is instead continuous with biopower.

Iskekel's essay grapples with the traces left in the archive by those who have been disappeared. Focusing on Chile in the years following Pinochet's 1973 coup, her paper employs necropolitics and genealogy as critical tools to make the dead speak through their very absence.

Both of these innovative essays help us to think through the significance of Foucault's provocations, not only as a "historian of the present" but also as a diagnostician of our present.

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ARTICLE

Genealogies of Nothing: Enforced Disappearances, Fable Lives, and Archives in Erasure

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ABSTRACT. This article investigates the political impact of collective story-telling practices in the enforced disappearances from a Foucauldian perspective. I utilize two main theoretical frameworks: on the one hand, that of necropolitics, a kind of power that works on the management of death. On the other hand, that of genealogy as a type of history that mobilizes subjugated knowledges. The first part situates these stories within the framework of genealogy: subjugated knowledges that are buried and disqualified as a part of the work of necropolitics. The second part argues that a Foucauldian genealogical approach to these stories is insufficient: necropolitical archives, when they testify to the work of power, remain incomplete at best and actively erase more often. The third part analyzes these stories as examples of critical fabulation. What is at stake in the insistence of the people searchers to tell their stories, I argue, is the collective emergence of another kind of fable – an act of fabulation in line with what Saidiya Hartman calls "critical fabulation," which multiplies the possibilities of the present and the past by precisely telling stories of 'nothing.'

Keywords: Necropolitics, Enforced Disappearance, Archives, Critical Fabulation, Resistance.

INTRODUCTION

The fable, in the proper sense of the term, is that which deserves to be told.

Michel Foucault, *"Lives of Infamous Men."*

Soacha is a suburb of Bogotá, Colombia. Between 2002 and 2008, the bodies of many young men from Soacha were regularly found thousands of miles away from the suburb, bruised with marks of torture and combat, armed with weapons, and dressed in uniforms belonging

to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).[1] According to reports, each person was killed in combat with the Colombian military. The families of over 3000 identified bodies, however, claim that guerrilla activity is not a unifying category among the deceased. Human rights organizations name these bodies from Soacha *Falso Positivos* ("False Positives;") people who were kidnapped, murdered, and reported as 'combat kills' by the Colombian Army forces in order to boost the body counts in Colombia's War on Terror.[2] While the number of "false positives" is estimated to be around 10,000, the exact number is unknown, and an official record of orders to boost body counts is missing.[3]

This absence of official numbers and records is not unique to the Colombian *False Positivos*. Indeed, much of the enforced disappearances are unrecorded, with estimates of the number of the disappeared ranging between 15,000-83,000 people in Colombia, 3,000 to 12,000 in Peru, 10,000 to 120,000 in Chile, and 4,000 to 45,000 in Mexico.[4] The high margins between estimates speaks to the difficulty in establishing a "fact" out of approximations. Despite such difficulty in figuring out what exactly happened, many of the organizations consisting of the relatives of the disappeared say that they will not be silenced and will not stop searching. For example, the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo, the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, who have been meeting every Sunday for the last 30 years, say that they will not stop meeting as long as they live, for they meet in order to tell the stories of their loved ones. In Turkey, the Saturday Mothers have been holding up the photographs of their disappeared loved ones, each week telling a story of one.[5]

The disappeared and their bodies, however, are harder to find than the stories of the loved ones. Indeed, much of the high margins in the count of the disappeared is due not only to the absence of records but also the absence of bodies. Lot 29 in the General Cemetery of Santiago, Chile, was originally used to dispose of the bodies of the disappeared, where initially over 300 bodies were buried each day between 1973-1979. However, in 1979 the "Operation Television Withdrawal" involved the excavation of Lot 29 and other such official mass burial sites, where the bodies were removed and airdropped over mountainous regions and the ocean.[6] Doña Nena González, the caretaker of Lot 29, says she would tell the stories, but there are no longer any bodies. In the absence of records and bodies, there is nothing. As Saidiya Hartman asks in the face of archival erasure, how do you tell a story of nothing?[7]

The goal of this article is to take seriously the demand of the relatives of the disappeared, or the remnants, as they call themselves, to tell their stories: instead of explaining the 'why' of

[1] For further details, see "On Their Watch Evidence of Senior Army Officers' Responsibility for False Positive Killings in Colombia," HRW.com, https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/24/their-watch/evidence-senior-army-officers-responsibility-false-positive-killings (accessed May 17, 2023).

[2] "Extra Judicial Executions," Colombiareports.com https://colombiareports.com/false-positives/ (Accessed May 17, 2023).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Mária Fernanda Perez Solla, *Enforced Disappearances in International Human Rights* (2006).

[5] Bozkurt, Hatice and Özlem Kaya, *Holding Up The Photograph: Experiences of the Women Whose Husbands Were Forcibly Disappeared* (2014).

[6] Peter Read and Marivic Wyndham, *Narrow But Endlessly Deep: The Struggle for Memorialization in Chile Since the Transition to Democracy* (2016).

[7] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2008), 128.

this insistence, my goal is to analyze the 'how' of it, in the sense of asking what this insistence 'does.' In doing so, I focus on two main theoretical frameworks: on the one hand, that of necropolitics, thus discussing the role of this insistence from the perspective of a kind of power that works on the production and maximization of death. On the other hand, that of genealogy, questioning what this story telling involves from the perspective of a history that aims to mobilize subjugated knowledges. The article is divided into three main sections. The first part focuses on the role of archival erasure in the context of necropolitics. Here, I will argue that the work of necropolitics occurs as a certain kind of fabulation where erasure of the archive functions to erase the distinction between the real and the fictional. The second part of the paper turns to the possibilities of telling other kinds of stories by focusing on Foucault's analysis of archival genealogies. Enforced disappearances and the knowledge thereof, I argue, constitute examples of fables that play into the dramaturgy of the real. A genealogical approach to these stories, however, poses problems: necropolitics works through erasures and fabulations, and thus archives, when they testify to the work of power, remain incomplete at best and more often actively erase. Thus, the last part questions what kind of an archival approach is necessary by asking what such stories do, and it analyzes the actors, events, and time of these stories. In the insistence of the searchers in telling their stories, I argue, what is at stake is the collective emergence of another kind of fable; an act of fabulation in line with what Saidiya Hartman calls "critical fabulation," which multiplies the possibilities of the present and the past by precisely telling stories of nothing.

I. GENEALOGIES OF NECROPOLITICS

In *Society Must Be Defended,* Foucault discusses genealogy as a method of interacting with what he calls "subjugated knowledges."[8] There are two modes of subjugated knowledges that he talks about here: the first one is the kind where the contents have been actively disguised in relation to political practices, the knowledges that were "buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systematization," and the second "the kinds of knowledges that have been disqualified from counting as knowledge."[9] He thus gives a summative description of genealogy as a history of "the buried and the disguised," a historical knowledge of "struggles."[10] Genealogies, he says, are "insurrection of knowledges," the insurgence of the kinds of knowledges that take place on the local level, the local discursivities, and most importantly, their "desubjugation."[11] This historical knowledge both gives a story of struggles and also struggles with the subjugation of knowledges.[12]

The former of the subjugated knowledges that Foucault discusses, what he calls "the buried," are the kinds of knowledges where the contents do not match the official or dominant discourse. These are the kinds of knowledges that encounter active dismissal and denial, that

[8] Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended, Lectures at Collège de France, 1975-1976,* (1997) 11.

[9] Ibid, 6.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] For further discussion on the two types of subjugated knowledges and their relation to genealogy, see Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy (*2009) 53-54.

are buried deep within in the archive, and that may or may not ever see the light of day afterwards. In many senses, archival disappearance can be seen as an example of this kind of subjugation of knowledge. Of the *Falso Positivos*, for example, about 3000 are identified, with the efforts of Mothers of Soacha, and some of them (though not all) are given burials after that.[13] The erasing act of enforced disappearance targets the body and the memory of both the archive and the person. In Avery Gordon's words, "a key aspect of state-sponsored disappearance is precisely the elaborate suppression and elimination of what conventionally constitutes the proof of someone's whereabouts. The disappeared have lost all social and political identity: no bureaucratic records, no funerals, no memorials, no bodies, nobody."[14] What is lost and what is disappeared, in the cases of the enforced disappearances, becomes not only the instances of detention, or how and where they were detained or disappeared, but the elimination of all proof that could point to the whereabouts of the disappeared at a given time. The absence of records of detention is mimicked with the erasure of the individuals themselves from the public records. In most of the cases of disappearance, there are no records of the disappeared: no records of death or funeral, but also no records of detention, court orders, and, in many cases, no records of birth. The name of the disappeared may become a forbidden subject where uttering the name in public might put the speaker at risk of detention.[15] As Banu Bargu explains, erasure may involve the eradication of the possibility of remembering, where those who remember can also disappear.[16] In the absence of records, there is no person, no body, and no one to disappear in the first place; in the absence of utterances, there is no loss, nothing to grieve, and nothing to remember. Bargu calls this process "invisibilization," which "renders bodies, history, and violence invisible."[17]

Nevertheless, invisibilization is not only an effect of complete deletion but can also take the shape of the proliferation of records – or the displacement of records with the production of new ones. As hard it is to find records of the disappeared, for example, there are records of enemies: 'subversives', 'terrorists', or 'traitors' all appear in the records as figures that have neither person nor name attached to them. These nameless titles of enmity have a long history in the case of enforced disappearances insofar as they mark precisely that shift from the absence of records to the presence of too many records. In and through such proliferation of titles of enmity, the disappeared often cease to be subjects: the possible ties between the subject and the state, or the subject and the community, become invisible together with the histories of violence, thereby disqualifying claims for the kind of juridical subjectivity attached to sovereignty that would interact with the subjects on the basis of rights – on the basis of the

[13] For further information on the efforts of the Mothers of Soacha, see Paul Angelo, "Colombia: False Reports, Failed Justice," Latin American Bureau, https://lab.org.uk/colombia-false-positives-failed-justice/ (Accessed May 17, 2023).

[14] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), 80.

[15] Alpkaya, Gökçen. "Kayiplar Sorunu ve Turkiye," *Ankara Universitesi SBF Dergisi*, 50:3 (1995), 48.

[16] The records disappear, and, sometimes, those who remain disappear as well later on. Such is the case of Kemal Birlik, for example: when he was discharged from his sentence of over two years, his two relatives went to pick him up. That was the last time anyone has seen him or his two relatives. Banu Bargu, "Sovereignty as Erasure: Rethinking Enforced Disappearances," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23:1 (2014), 61.

[17] Ibid.

right to live or the right to die. In the case of the Dirty War of Argentina, for example, where the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo have been continuing one of the longest lasting modes of political action for over five decades now, the entire number of the disappeared is far from known, apart from, once again, the nameless title of the "subversives."[18] The title points to neither a concrete entity nor a concrete group of people but rather to any and all ideological opposition of the government: Catholicism as well as Judaism, divorce and prostitution, and alcoholism or homosexuality would all be justificatory explanations for the title.[19] In turn, the absence of a coherent definition for who/what counts as subversive would help erase not only those marked as such but also any mode of violence inflicted upon them. As Diana Taylor writes, "Non-human non subjects do not exist in juridical systems,"[20] and any acts that befell them also do not exist as such. As General Ramón Camps once said on the issue of the *desaparecidos:* "it was not people that disappeared, but the subversives."[21] The absence of records on disappearance is countered by the proliferation of records on the subversives.

This doubling produces what Foucault calls an 'ensemble' where the knowledge of the disappeared is buried deep within, precisely in order to enact the task of necropolitics: if there are no people, there is no death; if there is no death, there is nothing to mourn.[22] This ensemble has a 'system of functioning,' indeed, as an archive, where, as Foucault says, statements become sayable and knowable in accordance with the regularities established by the ensemble: in the archive, there are no people disappeared but only subversives; there is no death, nothing to mourn, and the names of the disappeared or the word 'disappearance' may not be sayable.[23] The disappeared perish once again in this system of functioning and become buried by titles of enmity and nonsensical statements.

The functional titles of enmity are inseparable from an act of defense done in the name of the health and well-being of the rest of the population; an act of defense that Foucault names biopolitical racism. For Foucault, biopower, unlike sovereignty, which works primarily through the threat to 'take life or let live' and therefore the public ritualization of death, is concerned with life. In doing so, biopolitics deploys methods such as statistical recording, data collection on birth and death rates, as well as disciplinary methods such as surveillance: surveillance, observation, and data collection are some of the primary methods of biopolitics in making life dependent on the work of power.[24] The prioritization of life as the main object of power, however, does not mean that death leaves the political sphere but rather that it becomes a secondary object. Racism is the 'death function' of biopolitics, where the latter turns into thanatopolitics, such that mass slaughter becomes justified through vital ends: racism provides a "life insurance connected to a death command," and the logic of power turns into

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[18] Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's Dirty War* (1997), 148.

[19] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts,* 150.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Quoted in *Disappearing Acts*, 148.

[22] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8:4(1984): 777-795.

[23] Michel Foucault, "Historical A Priori and the Archive" [1969], in *Archeology of Knowledge,* trans. Alan Sheridan (1972), 130.

[24] For further discussion on politics of data collection and its intersections with biopolitical regulation, see Colin Koopman, *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person* (2019).

"the more you kill, the more you will live."[25] The kind of racism that Foucault discusses is not necessarily ethnic racism but, as Erlenbusch-Anderson helpfully explains, "a "principle of exclusion and segregation" deployed to protect the health of the population from abnormal elements within."[26] In this sense, the nameless titles of enmity, such as the 'subversives,' point precisely to that "justificatory operation of racism" that is deployed in the name of the defense of society.[27]

Nevertheless, the archival disappearance of the disappeared is a question not only of the regulation of the life and well-being of the population but of the regulation of death or what happens to the dead. Achille Mbembe defines necropolitics as the kind of power that is operative in the contemporary world and accounts for the regulation and management of death and the dead. Dovetailing biopolitics, that is, existing distinctly but together with biopolitics, what we see in necropolitics is a kind of power that, "under the name of war, or terror, makes the destruction of its enemy its primary objective."[28] Unlike Foucauldian thanatopolitics that kills in the name of life, necropolitics works primarily on death.[29] Consequently, necropolitics denotes the deployment of weapons "in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds,* new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*."[30] Within death worlds, the organization of space and time are aimed at managing the death and the dead: an entire population becomes defined through their relation to death, such that the status of the 'living dead' makes death itself the normal condition of the space.[31] One can think of the mountainous zones and the oceans where the bodies are airdropped, or the suburbs where people disappear in order to re-emerge as dead enemies, as such topographies of violence or death worlds: the condition of life has an underlying affinity with death, and this kind of an affinity with death carries over from spaces to archives, while people whose lives and deaths disappear in topographies of violence also disappear from the lines of the archive.

Thus, if the archive is, as Foucault says, the "general system of the formation and transformation of statements," a necropolitical archive is one where what is sayable and knowable reflects an affinity with death: within this affinity, people, events, or entire populations are

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[25] Racism for Foucault is where biopolitics has access to the sovereign power to kill. See Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended,*: "What is in fact racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die" (254).

[26] Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire* (2018), 10.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15:1 (2003), 12.

[29] Penelope Deutscher's analysis is particularly helpful in distinguishing Mbembe's account of necropolitics from the notion of 'thanatopolitics:' thanatopolitics describes direct and indirect killing that takes place in biopolitics in the service of health, well-being, or reproduction of life (and specific forms of life), and, as such, it still takes life as its object and objective. Necropolitics, however, takes death as its object and objective; as such, death does not take place as a by-product of the work of administration, securitization, or policing of life but is rather the key element of an entire economy of relations of power in and of itself. For more on this, see Penelope Deutscher, *Foucault's Futures: A Critique of Reproductive Reason* (2017), 103.

[30] Ibid., 39.

[31] In this sense, the work of necropolitics is distinct from traditional forms of sovereignty that Foucault talks about as well: unlike in the case of sovereignty, where power is individualized or centralized, and where death is ritualized, in necropolitics, the work of power is decentralized, and death is devoid of ritual.

situated on the verge of disappearance.[32] Such an archive is constituted not by testimonies to lives and deaths but rather a bundle of statements that are constituted by irregular, and at times phantasmic statements. Thus, even though the necropolitical archive fails in providing testimony to lives and deaths, there is a sense in which it is not exactly nothing that becomes apparent in it. There are no records of death, for example, nor are there records of life. And yet, the archive still exists on its own. In the case of Colombia, there are no records of the number of people who were buried in order to boost the body count of murdered guerrillas. However, there are records of the number of weapons that were held by the Colombian Military on a monthly basis, and gaps in the records suggest the amount of weapons that the dead were dressed in to be buried with.[33] As the records and bodies are erased, what remains is a fabulation of sorts in necropolitics: the story of the killing of an enemy; the story of the death of a terrorist. Indeed, to think that there is nothing would be to overlook the story of power itself or, as Mbembe says, to overlook the fact that "the work of power also involves a process of 'enchantment' in order to produce 'fables.'"[34] Gaps in the archive do not amount to nothing but form a fable together – an enchantment. Thus, the intensive criminalization that the disappeared face posthumously can be seen as an example of such fables of power: the fables of power produce modes of rationalization and evidencing that, in and of themselves, do not make a coherent whole but are nevertheless necessary for their work as a functional ensemble.

As Mbembe says, "there can be no 'fable' without its own particular array of clichés and verbal conventions notable for their extravagance and self-regard, the purpose of which is to dress up silliness in the mantle of nobility and majesty."[35] The purpose of the fable is not that of creating a rational whole. Rather, fables in necropolitics produce nothing but 'silliness:' silences, pieces of information that do not fit, apart from the fact that they are present, said, and done. The insistence of the 'remnants,' as they call themselves, of the Mothers of Soacha, the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo, or the Saturday mothers on 'telling their story,' telling the stories of their loved ones, their lives, deaths, detentions, or daily habits, becomes especially relevant to consider in the context of the fabulations of necropolitics in an attempt to think about the different possibilities of fables or different ways of thinking about histories. The world of necropolitics, conversely, is filled with fables: fables of enmity, fables of terror, fables with cliches and verbal conventions of various sorts. The stories that the relatives of the disappeared insist on telling do not "fill up" emptiness as much as talk over the fabulations of necropolitics.

Inasmuch as they do not fill up the voids of necropolitics, the stories of the remnants resemble more the second kind of subjugated knowledges that Foucault talks about: not the 'buried' but "the disqualified". These are the kinds of knowledges that are "singular, local knowledges, the noncommonsensical knowledges that people have, and which have been in

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[32] Foucault, "Historical A Priori and the Archive," 131.

[33] See Joe Parkin Daniels, "Colombian army killed thousands more civilians than thought, study claims," theguardian.com. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/08/colombia-false-positives-scandal-casualties-higher-thought-study (accessed May 17, 2023).

[34] Achille Mbembe, "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62:1 (1992), 15.

[35] Mbembe, "Provisional Notes," 15-16.

a way left to lie fallow, or even kept in margins.""[36] Indeed, the stories are drastically different from all other modes of records that surround enforced disappearances: against absences, they are filled with presences, against clichés, there are memories, against titles of enmities, there are dreams and nightmares. For Foucault, genealogies emerge from coupling together the buried and the disqualified, from the mobilization of these kinds of knowledges against unitary or centralizing attempts of power effects on knowledge: genealogies are "insurrections of knowledges," as Foucault says: a genealogical approach to the stories of the remnants would precisely be aimed at mobilizing these stories.[37]

The question, however, is about the relation between these stories and the archive: what does it mean to approach these stories as an archive, and what kind of an archive do they form? As Foucault's account of genealogy emphasizes the archive as a domain of discursive regularities, of statements that are sayable, that fit within a general ensemble of discourse, and that are or could be supported by other statements and records, the consideration of these stories would necessitate another approach. What kind of a genealogical engagement would be at stake when the archive at hand is not an ensemble of statements that match and fit within each other but rather contains stories that are neither sayable nor enunciable – stories that amount to nothings of the archive? What would it mean to mobilize these archives? Against what centralizing power effects are they mobilized? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to interrogate the possibilities of non-written archives and interrogate what these archives do from the perspective of genealogy.

II. INFAMOUS DISAPPEARANCES

In "Lives of Infamous Men," Foucault talks about his engagement with the archive as an attempt to find lives that are about to disappear into the archive. The few lines that mark these lives give them an existence that is on its way to disappearance even as they are being written; an existence, nevertheless, that has a shifting place in what is real and not fictional. These lives, he says, are very much real existences and not literary fictions or imaginary lives: one should be able to "ascribe a place and date to them" that exist in one point and place in history.[38] One way to think about the lives that emerge in the stories of the remnants is this: a glimpse of existences that are on their way to disappearance; a way of talking about brief lives that one would have to be lucky to encounter in the archives.

The lives that Foucault talks about are 'infamous' or 'obscure' lives. Rather than famous existences that take up pages of history, these people do not exist beyond a couple of lines, if there are any lines about them at all: it is important, he says, to consider that "nothing prepared them for any notoriety" and that "they would not have been endowed with any of the established and recognized nobilities." They are not marked by nobility, beauty, heroism, genius, or any other classification that would distinguish these lives from all

[36] *Society Must Be Defended*, 8.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Michel Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men" [1977], in *Power*, ed. James Faubion (1994), 160.

others or make them subjects of history.[39] In short, "the existence of these men and women comes down to exactly what was said about them: nothing subsists of what they were or what they did, other than what is found in a few sentences."[40] The bodies in Lot 29," or the "false positives," or those who exist in the stories of Saturday Mothers can be seen as such 'infamous' existences: existences that are not marked by any element of notoriety or nobility; not wealth, birth, nor any other form of celebrity. Inasmuch as these lives are very much real, rather than imaginary, there is a certain way in which the distinctions between the real and the imaginary gets blurred in their existences, precisely because their existence comes down to what is said about them, and that, insofar as the archive is concerned, they may as well not have existed.

Marking these lives, however, following Foucault, does not simply bear testimony to them: even though these are people who lived and died, "with their meannesses, sufferings, vociferations, and jealousies," one does not see any of these in the few lines that remain from them.[41] Rather, the "beam of light that illuminates them" is nothing but the work of power.[42] In the cases of Foucault's examples, the records of detention, asylum, and police reports are the only things that mark these existences. Thus, Foucault talks about these as "lives that are as though they hadn't been, that survive only from the clash with a power that wished only to annihilate them or at least to obliterate them."[43] The very work of power, in this sense, makes them emerge, as Lynne Huffer says, "out of the anonymous murmur of beings who pass without a trace."[44] In telling their stories, thus, Foucault says, "the dream would have been to restore their intensity in an analysis," or at least to "assemble a few rudiments for a legend of obscure men, out of the discourses that, in sorrow or in rage, they exchanged with power."[45] Doing so would primarily mean providing a witness for that flash of power that struck them, witnessing their annihilation, or obliteration, forming a legend not of who they are or were but rather of that moment in each of these lives where they "came up against power" one way or another and struggled with it.[46] Thus, the work of power for Foucault makes existences that otherwise would have passed without a trace stand out in the archive, leave a trace, however minor, in the functional ensemble of the archive.

In Foucault's archives, power marks its own presence through the archive: there are detention records, medical records, records of arrest and confinement, records of release, birth dates, and dates of death; records that, if nothing else, testify that there was a person there who lived and died, and, even if their encounter with power was only for a split

[39] Ibid.

[40] Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," 162.

[41] "Lives of Infamous Men," 160

[42] Ibid.

[43] "Lives of Infamous Men," 165

[44] Lynne Huffer, "Foucault's Fossils: Life Itself and the Return to Nature in Feminist Philosophy," *Foucault Studies* 20 (2015), 139.

[45] "Lives of Infamous Men," 158 and 162.

[46] Ibid.

second, that encounter was written down somewhere. Considering the work of biopolitics that Foucault analyzes, which consists precisely in the proliferation of records, this makes sense insofar as biopower already consists in the work of collecting data, in recording, in massifying information. However, when it comes to the work of necropolitics, this poses a problem, for necropolitics works not through collecting records but rather their erasure, invisibilization, and fabulation. In the cases such as enforced disappearances or "false positives," witnessing the power that flashes on them is precisely the problem at hand: there are no records of their 'clash with power' inasmuch as the very technique of power is that of annihilation and obliteration not only of existences but also the records. That kind of testimony in written records is not afforded to many whose encounter with power precisely works in the obliteration of records.

Erasure from records poses a problem about what can be known and what can be told of these lives. Saidiya Hartman says, "the archive dictates what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told about the persons cataloged, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios."[47] The few lines that mark the existences of Foucault's infamous existences, the kinds of lines that testify to the work of power, are impossible lines when it comes to enforced disappearances. Moreover, inasmuch as the clash of power on the lives of the forcibly disappeared is very difficult to bear testimony to, what makes them infamous is not their lives but their deaths; or, the impossibility of accounting for their deaths as much as their lives: they are infamous because no one knows what happened to them, whether they are living or dead, or how they died. Despite this impossibility, the tales of each disappearance are very acutely told by remnants. Mothers of Soacha, Plaza Del Mayo, and Saturday Mothers recount the day that their loved ones disappeared: the color of the pajamas that they were wearing, the exact time of their detention, the sound of the knocks of the door, the daily activities that they were performing at that moment, the last words that they heard them say. There are no lines of the archive yet there are stories: stories of disappearance, stories of violence, stories that refurbish one moment in time, a glimpse of a moment that existed and went away as quickly as that.

Interestingly, when Foucault talks about how he chooses the archival material to engage, he notes that memories or stories that appear like those of the Mothers of the Disappeared are precisely the kinds of archives that he avoided. The reason he gives is "their relation to reality" or the way in which they take up a role in the battlefield of reality. Thus, he says:

> I likewise ruled out all the texts that might be memoirs, recollections, tableaus, all those recounting a slice of reality but keeping a distance of observation, of memory, of curiosity, or of amusement. *I was determined that these texts always be in relation, or, rather, in greatest possible number of relations with reality: not only they refer to it, but they be operative within it, that they form a part of the dramaturgy of the real*: that they constitute the instrument of a retaliation, the weapon of a hatred, an episode in the battle, the gesticulation

[47] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother,* 24

> of despair or jealousy, an entreaty or an order. I didn't try to bring together texts that would be more faithful to reality than others.[48]

Avoiding the stories that have tellers attached to them, for Foucault, thus, is necessary not because how real they are, or whether they are more real than others, but because of the specific relations that they build with reality: they play into the 'battlefield' of reality and constitute instruments, thus they can be instrumentalized and played along.

Indeed, there are many ways in which the telling of a story, or the telling of a memory, plays into the 'dramaturgy of the real' for the remnants. In Lot 29, for example, when the first round of exhumation was completed and the first set of bones sent to the relatives, reading the bones, telling the story of the deceased through reading the bones, became a way of claiming legal support as well as state retribution. As Peter Read and Marivic Wyndham discuss, once the relatives acquired the bones, each carefully read and explained, in painstaking, excruciating detail, every sign of torture, every trace of injury that remains: 'This is the trajectory where the bullet entered and exited his brain,'[49] "This is how many pieces the hand was fractured.'"[50] The narrative of horror in its most cruel and gruesome details becomes a way of attaching the body to its clash with power; a way of witnessing the work of power on the body beyond the lines of the written archive. Moreover, this narrative recounting has legal and political implications in the dramaturgy of the real for the remnants: for example, once the person is no longer 'disappeared' but 'executed,' the relatives become, as Read and Wyndham say, a part of the "the 'normal' community of mourners."[51] The wife of the disappeared becomes the widow of the deceased and qualifies for pension and life insurance, the legal route of investigation becomes investigation for homicide, and the relatives can decide on a burial place where they visit the bones and bring flowers on holidays. Stories, specifically in the form of memories, play into the 'dramaturgy of the real' in this sense, particularly because they change the order of things in the real.

There are, however, limitations into what does and does not change in the dramaturgy of the real through speech. After all, it is important to avoid the teleology of resurrection when it comes to speech: speech does not bring the past alive, nor does it make the dead live again. As Foucault says, the function of archival work is not "bringing the past back to life."[52] "They think I am the silly one," says one of the Saturday Mothers who has been going to Istiklal Street since the disappearance of her husband in 1996. "They tell me I am the silly one; as if I don't know that he is dead by now."[53] Many of the Saturday Mothers say that they know that their loved ones will more than likely not appear, just as they say that they will not stop grieving upon finding the bodies either. That the archive is shaped

[48] "Lives of Infamous Men," 160, emphasis added.
[49] Read and Wyndham, *Narrow But Endlessly Deep,* 54.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Foucault, *Speech Begins after Death, In conversation with Claude Bonnefoy* [1968] (2011), 44.
[53] Göral, Özgür Sevgi, Ayhan Işık, and Özlem Kaya, *Unspoken Truth: Enforced Disappearances* (2013).

by necropolitical fabulations means precisely that there is no "miraculous closure" that can be attained by telling their stories; that telling their stories will not bring about such recuperation. This is of particular interest when it comes to the decades old demand of Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo: Aparición Con Vida, "Bring Them Back Alive." In the demand, the inability of speech in bringing back alive becomes clear: the Mothers do not claim to be doing the work of resurrecting through telling the stories, and the demand stands as precisely a demand that is posited.

Nevertheless, following Foucault's approach to the archive, and thereby avoiding stories that play into the dramaturgy of the real, proves difficult when discussing stories that emerge in necropolitics. Just as necropolitics differs in its operation in not collecting but rather obliterating the records, the dramaturgy of the real within the context of necropolitics also works through different rules. It does not follow any supposed linear patterns between archive and reality, nor can the narratives of the remnants hold onto the stakes into reality that they claim. In the case of the first round of exhumations in Lot 29, many of the remnants who received a set of bones in bags learned later on that the bones belonged most likely not to their relatives: the traces that they read in those remains, the fractured bones, the bullet holes, and the pulled teeth, belonged to yet another anonymously buried one, told the story of another one, another deceased, another disappeared. Inasmuch as Neña Gonzales, the caretaker of the lot, was unable to identify the deceased from the photographs, so the state was unable to take names out of the contorted bodies found. Inasmuch as the stories themselves play into the battlefield of the real, such reality, the remnants got to learn, was shaped in and through fabulations, with narratives of torture attached to 'wrong' sets of bones, where the remains disappear once again, and disappearances once again find themselves in fables of anonymous skeletons and horrors of unknown corpses.

These stories, therefore, are not "faithful to the reality," insofar as they do not represent a knowable or objective reality that exists outside of the fabulations of necropolitics. Nevertheless, they have real stakes both in terms of causing changes in the lives of those who remain and in the lives and deaths of those who are gone. Foucault, in *Speech After Death,* talks about "speaking over the corpse of others, to the extent that they are dead" in dealing with archives: when they testify, archives testify to the impossibility of attaching death to disappearance, to the very impossibility of "postulating their death," and to the very impossibility of dealing with the death of others" to the extent that they're already dead."[54] Perhaps more importantly, there is the question of the possibility of putting the disappeared to death. Foucault, for example, suggests that while speech cannot bring the past back alive, this was never the point anyway; it was, rather, the "realization that the past is dead."[55] Perhaps the stories, or the emphasis of the remnants in telling those stories, the stories of the lives of their relatives, the last time they saw them, or the stories that they read from their bones as to what happened to them, can be thought of in relation to such

[54] Foucault, *Speech Begins after Death,* 40.

[55] *Speech Begins after Death*, 44.

a realization: given that many of the cases of enforced disappearances have been going on for decades at this point, and given that what the remnants of the False Positives have at hand are precisely bodies that are dead, the question may be less of bringing them back to life through telling their stories and more of postulating their death; of precisely that realization that Foucault speaks of, that the "past is dead," such that there can be some form of speech once again.

As Mbembe says, it is no easy feat to "seize from the world and put to death what has previously been decreed to be nothing."[56] That archival temptation, to provide closure where there is none, "to create a space for mourning where it is prohibited," neither produces a dead body where there is none nor mourns a dead body where there are too many.[57] Saturday Mothers call the act of officially declaring their disappeared dead "handing off their death," as in giving away their death to the State: often times, this means that the relatives can claim their pension. Much too often, that task of "handing off their death" is precisely what the relatives avoid, even when this death plays into the necropolitical dramaturgy of the real. Such restraint in decreeing the loved one dead is important in accounting for the impossibility of 'undoing' the work of necropolitics through words or stories. Providing a new story neither 'brings back' the disappeared nor undoes the mountains of unburied bodies. As much as necropolitics fabulates in order to create limbos, the remnants do not create closures for such limbo either.

Foucault's discussion of the archives and speech is thus helpful in that it describes a method of mobilizing subjugated knowledges by paying attention to the obscure lives of the archive: the archive provides a glimpse of lives that are about to disappear. However, much of the methodology that Foucault describes assumes that the written archive makes otherwise obscure lives stand out from the anonymous murmur of beings: written records of their clash with power beams a light on them, and speech allows them to be put to death. Both of these assumptions prove to be limited when it comes to the archives of necropolitics. Finding a witness to the work of power in written records proves impossible for necropolitics since it erases and fabulates rather than records. This very impossibility is inseparable from the necropolitical 'dramaturgy of the real' that is wrapped up in fabulations of sorts. As a result, speech does not put the disappeared into death either.

The stories of the remnants remain on the other side of making either life or death possible: the disappeared neither come back nor die, in the proper sense of the term. Thus, insofar as genealogy is an attempt at mobilizing subjugated knowledges, when it comes to the work of necropolitics that consists in making death disappear, this attempt cannot rely on written archives, nor can it rely on the general order of discourse that makes statements sayable. Rather, it must pay attention precisely to the stories that go beyond the limits of archives; stories that refuse to be determined by the limits of the archive. The question is what is mobilized in these stories. If they do not fill up gaps, bring the

[56] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (2001), 172.

[57] Ibid.

disappeared back, provide testimony to life, death, or work of power, then what is the function of fable and, in particular, fables of disappearance?

III. WHAT IS IN A STORY?

In voicing their demands to tell their stories, the remnants use different words seemingly interchangeably. They say, for example, that "they will not be silenced" in the same way that they announce that they will "share their stories," or, as one of the Mothers of Soacha says, that theirs is a "tale (*cuento)"* that needs to be told, and Saturday Mothers say that they will continue "speaking." In Spanish, such telling of *historia* refers both to giving an account of "history" and "story" at once, while many of the remnants still refer to such demand as that of telling a tale (*cuento*). In Turkish, the relatives refer almost exclusively to telling their story in telling a tale *(hikâye)* and in telling what came upon them (*basimiza gelenler)*. Foucault says a "fable, in the proper sense of the term, refers to that which deserves to be told."[58] In exchanging the stories and histories, the demand of the remnants lies on this: that whatever happened deserves to be told, and that there is a necessity in the stories that requires such telling.

The story at hand is not of a fairytale or a literary tale. Instead, they refer to loved ones that have disappeared, the events of the day that they disappeared, often the few days after the disappearance, and any interactions with the remains, if there were any: when the bones were found, when they received the bones, when they were told of their existence, what they 'read' of those remains (the torture, the fracturing, the lost limbs), if the bones were taken back (as in the case of Lot 29), when and how that happened, when they met other remnants, their activities from then on, and so on. When describing fables, Hartman says: **"**'Fabula' denotes the basic elements of story, the building blocks of the narrative," or, as she cites Mieke Bal, "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors. An event is a transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions. To act is to cause or experience an event."[59] The events of the fable appear connected to each other on certain transformations. For example, many of the relatives of the disappeared refer to time in the stories in relation to their states: "that is when my father was still alive," or "I was a pregnant woman then," or "I was a young bride then." The event itself prescribes a certain transformation in the states of the remnants, as when they went from being a pregnant woman to a single mother, for example, or from a young bride to the wife of the disappeared, and, always, to the state of being a 'remnant' or a 'searcher.' This transformation underlies the narrative of the story as well: in telling their stories, they refer to their current status exclusively as a 'remnant' or a searcher; a relative of the disappeared. If the fable transcribes a transformation, the fable of disappearance primarily transcribes the event through which the person changed status from being an 'ordinary person' of an obscure life to that of a searcher, an actor and an agent that exists in relation to necrosovereign assemblages, that plays into the web of power relationships that constitute necropolitics.

[58] "Lives of Infamous Men," 168

[59] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12:2 (2008), 11.

Unlike Foucault's discussion, which focuses on finding the traces of infamous lives, however little these traces may be, in the archive, Hartman works specifically in the limits of archives, the liminal spaces that open up in the archives when the power is not writing but erasing; in the afterlives of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Nevertheless, Hartman says, "every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor."[60] According to Hartman, in the absence of archival records, critical fabulation enters as a method of mobilizing subjugated knowledges. Critical Fabulation, as a method, takes place not in the accounting of the fable of the event but rather in jeopardizing the status of the event. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments,* Hartman provides an enactment of this work by focusing on the lives of young Black women at the turn of the century. In her account, the city becomes alive, young women move out of "journals of rent collectors; surveys and monographs of sociologists; trial transcripts; slum photographs; reports of vice investigators, social workers, and parole officers; inter- views with psychiatrists and psychologists; and prison case files, all of which represent them as a problem."[61] In Hartman's fabulation, both the actors and the events are transformed. On the one hand, actors that are young women are transformed from problems or "surplus women of no significance, girls deemed unfit for history and destined to be minor figures" to "social visionaries or innovators."[62] On the other hand, the events prescribed by social workers, parole officers, or slum photographers lose their status as events and leave their place to other events: events of existing otherwise, events of waywardness, or events of "imagining other ways to live."[63] Critical Fabulation appears as a method that "elaborates, augments, breaks open" archival documents in order to jeopardize the status of the event, multiply and replace it with many other events.

This kind of jeopardizing of the status of the event that Hartman enacts in *Wayward Lives* is done "by playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view."[64] Insofar as the event itself refers to the transformation from one state to another, such jeopardizing involves shifting around the building blocks of the narrative in order to displace the center of the narrative from the work of necropolitics to its peripheries. In the stories of the remnants, this kind of jeopardizing is done by mobilizing the everyday life, the mundane moments of living, in order to re-center the narrative. Many of the remnants, for example, when telling the story of when their loved ones disappeared, discuss this precisely in relation to everyday occurrences, situating it in the process of everyday life. "I was making the bed" they say, for example, and "lentils weren't blanched yet," and "I was breastfeeding the kid."[65] Insofar as "to act is to cause or experience an event," the stories of the searchers consistently shift the focus of the event from the act of disappearance back to their own status as actors that are in relation to and in

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[60] Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*: *Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019), xiv.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11

[65] Göral et al., *Unspoken Truth,* 31.

response to it: disappearance becomes flesh and bone, the person gone becomes situated in another time, the time of the lentils blanching or the time of the kid being breastfed, unlike the time of disappearance; a time that exists somewhere.[66]

As the time is that of lentils blanching, the stories of the remnants also attest to the 'impossibility' of the event. The event of the lentils blanching, for example, is the time of arrest or detention: "we were very poor, and they turned down all our beds," for example, "they held him by the arms and took him."[67] Sometimes they are not present in any part of the event: "I was breast-feeding the kid, and the neighbor told me they took him away."[68] The time of disappearance is an absent time; time that does not exist in the temporality of affairs nor fit within the time of death. One of the Saturday Mothers, who has not been able to locate the remains of her son, says "they say that he died. Did he die? How do I know that he died?"[69] Much of the stories of disappearance for the relatives move from the quotidian affairs to that of becoming a searcher, often skipping disappearance altogether. While there is a transformation that occurs for the status of the remnants, the event that marks that transformation, that of disappearance, is precisely what is missing in their stories. There is no time of disappearance, no event of disappearance either: time is that of lentils blanching, and the event is of the arrest or the beds being turned down.

Jeopardizing the status of the event does not just shift its focus from the work of power. Jeopardizing functions "to displace the received or authorized account," to open up another kind of account, in order to "imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done."[70] Indeed, the question of other pasts and other presents is a question that haunts improper burial: what would have happened if they had not opened that door? What would have happened if they had not known that person? What could have happened in disappearance, if not death? In this sense, the task of telling other stories, or putting the 'event' in question, becomes inseparable from the task of writing a history of the present, and yet that of another kind of present, another kind of present where they did not open the door, where the white car did not drive around the cities, or the person was present. Hartman says that writing "a history of the present strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead."[71]

Displacing the event from disappearance to that of beds turned down, and the time of the event from absence to that of lentils blanching, marks another kind of intimacy with the lives of the disappeared where their absence is inseparable from the most mundane moments of existence, such as making the beds, breastfeeding the kids, or harvesting the plots. As Mbembe says, for the remainder, "there opens a time after death," insofar as "death, as speech, does not imply silence, even less the end of possible representation of the dead."[72] The question of what could have happened if they were present is inseparable from what could have

[66] "Venus in Two Acts," 12

[67] *Unspoken Truth*, 33.

[68] *Unspoken Truth*, 33.

[69] Ibid.

[70] "Venus in Two Acts," 11

[71] Ibid.

[72] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* 206.

happened if they were absent: imagining a present in which they are alive becomes in this sense as hard as imagining a present where they are dead, and imagining a present where they are walking around as difficult as one in which they are in a grave. If the representation of the dead does not end with the moment of death, neither does that of disappearance, which does not vanish the disappeared. Instead, it opens up other modes of presents, as well as other kinds of presences.

Inasmuch as critical fabulation is helpful in understanding the stories of the remnants in the displacement of events, there are significant stakes in understanding these stories from a genealogical standpoint as methods of mobilizing subjugated knowledges. The kind of archival engagement that Hartman enacts in *Wayward Lives* is largely informed by its specific connection to the kind of archival disappearance that Hartman works with, which resides specifically "in the wake," as Christina Sharpe would say, of abyssal histories of Blackness, the kind of archival disappearance that marks the Middle Passage and its afterlives.[73] Thus, when describing her method of critical fabulation, Hartman describes it as "a history of an unrecoverable past."[74] In the case of the stories of the remnants, however, one of the particular tasks of the story is to play into the dramaturgy of the real, and this is done as a collective act. Many of the remnants, thus, describe their stories not of the past as either recoverable or unapproachable. Instead, they refer to the stories precisely of their present, the stories of them becoming searchers, or the stories of them becoming remnants. For many of the searchers, the stories of the arrests, detentions, or that of finding the remains are inseparable from their stories of hearing about the meetings of the remnants or the stories of meeting each other for the first time. Many of the remnants tell their stories in relation to encountering the stories of others and, specifically, in relation to changing their life courses by such encounters: "I was walking to the gendarmerie station for the second time," one of the Saturday Mothers says, for example, "when I heard that there are these other women that meet up in Istanbul, so I decided to go to Istanbul to meet them."[75] The story of improper burial neither ends with its impossibility nor becomes the story of the disappeared only: just as the event is displaced, so is the subject, where disappearance becomes the search, the disappeared becomes the remnant, and the story of necropolitics becomes that of meeting, that of protesting, and that of organizing. In this sense, in the stories of the remnants, what becomes apparent is not the fabulation of an irrecoverable past but rather a history of the present; a present that is continuously shaped by mobilizing these stories.

For many of the searchers, the process of becoming a searcher entails a shift not only in their status but also in their activities, in the way they speak, the kinds of acts that they perform, and the way they spend their days. Nora Cortiñas, one of the Mothers of Plaza Del Mayo, explains that becoming a Mother means getting used to "public life, new relationships, the loss of privacy, travelling a lot, using different forms of speech, preparing themselves to

[73] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016).

[74] "Venus in Two Acts," 12.

[75] Bozkurt, Hatice and Özlem Kaya, *Holding Up The Photograph: Experiences of the Women Whose Husbands Were Forcibly Disappeared* (2014).

meet with people in power, speaking to the media, being recognized on the street."[76] As Diana Taylor explains, being a "Mother" paradoxically entails letting go of the traditional scripts of motherhood in order to pursue a long durational movement that is shaped by telling stories as a political act.[77] Saturday Mothers discuss traveling all over the country, meeting others like them, organizing, and becoming politically active.[78] When the event is a non-event, the death a non-death, there are no actors in those fables either but rather other kinds of activities, other modes of organizations, and relations. Indeed, there opens a time after death, but the time after improper burial is another time filled with other pasts, futures, and presents, not only in imagining what could have been but also in multiplying the possibilities of the presents. In the impossibility of putting the disappeared to death, fables of disappearance neither bring back to life nor put to death what is gone but rather open other presents and other kinds of deaths, precisely by jeopardizing the status of the non-event.

Fables of disappearance, in this sense, are not merely stories to be told, nor do they function as stories told with impossible hopes of bringing back the dead or providing closure where there is none. They enact a specific kind of critical fabulation that plays into the dramaturgy of the real insofar as they function to blur the distinctions between the real and the fictional: in short, they are stories that do things. They shift the time of the event, they disrupt the order of things, and, perhaps most importantly, they introduce actors into necropolitical fabulations by way of conjuring the ghosts. In the demand of the relatives to tell stories, in their insistence to read fables out of their decaying bodies, what is at stake is another kind of acting, doing, and telling which jeopardizes the non-event that marks improper burial. A genealogical approach to such fables, moreover, reveals a different kind of genealogy altogether: a history of the present that moves beyond the limits of written archives in order to mobilize the subjugated knowledges that exist at the limits of archives, revealing a kind of mobilization that works precisely not to reveal the power that strikes but the kinds of memories, movements, and subjects that remain.

NECROPOLITICAL ENCHANTMENTS AND STORIES OF NOTHING

Genealogy, according to Foucault, entails a historical sense that plays into the field of power through its relation to the archive. Specifically, genealogy is the kind of historical engagement that aims to mobilize subjugated knowledges from within the archive: it provides an account for the knowledges that are buried and disqualified in the functional ensemble of the archive, pieces of information that are either hidden into the forgotten lines of dusty records or entire sets of knowledges and disqualified from counting as real or reliable knowledges. When it comes to the necropolitics of enforced disappearances, however, a genealogical approach to the written archive becomes precisely the problem: in enforced disappearance, invisibilization of the disappeared is accompanied by the erasure of records, where what remains in the

[76] Mabel Bellucci, "Childless Motherhood: Interview with Nora Cortinas, a Mother of the Plaza de Mayo, Argentina," *Reproductive Health Matters* 7:3 (1999), 87.

[77] *Disappearing Acts*, 234.

[78] Bozkurt et al., *Holding Up The Photograph.*

archives testify only to the fabulations of necropolitics: fabulations of enmity and criminality, fabulations of non-existent people and disappeared weapons.

In this context, the stories of the remnants, and their insistence on finding and telling their stories, becomes especially important. These stories do not fill up emptiness as much as counter fabulations. Indeed, the stories of remnants play into the dramaturgy of the real: in this sense, they neither provide closure where there is none, as Hartman says, nor do they bring the past back alive or bring the dead back. Fable, Foucault says, is that which deserves to be told: the stories of the searchers jeopardize precisely the account of what deserves to be told by putting the event in question. The time of the fables of remnants shifts from the time of arrest to the tome of everyday events, to the lentils bleaching, to the beds being made. The status of the event shifts from the event of violence to the event of a change in actors, the status of a change to becoming actor in a different kind of event, that of becoming a political actor, that of meeting others, that of organizing. More than anything, the stories of the remnants reveal precisely what is at stake in enforced disappearance: an event that is a non-event, a death that is not death, a present that does not follow from the past.

Death does not imply silence, and neither does disappearance: instead, it is filled with stories. In the insistence of the remnants to read the bones of anonymous remains, in weekly meetings that take place over decades, what takes place is the opening up of another kind of present, multiple presents, attesting to the constant telling and re-telling of stories of nothing in another time. Engaging with these stories reveals another kind of genealogical sense which moves beyond the limits of the written archive in order to mobilize that which deserves to be told.

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ARTICLE

Inhuman Hermeneutics of the Self: Biopolitics in the Age of Big Data

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I present a Foucauldian reflection on our datafied present. Following others, I characterize this present as a condition of "digital capitalism" and proceed to explore whether and how digital conditions present an important change of *episteme* and, accordingly, an importantly different mode of subjectivity. I answer both of these concerns affirmatively. In the process, I engage with Colin Koopman's recent work on infopower and argue that, despite changes in *episteme* and modes of subjectivity, the digital capitalist present is continuous with biopolitics as Foucault understood it, though it does raise serious worries about the possibility of transgressive resistance.

Keywords: Algorithms, surveillance, digital, capitalism, infopower, philosophy of technology, risk.

I. THE CRITIQUE OF THE PRESENT

To what extent is Foucault our contemporary? For some philosophers, this question is not particularly important; it does not matter that Plato is not our contemporary for his work to be valuable and worth engaging with and learning from. But Foucault, at least in his genealogical work, was often quite explicit that he was writing a "history of the present," and that this differed from writing a "history of the past in terms of the present."[1] That is, Foucault is not simply interested in giving us an account of the career of the objects, techniques, and strategies of power that confront us but rather in laying bare the conditions by which they have, precisely, become present, that is, how they have been able to emerge, take form, and become operative in our lives here and now.

And whether or not we are Foucault's contemporaries has, at the very least, long been treated as an open question. Indeed, it was, for some of his more prominent peers, an open

[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975] (1995), 31

question during his lifetime; in 1977, Baudrillard published *Forget Foucault*, arguing that Foucault's genealogies of power were no longer relevant to a virtual world of consumers and simulacra. Similarly, in 1990, just a few years after Foucault's death, Gilles Deleuze took explicit issue with Foucault's concept of discipline, arguing that our society is now more deeply shaped by modular forms of "control". In each case, the point is that Foucault no longer correctly diagnoses our time. If Foucault is no longer our contemporary, it is no longer clear that his work is the history of *our* present or of the modalities of power that *we* encounter, and its practical importance is, at best, attenuated. This worry should be amplified as we increasingly encounter *prima facie* new modes of power variously described as digital, informational, or datafied; about which more below.

But forms of power do not exhaust the objects of Foucault's inquiries. Part of the novelty and power of Foucault's work is the way in which it demonstrates the entanglement not only of power, as the capacity to shape the agency of subjects, and of knowledge, as the normative constitution of objects of knowledge, but of the acting and knowing subject. Todd May discusses both Baudrillard's and Deleuze's objections at length in the final chapter of *The Philosophy of Foucault*, tellingly entitled "Are We Still Who Foucault Says We Are?"[2] May recognizes - and I agree - that Foucault's histories do not merely tell us what has happened to make the forms of power we encounter possible but tell us how we have become *who we are*, and that it is who we are that is at the heart of Foucault's critical concern.

I will not be dealing with these canonical criticisms of Foucault. For one thing, it is not clear that our own times are any more Baudrillard's or Deleuze's than Foucault's. Rather, I will be exploring whether or not Foucault's concepts remain fruitful for our own present, that is, for who we are now. In doing so, I will be taking guidance from Foucault's own explicit reflections on the relations between his philosophical practice and his present.[3] This is precisely the question that he addresses in the last essay he approved for publication before his death, an interrogation of his Kantian inheritance, namely, "What is Enlightenment?"

In that text, Foucault straightforwardly claims that his work is an inquiry into "who we are," which he characterizes as, variously, a "historical" and "critical" "ontology of ourselves."[4] In related work discussing the same Kantian/Enlightenment problematic, he describes this ontology of ourselves as being, crucially, also an "ontology of the present" and "ontology of actuality."[5] That is to say, for Foucault the investigation of the self is at the same time an investigation of its time; in its very being, the self is historical, and to understand the self one must interrogate the present it inhabits *as* the present. Foucault

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[2] May, *The Philosophy of Foucault* (2006).

[3] For more work emphasizing the centrality of Foucault's "Enlightenment" writings for understanding his relation to the present, see Judith Revel, "What Are We at the Present Time? Foucault and the Question of the Present," in *Foucault and the History of Our Present*, ed. Sophie Fuggle, Yari Lanci, and Martina Tazzioli (2015), 13-25.

[4] Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 113-115; 117-118.

[5] Michel Foucault, "What is Revolution?" [1986] in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvére Lotringer (2007), 95.

implies that the key question, from which the very specific Enlightenment attitude or *ethos* with which he identifies springs, is "What has just happened to us?" In other words, the question is not how subjects manage to persevere through time and different circumstances but how a concrete history of power and knowledge produces distinctly different modes of subjectivity. According to Foucault, for example, we are biopolitical subjects, subjects of sexuality and desire, but we are so because we have come to be concerned about ourselves, and we thus know and conduct ourselves and others in particular ways and in response to particular problems.

But this dual ontology, of both ourselves and our present, is not the reward of a disinterested or neutral stance towards the present time. As Foucault notes throughout his Enlightenment writings, it is motivated and shaped by a particular attitude, one which *rejects* the forms of power, knowledge, and selfhood that have shaped us, and which searches out the contingencies of the present as a prolegomenon to self-transformation; he calls this a "decision-making will not to be governed" as we have been governed and, alternatively, the "work of freedom" of "no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do, and think."[6] The Foucauldian critique of the present aims to disclose opportunities to cultivate new forms of subjectivity, new ways of subjecting ourselves to knowledge, of governing ourselves and others.

So, I take it, in terms of his critique of the present, Foucault may, or may not, be our contemporary in at least two different ways. First, the forms of power, knowledge, and selfhood that he analyzed, the cracks and contingencies of which he attempted to probe, may be, in at least broad strokes, the same that constitute us here and now. In the decades since Foucault's death, there have been any number of events and phenomena about which one might reasonably ask "What just happened?" and, more pressingly, "Who are we now, then?"[7] Are we still, then, who we have been for the last half-century? For our purposes, this is to ask, "are we still, first and foremost, *biopolitical* subjects?" And, in either case, how might we be otherwise?

Arguably, the most immediately visible, drastic development of the past 40 years has been the rise of pervasive digital information and communication technologies: artefacts and networks from massive computer mainframes to iPhones, from DARPAnet to Web 2.0 to the IoT. Now, these changes are too widespread, complex, and varied to plausibly demand a single unified explanation. So, for this article, I will focus on the rise of so-called "Big Data" and its impact on practices of the self and technologies of domination. I will be arguing that, appearances to the contrary, the forms of power and knowledge characteristic of Big Data, predominantly in the practices of digital capitalism, can be fairly described as biopolitical in the ways in which they constitute us as subjects. Not only that,

[6] Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" [1990], in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvére Lotringer (2007), 67; Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" [1984], in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvére Lotringer (2007), 114.

[7] Perhaps surprisingly, many of these events seemed to confirm Foucault's genealogical intimations from generations ago; the increasing exceptional powers of the security state post-9/11 led to an explosion of research into biopolitics, and the increasingly austere and severe government of global capital following the Great Recession has led to renewed critical engagements with neoliberalism.

but they can, in fact, help shed light on the very notion of biopolitics in Foucault, which, despite its immense theoretical productivity, remains elusive and lacks explicit development in his work. So, in this sense, Foucault's moment remains ours.

But there is another way in which Foucault may or may not be our contemporary, namely, with respect to the Enlightenment attitude of critique. The critique of the present as the historical ontology of ourselves was to outline the points, the dimensions of ourselves, that might be otherwise. I will suggest – though a full accounting would go beyond the space I have here – that the intensification of biopolitics through digital capitalism and what has been called "the data episteme" may signal the exhaustion of the possibilities of subjectivity, at least on a common understanding of it. In that sense, our present may be quite unlike Foucault's.

To briefly preview, in §2 I give an overview of what has been variously described as "digital," "data" and "surveillance" capitalism. The point here is to give a sense of the distinctive, salient features of our present for a genealogy of the power of data. In §3, I engage with Colin Koopman's work on "infopower." Koopman, as I understand him, argues that we are no longer the biopolitical selves that Foucault took us to be. Rather, through the workings of infopower, we are now "informational selves." I argue, against Koopman, that, under the conditions of digital capitalism, we remain biopolitical selves. After outlining the ways in which the rise of Big Data has altered our conceptions of what it is to know, and the *ethos* of knowing in §4, I try to show in §§5-6 that the imperative to collect ever increasing digital data is part and parcel of the genealogy of biopolitics presented by Foucault. Finally, in §§7-8, I try to demonstrate how, given the epistemic dimensions of Big Data, we are facing a striking new form of veridiction which has troubling ramifications for the sorts of selves we are and for the possibility of transformation and resistance.[8]

II. BIG DATA AND DIGITAL CAPITALISM

This idea of the "rise of 'Big Data'" or the "datafication of society" requires a bit of clarification. First of all, it is important to distinguish several different, if related, concepts. By "data" I do not necessarily mean "information." A datafied or "data-driven" society emphasizes different features than an "information society." This, of course, should be obvious: the terms "information society" and "information" or "knowledge economy" are decades old, and precursor terms like "postindustrial society" date back even further.[9] If whatever these older terms capture is all we mean by our newer, data-centric descriptions of society and selfhood, then it is a form of society that existed before Foucault's mature writings or, at the very least, came of age at the same time. And he certainly was not naive

[8] Each of these sections is a sketch and could (and both should and, I hope, will) be expanded upon in further essays. Nevertheless, I think it is important to provide a synoptic view of how these phenomena fit together before filling in the details.

[9] Ronald Kline, *The Cybernetics Moment, Or Why We Call Our Age the Information Age* (2015), 202.

about the role of communications technology. So, to the extent that we live in the "Information Age," we still inhabit Foucault's present. But what is meant by the rise of "Big Data" is something slightly more specific.

Much of what I have in mind here has already been articulated through the concepts of "surveillance capitalism," "digital capitalism," or "data colonialism".[10] In broad strokes, the critics of digital/surveillance capitalism and data colonialism are concerned about the coupling of increasingly comprehensive collection, storage, and processing of data, with the aim of transforming this data into profit. By amassing data and using sophisticated data analytics, generally powered by machine learning algorithms, corporate agents can discover important correlations in user-generated data which, combined with new insights in the behavioral sciences, themselves increasingly fueled by big data, can allow for a distinctive kind of *intervention* in target consumer's lives through nudging.[11] In turn, these nudges can incite consumers into patterns of behavior and engagement with technology in both a positive feedback loop and vicious circle.

Hopefully, this helps distinguish the rise of Big Data from broader notions like the "Information Age," "network society," and so on. While it is true that data, and the information that can be produced from it, have become both foundational resources and most precious commodities, what needs to be stressed here is that this is about *more* than just data as such. After all, in the wake of the "information revolution" that accompanied the development of the computer, and has only expanded with the development of the personal computer, the internet, and mobile and ubiquitous computing, historians have taken it upon themselves to illuminate the often-decisive role that information - and, thus, the data that constitutes it - has played throughout the past.[12] In contrast, Big Data has arisen (and, in a sense, could only arise) in connection with new kinds of algorithms, namely, machine learning.

Machine learning is sometimes referred to as the "new AI". In brief, the expansion of computing along with sensor technologies, combined with the notion that all information can be represented numerically or syntactically, and hence can be computed, unleashed a flood. Whereas early computer algorithms simply embodied the directions of a programmer, machine learning algorithms are *trained* on massive amounts of data, and successful outcomes are reinforced: "Data starts to drive the operation; it is not the programmers

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[10] Shoshanna Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019); Jathan Sadowski, *Too Smart: How Digital Capitalism is Extracting Data, Controlling Our Lives, and Taking Over the World* (2020); Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias, *The Costs of Connection: How Data is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism* (2019).

[11] Helbing et. al., "Will Democracy Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence?" in *Towards Digital Enlightenment: Essays on the Dark and Light Sides of the Digital Revolution*, ed. Dirk Helbing (2019), 73-98; Helbing, "Machine Intelligence: Blessing or Curse? It Depends on Us!" in *Towards Digital Enlightenment: Essays on the Dark and Light Sides of the Digital Revolution*, ed. Dirk Helbing (2019), 25-40.

[12] E.g., Daniel R. Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution* (2000); Blair et al (eds.), *Information: A Historical Companion* (2021). Of course, there are those who take an opposing position, e.g., Ronald E. Day, *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power* (2001).

anymore but the data itself that defines what to do next."[13] Certain forms of machine learning, namely, deep learning, are themselves modelled on the structure and activity of the human brain, and they often produce successful predictions on the basis of incredibly complex, detailed, and abundant data. Perhaps the most famous example is AlphaGo, a deep learning algorithm that was able to successfully beat human players in the game Go, a board game many orders of magnitude more complex than chess. But the point here is that we have to think about the rise of "Big Data" not merely as a result of the widespread adoption of personal computers or the explosion of social media and so on; the age of Big Data is not *merely* the digital age but an age of autonomous algorithms. Data and AI fit together.

And this makes sense; the digital condition transforms our use of data because, with the dawn of the computer, all data could be represented digitally and, by the same token, whatever can be registered digitally can become data. Any differential input, whether it be manual or through sensors, can be stored and tracked. This is, in part, how digital or surveillance capitalism is able to produce and exploit what Shoshana Zuboff calls "behavioural surplus".[14] That is, to the extent that our mere *behavior* is perceptible to sensors or other inputs, and legible to an algorithm, it produces data that can be used to predict, intervene in, and produce our behavior.

Clearly, the digital capitalist pursuit of profit can, and often does, result in heightened forms of social control. This cycle of nudging and behavior modification is perhaps a particularly insidious one, but there are also modes that remain clear-cut even if invisible. This is exacerbated as our devices continue to become "smart," that is, connected to the so-called Internet of Things (IoT). The development of the IoT works hand-in-hand with an imperative to collect greater and greater amounts of data and provide a responsive, predictive milieu for our activity. Smart devices, no less than dumb ones, afford us the possibility of new actions and foreclose others. So, for example, Jathan Sadowski gives the example of services that are retracted and goods remotely repossessed mid-use for failure to comply with terms; e.g., cars who cease to function in traffic for a late payment.[15] These sorts of failsafes on the part of vendors and insurers are instances of what Zuboff calls the "uncontract," a form of social relation established between consumers and corporations under the conditions of surveillance capitalism that vitiates more traditional agreements between autonomous agents insofar as it demolishes the background of uncertainty and demand for trust against which the contract, and the broader need for promises as a means of self-regulation and behavior modification, made social sense.

Beyond these, and similarly straightforward moral and political worries about digital capitalism, such as AI bias or the explosion of "fake news" or misinformation through algorithms that aim at fostering engagement, are other, arguably deeper or more radical,

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[13] Ethem Alpaydin, *Machine Learning* (2021), 12.
[14] Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 416-423
[15] Sadowski, *Too Smart*, 75.

criticisms of digital capitalism.[16] Data mining, combined with algorithms that are designed to provide us with content with the aim of maximizing engagement and attention and thus producing ever more data, can undermine our ability to *step back* and *reflect*; by taking advantage of the effects of nudging, we are deprived of the possibility of disconnecting, cultivating new passions, interests, plans, and so on. We are being cognitively hacked in ways that might have deleterious effects on the possibility of genuine democracy, insofar as genuine democracy demands that citizens actually exercise some control in the formation of their wills, that is, the shaping and ordering of their desires.

Nothing of the preceding summary is original; these points have been made at greater length and in finer detail by others possessed of much keener insight. I think they are largely correct and indisputably worth thinking about. What I hope to do in the remainder of this essay is bring a Foucauldian lens to these issues. As is well known, during his lifetime he maintained a deeply ambiguous relationship to the Marxist Left, and unlike almost all of his peers amongst the French intelligentsia, none of his major works can be considered particularly critical of capitalism as such. Indeed, many have (quite wrongheadedly) thought that the critical interrogation of liberalism in his lectures of the late 1970s are actually endorsements.[17] And so it is not particularly surprising to find that there are few distinctively Foucauldian engagements with digital capitalism.[18] But I think that there must be, if we are to understand who we are now.

Before continuing, it is important to lay out some important caveats. First, though Zuboff, Sadowski, and others tend to foreground "surveillance" and cognate terms like "dataveillance," and thus evoke broadly Foucauldian anxieties about the panoptical character of disciplinary power, mere surveillance is not itself the key to either Foucault's concerns or to contemporary concerns about dataveillance or digital capitalism. What matters, with respect to the panopticon, is not that we are always being surveilled but that we always *could* be surveilled, and we thus *modify ourselves* through our conduct. Actual surveillance is not the issue but rather the mode of being, or form of life, that general observability provides. Panopticism constructs a certain kind of subject through transparency: a moderation of conduct by a self holding itself to norms. Anecdotally, it does not seem that the dataveillance of digital capitalism has the same effect or, at least, it does not seem to be the most obvious one. Rather, it is often shocking how little people are concerned with the consequences or optics of disclosing a great deal of otherwise intimate and occasionally transgressive information online. Publicity, in this sense, does not moderate or regulate the subject in the same way as it might have under a disciplinary regime. Second, insofar as such terms aim to designate a new *economic* reality, and a new form of value extraction, that is, a genuinely *new form* of capitalism, we might think that it therefore designates a new form of subjectivity and a new mode of power. After all, Foucault

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[16] James Williams, *Stand Out of Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy* (2018), Ch. 9; Couldry and Mejias, *The Costs of Connection*, Ch. 5.

[17] Cf. Daniel Zamora and Mitchell Dean, *The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution* (2021).

[18] The work of Gordon Hull and Bernard Harcourt stand out here as important exceptions.

suggests that the rise of neoliberalism coincides with or constitutes a new form of subject, an "entrepreneur of the self," whose conduct is governed by new structures and practices of power.[19] So, does the rise of surveillance capitalism by nature lead to a new form of subjectivity; a new mode of self-relation? Perhaps, but not by necessity. Consider Foucault's remarks on Marx in *The Order of Things*; on his view, the idea of a new form of proletarian subjectivity shaped by industrial capitalism is simply an artefact of the broader 19th-century *episteme*.[20] Similarly, in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, he notes that socialism as an economic regime is still bound to liberal modes of governmentality and, hence, to liberal forms of subjectivity.[21] In other words, there is no clear-cut connection between economic regimes and forms of subjectivity. Following Foucault's methodological clues in his Enlightenment writings, it appears that the episteme at work in surveillance capitalism, and the forms of power sustaining it, still require interrogation.

III. INFOPOWER OR BIOPOLITICS?

A. How have we become our data?

At first blush, one might think that this digital capitalist present is drastically different from Foucault's, and that we are thus very different sorts of selves. Colin Koopman's recent work on "infopower," for example, presents a distinctively Foucauldian account of our datafied present and argues, explicitly and at length, that this mode of power cannot be reduced to biopower. Thus, we are in a very important sense no longer who Foucault says we are. In this section, I engage with Koopman on infopower in some depth.

Given that I take the rise of Big Data and digital capitalism to constitute a particularly worrisome intensification of biopolitics, Koopman presents the most sophisticated opposing viewpoint. Further, his writing is exemplary both for its methodological rigor and the depth of its insight. Koopman does the difficult genealogical work of revealing the history of decisions that have shaped several contemporary archives of data and their effects. I agree strongly with Koopman's insistence that any political reckoning with the explosion of Big Data and artificial intelligence cannot rest content with a focus on the power of *algorithms*; the algorithms that govern so much of our lives do not operate in a vacuum but operate on data structured in particular ways, gathered by particular technologies according to specific imperatives, and thus it is crucial to expand critical attention from algorithms to data structures that comprise both formats and algorithms.[22] And yet, further still, I emphatically support Koopman's suggestion that, rather than political theories of communication, a critical politics of information technologies calls for a "politicized

[19] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* [2004] (2008), 226-230.
[20] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] (2002), 284-285.
[21] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 91-92.
[22] Cf. Colin Koopman, "The Political Theory of Data: Institutions, Algorithms, and Formats in Racial Redlining" *Political Theory* 50:2 (2021), 337-361

technics" that actually engages engineers, technicians, and others in the work of making.[23] Indeed, it is because I find so much of value in Koopman's work that exploring our points of disagreement can be particularly productive. I will, thus, contrast my views with his at various points throughout the following sections as well. In this section, I do so to illuminate our different approaches to distinguishing forms of power.

In *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person*, Koopman presents us with a genealogical account of what he sees as three key moments or dimensions of modern data (in the United States): the establishment of standardized birth registration, the development of "personality traits" as an early, crucial instance of the datafication of psychology and, finally, the intake of racial data and its impact on credit during the professionalization of realty: transforming phenotypical differences into an informatics of race, enabling the infamous practices of "redlining," and contributing to the "racial data revolution". Taken together, these map onto the structure of data processing: input (birth registration indexing an individual to an incipient body of data), processing/algorithm (the construction of personality from measurable traits), and output (racial segregation and continuing forms of discrimination). Koopman's genealogies are full of fascinating detail and force us to view these apparently mundane practices, and their consequences, through a new lens.

Further, *How We Became Our Data* has the virtue of focusing its genealogical eye on the interwar US, expanding our understanding of the deep roots of our datafied present, much of the historical scholarship on which has been concerned with the post-WWII period and excavating the history of the Cold War sciences. In this regard, Koopman's genealogy is a particularly valuable contribution, demonstrating how anodyne practices of formatting have made possible, and actual, our datafied, digital present by "fastening" us to our identities and comprehending those identities in terms of traits that can be recorded in tables and on cards, which, despite a veneer of algorithmic neutrality, can have outsized effects on our lives.

Indeed, it is this "fastening," both in the dual senses of binding us tightly to an identity and at the same time speeding up our passage through the machinery of social life, that Koopman takes to be distinctive of a new and irreducible modality of power, namely, "infopower." I think it is clear how this fastening takes place in the studies he presents of standardized birth registration, the psychology of personality traits, and the algorithmic racialization of real estate through racial data. These employ genuinely new strategies and techniques of power. Moreover, on the face of it they seem to be correlated with a new mode of subjectivity: what Koopman calls the "data self," which, he insists, is precisely not merely a "double" or representation in and through its data.[24] So, it seems, on Koopman's view, there is a very real sense in which we are not Foucault's contemporaries. Our selves are no longer the same, our knowledge is no longer the same, the power that

[23] Colin Koopman, *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person* (2019), 191-193.

[24] Koopman, *How We Became Our Data*, 170.

shapes us is no longer the same. Today has introduced a difference, and our present is no longer Foucault's.

B. Analytic, concepts, powers

To understand why I disagree with Koopman on this point, I need to place his account of infopower in a slightly broader context. In a series of earlier articles, Koopman (and occasional coauthors) comes to distinguish between Foucault's "concepts" and his "analytics" or "method."[25] In the crudest terms, Foucault's "concepts" denote the forms and technologies of power and subjectivity that constitute the *content* of his diagnoses of the present: so, e.g., "discipline," "biopower," "biopolitics," the subject as "entrepreneur of the self," etc. On the other hand, his "analytics" or methods, rather than being the *result* of inquiry, *structure* the inquiry, e.g., the "episteme," "power/knowledge," and even archaeology and genealogy themselves.[26] It is fair to say that Koopman is far more interested in Foucault's analytics, that is, in actually carrying out the work of an historical ontology of our selves. The stabilization of the content and concepts that result from these inquiries is a sign of the fruitfulness of those analytics and methods. It is too easy simply to take those concepts and algorithmically apply them to new cases, e.g., to find new instances of discipline or governmentality; rather, they should themselves become the object of further investigation. Indeed, Koopman is particularly critical of the "biopower-hunting" that he finds, e.g., in Agamben's work.[27] Doing so sacrifices the empirical specificity that makes Foucault's work so compelling and gives it its unique diagnostic force.

So, in giving us a genealogy of data as it informs infopower, Koopman is trying to give us a history of *our* present, of the kind of self we are, and the sorts of power that have made us that way that is empirically specific. It is important, then, that he show that infopower, in its peculiar mode of fastening, really is distinct from discipline and biopower. I will not here address the differences between infopower and discipline; I take it as granted that however power structures our contemporary form of life, it no longer does so in the same way as the disciplinary society that Foucault tracks in *Discipline & Punish*, a book that even Foucault admits "must serve as historical background" to further studies of the forms of power and knowledge-production at work in our lives and milieus.[28] This, of course, does not mean that disciplinary techniques and forms are not at work in those lives and milieus but rather that they can be integrated into broader strategies of, e.g., biopower without losing their distinctive character. Koopman is subtle here. He correctly

[25] See Colin Koopman and Tomas Matza, "Putting Foucault to Work: Concept and Analytic in Foucaultian Inquiry," *Critical Inquiry* 39:4 (2013), 817-840; "Two Uses of Michel Foucault in Political Theory: Concepts and Methods in Giorgio Agamben and Ian Hacking," *Constellations* 22:4 (2015), 571-585; Morar and Koopman, "The Birth of the Concept of Biopolitics – A Critical Notice of Lemke's *Biopolitics*," *Theory & Event* 15:4 (2012); and Colin Koopman, "Michel Foucault's Critical Empiricism Today: Concepts and Analytics in the Critique of Biopower and Infopower," in *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault Studies,* ed. James D. Faubion (2014), 88-111.

[26] Koopman, "Two Uses of Michel Foucault in Political Theory," 576.

[27] "Two Uses of Michel Foucault in Political Theory," 576.

[28] *Discipline & Punish*, 308.

recognizes that it would be a mistake to think of a particular form of power – whether infopower or discipline or biopolitics – as "dominating" a particular era; there is no "disciplinary epoch" that is then superseded by a "biopolitical epoch."[29] He suggests instead that infopower is "layered" on different mechanisms of biopower, just as techniques of biopower were layered upon the disciplinary, often integrating, adapting, and transforming them. I do not dispute that the technologies and practices that Koopman identifies and whose histories he uncovers – birth certificates, personality metrics, racial categorization in real estate – can be layered on other technologies of power and other histories. Rather, I am not entirely convinced that "infopower "really designates a distinctive form of "power" in the Foucauldian sense of the term.

In part my criticism is motivated by a concern that mirrors Koopman's own about biopower-hunting and the irresponsible extension or expansion of Foucauldian concepts, namely, a concern with what could be called an "explosion of powers." The strength of Foucault's concepts, their capacity to render our situations legible or intelligible beyond the conditions from which they were derived, are precisely the evidence we have that Foucauldian analytics or methods are fruitful and worthwhile. If the concepts are, on the other hand, relatively limited - if Foucault's present was only a brief moment - then it is not clear how helpful the analytics are. Perhaps we understood biopolitics or biopower just as it was already on the verge of receding from dominance but not nearly in time to challenge it to any significant degree, and we are already governed by infopower. In Foucault's Enlightenment, the present is illuminated by its salience: in our "decision-making will not to be governed" in the same ways we have been. But this decision-making will might be overwhelmed by the explosion of different modalities of power that have been proposed in the literature. Koopman distinguishes his own view from "soft biopolitics," "communication biopower," "psycho-power," "datapower," "metric power," "expository power," and "#datapolitik" among the various candidates for the sort of power exerted over us and our actions by information and communication technologies.[30] If we look beyond ICTs to the broader landscape of critical theory, we can find discussions of, *inter alia*, "onto-power" and "geontopower" succeeding biopower, or "necropolitics" and "psychopolitics" transforming biopolitics, and governmentality shading into "environmentality."[31]

Analyses of all of these different modes, tactics, techniques, and strategies of power, of course, provide insights. But if every novelty in technique, aim, objective or rationality is taken to produce a new mode of power and new form of subjectivity, then - it seems to me - "power" and "subjectivity" just do not mean what one might have thought they meant in Foucault's writings. So, for example, it is certainly true that email has

[29] *How We Became Our Data*, 171-172.

[30] *How We Became Our Data*, 169.

[31] See Brian Massumi, *Ontopower: War, Powers, and the State of Perception* (2015); Elizabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (2016); Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (2019); Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, trans. Erik Butler (2017); Thomas Lemke, *The Government of Things: Foucault and the New Materialisms* (2021).

transformed the ways in which we can communicate with each other, our possibilities of action and our relations to authority, and one could give a detailed genealogy of the ways in which email has become possible. But it does not seem, for all this, that we are confronting something like "mailpower"; to think so would risk trivializing the analysis of power. Similarly, though the advent of birth certificates and the intake of racial data in real estate intensified and extended relations of power and possibilities of action, that is, they are new technologies, it is not clear that, as a whole, the "fastening" they perform is a new kind of power.

Rather, a form or mode of power in the Foucauldian sense is distinguished in that it involves interrelated forms or modes both of *knowing* and of *selfhood*, *episteme* and subjectivity. Koopman does suggest that there is indeed a specific sort of self produced by infopower, namely, an "informational self". He uses the example of a social media profile as an "emblem" of this sort of self; the idea, it seems, is that these profiles force us into, and fasten us to, the kinds of categories and formats that tech corporations, designers, and engineers have prefabricated for us.[32] But all social interaction, electronic or not, provides certain affordances for self-expression and self-understanding; employing categories and identities that make some actions possible while preventing others. And larger patterns of such interactions constitute a self. It is hard to see how the "informational self" is something novel. I think that the problem here is that Koopman explicitly wants to distinguish "data" from the "digital" and focus his critical energies on the former.[33] For my part, I think that data, as we understand it, is essentially digital; in §§7-8 I explore new, specifically digital, forms of veridiction and the sort of self that these produce.

And, while no one can say everything in a single text, and should not be expected to, Koopman largely avoids any discussion of the epistemology of data. I think that this is particularly important for understanding the power embodied in the rise of Big Data, and so, in the following section, I briefly outline what I take to be its most important epistemic dimensions to set the stage for the subsequent sketch of the imbrication of Big Data and biopolitics.

IV. DATA AND THE ETHICS OF KNOWING

In speaking of Big data and Datafication, surveillance and digital capitalism, and especially in order to understand the epistemic dimensions of these, we need to ask, "What are data?" "Data" is often used interchangeably with "information," but they are not the same thing, insofar as not all data informs. A common way of thinking about data is as part of a "hierarchy," often referred to as the "DIKW" or "Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom" hierarchy. On this and related views, data are referred to as the basic "units" of information. It might make more sense, and be less contentious, to refer to it as a basic *constituent* of information, in the same way that words and phrases are constituents of

[32] *How We Became Our Data*, 13.
[33] *How We Became Our Data*, 170.

sentences but are not themselves bearers of truth or falsity. So, for example, data might refer to what a philosopher would call properties or predicates, such as "8 years old" or "young," and structured assertions or propositions, just as "Sabrina is 8 years old" or "Sabrina is young" would count as information.[34] In the same way, despite colloquial use, data are the not the same things as "facts," if we understand facts as what Hacking calls "compact, robust, down to earth, bite sized" judgments or representations of reality that happen to be veridical, that is, as *true* pieces of information.[35] So, it is important to note, the collection and storage of data (especially *digital* data) is not the same as the collection and storage of facts.

Another major feature of data, often connected to their alleged (if mistaken) equivalence to "facts," is that they are supposed to be *objective*.[36] This is an interesting point. Consider the role that data was supposed to serve in "sense-data" types of empiricist theories of knowledge or meaning. Sense-data were supposed to provide a realm of *certainty*, or incorrigibility, from which to build back a bridge to an external world. While I might not know that there is a red wall in front of me, I can certainly know that some sort of redness is appearing to me. Perhaps I go astray in making further judgments, but this basic element, which impresses itself upon me, is not the sort of thing I can be wrong about. On such views, however, the indubitable elements of knowledge are consigned to the realm of *subjectivity*. Classically, these were referred to as "secondary qualities," and there is an unfortunate exchange between certitude and objectivity, in that "primary properties," the quantitative, measurable properties that can be attributed to objects themselves, do not appear to us to have the same certainty: the cost of being connected to the world is assuredness. Data aims to bridge that gap by making the simple detection of traces - impact on sensors, for example - both indubitable and certain. Part of the rise of "Big Data" and its place in our theoretical and practical imaginaries, then, is a transformed conception of "objectivity."

Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have demonstrated the way in which epistemic ideals of objectivity change over time and the corresponding moral ideals they demand from scientists and knowers.[37] I focus on this idea, in this section, insofar as what I am ultimately interested in is how the sort of knowledge that Big Data provides has implications for our ethical formation, as both subjects and objects, and knowledge. In their words, they provide a tentative history of "the scientific self" over the last few centuries. Using the example of objectivity in scientific images and illustrations collected in scientific

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[34] Longbing Cao, *Data Science Thinking: The Next Scientific, Technological, and Economic Revolution*, (2018), 31.

[35] Ian Hacking, "Historical Ontology," in *The Scope of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Peter Gärdenfors, Jan Wolenski, and Katarzyna Kijania-Placek (2002), 583-600.

[36] Cao, *Data Science Thinking*, 31.

[37] Cf. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (2007), 35-42. Fittingly, Daston and Galison's work is often described as a form of "historical epistemology," deriving at least in part from a French tradition in the history of science exemplified by Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Foucault, and which Ian Hacking sees as similar to his own project of "historical ontology," explicitly inheriting Foucault's project from his Enlightenment essays.

atlases, they demonstrate three different ideals of objectivity: "truth to nature," "mechanical objectivity," and "trained judgment". The former, a dominant if often implicit ideal in 18th and 19th century science, demands of the scientist *intervention* in the process of scientific representation. Not merely an artifact of the shortcomings of imaging techniques, the ideal of objectivity as truth to nature is not quite an ideal of accuracy, or of precision, on its own but a correlate of a particular scientific ontology of universals. The scientific genius must be able to discard all the messy particularities that prevent nature's universals from presenting themselves for representation; in this way, the process of knowing objectively involves an important contribution on the part of subjectivity by selecting and synthesizing among elements. On the other hand, in pursuing the ideal of mechanical objectivity, scientists came to see the intrusion of subjectivity as a danger to objectivity; the proper objects of scientific investigation were not universal kinds or essences to be discovered amidst nature's particulars but those very particulars themselves. Scientific representation must then simply present the mess - what we might call, now, just the "facts" - that we observe or produce through a purely mechanical transfer of images. Finally, the ideal of "trained judgment" speaks to the *institutionalization* of science in the 20th century, where the formation of a scientist through education and apprenticeship gives them the expertise to manipulate representation not to produce the truth of a universal essence in nature but, rather, the salient commonalities or "family resemblances"; as Daston and Galison put it, the scientific expert aims at *pattern recognition*.[38]

Daston and Galison note that these epistemic ideals require a certain ethic on the part of the knower; a kind of restraint or asceticism in the case of mechanical objectivity, for example. In this, they provide an example of the sort of inquiry that Foucault characterizes as "the historical ontology of ourselves… which will… address the questions systematized as follows: How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?"[39] As we saw, his investigation into our present is an interrogation of both the forms of knowledge we can have and the ways in which these forms of knowledge are related to both systems of domination and ethical modes of self-formation. If the rise of digital capitalism and big data involves a new central epistemic concept, "data," we need to ask after a change in our ethical self-formation as knowers, that is, to again ask, after Foucault, "How have certain kinds of interdictions required the price of certain kinds of knowledge about oneself? What must one know about oneself in order to be willing to renounce anything?"[40]

If we now see "data" as objective - indeed, as something like the paradigm of objectivity - it is in part because the sense of objectivity has once again changed, and thus the ethical

[38] A quick summary of these points, along with a systematic presentation, can be found in Daston & Galison, *Objectivity*, 31.

[39] "What is Enlightenment?" 117.

[40] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self" [1988], in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984,* ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 224.

ideal of knowing will also be altered. And, Galison suggests, contemporary "algorists" see in the conjunction of Big Data and machine learning a new and more powerful ideal of objectivity.[41] In a world of Big Data, aided by machine learning algorithms, we are well aware that much of the task of pattern recognition, the aim of trained judgment, exceeds human capacity. We still aim to grasp real patterns, but our models and representations are limited. The task of pattern formation is left to machine learning algorithms, which are often proprietary or, even if they are not, can remain opaque to us, both because most people lack the technical expertise to understand how they work and because in many cases the connections and correlations made by them, and the steps they take to arrive at them, are radically different from our usual ways of drawing inferences, to the point of unintelligibility.[42] Even more extremely, some have argued that Big Data transforms the project of knowing so thoroughly that we can dispense with "theory," and "explanation," entirely. So, for example, Chris Anderson suggests that the sheer amount of data, and the ability to produce predictions based on it without the intermediary of theory and hypothesis, shifts knowledge entirely to manipulation and predictive control.[43] While this stronger thesis has been subject to continuous critique, the ideal it embodies still guides the practices of digital capitalism. At the very least, it expresses a powerful point: the cost of this algorithmic objectivity, and accompanying increases in predictive power and control, is one's understanding.[44]

This, of course, does not mean that the objectivity of data is simply mechanical objectivity and that the data scientist simply aims to erase the traces of their subjectivity. As Rob Kitchin has pointed out, a better name for "data" might be "capta," insofar as data do not simply come prepackaged and perfectly formatted but are *captured*. They are not the sense-data that the empiricist passively receives. Technicians and engineers design sensors and instruments, select units and frequency of measurement, and correct for noise through the application of smoothing algorithms.[45] But, of course, this is not a matter of the "truth-to-nature" ideal, of detecting natural universals by way of the wisdom of the scientist-sage; what the researcher does is use their judgment to make decisions that will make the data legible to algorithms, machines and programs while remaining opaque to us. In stark contrast to the sort of Enlightenment ethos of knowing advocated by Kant

[41] Cf. "Algorists Dream of Objectivity," in *Possible Minds: 25 Ways of Looking at AI*, ed. John Brockman (2019), 231-239.

[42] See Jenna Burrell, "How the Machine 'Thinks': Understanding Opacity in Machine Learning Algorithms," *Big Data & Society* 3:1 (2016), 1-12.

[43] Chris Anderson, "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete." *Wired* 16:1 (2008). https://www.wired.com/2008/06/pb-theory/

[44] For criticisms, see, e.g., Rob Kitchin, "Big Data, New Epistemologies and Paradigm Shifts," *Big Data & Society* 1:1 (2014), 1-12; (Geoffrey Bowker, "The Theory/Data Thing: Commentary," *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014), 1795-1800; F. Mazzocchi, "Could Big Data Be the End of Theory in Science?" *EMBO Rep* 16 (2015), 1250-1255; and Cabrera, "The Fate of Explanatory Reasoning in the Age of Big Data," *Philosophy and Technology* 34:3 (2021), 645-665.

[45] Rob Kitchin, *The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures and Their Consequences* (2014), 29-30; see also Rob Kitchin, *Data Lives: How Data Are Made and Shape Our World* (2021), 17-22.

and, in his way, by Foucault, that we "dare to know" - *sapere aude!* - if there is an ethos of knowing correlative to the rise of Big Data, it is an ethos of submission: the objectivity of data will reveal its secrets through the application of algorithms, the true engines of knowledge, independent not only of human interpretation but of human sensibility, which we merely serve by preparing and formatting inputs.

The point to be made, here, is that the changes in knowing in the age of Big Data have repercussions both for the knower and the known. More importantly, the structure of *knowing ourselves* has changed. To *be known*, we must leave as many digital traces as possible to make possible predictions of our behavior; *who* we are, beyond this, remains opaque. To *know*, we must entrust these traces – free from our interpretation – to the algorithms. In the remaining sections, we will see how this transformation has been made possible through the history of biopolitics.

V. DATA AND THE UNFINISHED HISTORY OF BIOPOLITICS

In order to show how biopolitics incorporates Big Data and information into its workings, it is important to get as much of a grasp on biopolitics as possible. This is somewhat difficult to do because Foucault's characterizations of biopolitics are never particularly developed, collected in a single piece, or (perhaps) even ultimately consistent. The idea is first presented - under the title of "biopower" rather than biopolitics, though (again) the difference, if there is one, is unclear - in the introductory volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (hereafter *HS1*) project. In that work, it seems that biopolitics is primarily distinguished from disciplinary power in that it is not focused on the *correction* of individuals or individual bodies functioning to accord with some sense of normalcy (whether social or statistical) but is rather concerned with the *regulation* of *populations as a whole*.[46] Moreover, what distinguishes biopower from sovereign power is its positivity: expanding upon Foucault's more pithy slogan, the sovereign power to "let live or make die," by refraining from intervention or issuing a legitimate penalty of death, recedes in the face of biopower's imperative and prerogative to "make live or let die."[47]

At first, it seems that biopower is concerned exclusively with the biological life of the population or, rather, that the "population" is fundamentally a biological object rather than a social, civil, or cultural one. Foucault suggests as much when he claims that a society's "threshold of modernity" is crossed when the very life of the species is an object of political calculation and the stakes of political strategy.[48] And this association with biological life is, explicitly, part of the reason why Koopman takes infopower or infopolitics to be irreducible to biopower or biopolitics; on his reading, biopower acts only on

[46] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* [1976] (1978),13.
[47] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* [1997] (2003), 247.
[48] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1*, 143.

populations as non-individuated sets of organisms.[49] But I think that this is at best a partial, and misleading, account of what biopolitics was, is, and might be.

I do not think that I am simply expanding or inflating the concepts of biopolitics or biopower when I note that it has not only been malleable in contemporary theory but in Foucault's thought as well. For example, the concept as originally described in the concluding sections of *HS1*, as well as the highly similar closing of the *"Society Must Be Defended"* lectures, is not particularly fleshed out. It is in those brief discussions that Foucault seems most committed to the thesis that biopolitics works solely on its object and subjects strictly *qua* biological or organic beings. But much of what he says in these places - including and especially his well-known if abbreviated genealogy of "state racism" that transforms older forms of racial thinking into biological racism - is not actually explicating biopolitics *as such.* In *HS1* he is primarily concerned with how biopolitical strategies have become entangled with the goals of sovereign power; in the lectures he is, among other things, exploring how the discourse of "race war" became, through a series of contingencies, a model for Hegelian and Marxist dialectics and, in turn, for Nazi and Soviet racial politics. What biopower or biopolitics amounts to, in itself, remains unclear.

And it is never particularly clarified. In his lectures of the following years, Foucault attempts to draw out the particular histories of various "biopolitical" imperatives. So, for example, he traces the imperative to produce a healthier and stronger population - to "make life live" - to the peculiar political rationality that emerged in the wake of the imperial dreams of the Middle Ages, namely, *raison d'État.* Governing in accord with *raison d'État*, the "police" transformed into a constant, overarching presence that aimed, precisely, at the management and wellbeing of both the population and the individuals that comprise it. In the same course, however, he discusses how the techniques of government were developed not just by the police but as a "pastoral" power, drawn from the history of Christianity, that exerts a constant power over the lives of individuals *qua* living individuals. As he puts it in his Tanner lectures from 1979, where he perhaps most explicitly connects the pastorate and the police:

> Political rationality has grown and imposed itself all throughout the histories of Western societies. It first took its stand on the idea of pastoral power, then on that of reason of state. Its inevitable effects are both individualization and totalization.[50]

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[49] *How We Became Our Data,*164.

[50] Michel Foucault, *"Omnes et Singulatim: Toward a Critique of Political Reason"* [1981], in *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion (1997), 325. Emphasis mine. While in this lecture Foucault does not refer to biopolitics by name, it is eminently plausible to think he is talking about it. The Tanner Lectures, on which the text is based, took place six months after the close of two years-worth of lectures at the Collège de France on "biopolitics," namely, the courses on *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*. They are almost entirely focused on material covered in those lectures as part of the genealogy of biopolitics, namely, the transformations wrought in the West by the adoption of the techniques of Christian "pastoral power" into wider political contexts. And it makes sense that he might not use the term "biopolitics" in a brief lecture to an American audience; at the time it was a technical term, appearing

So, whatever Foucault is after with his conception of biopolitics, it concerns the individual as well. There does not seem to be just one way that biopolitics works or one kind of target. It does not seem quite right to think that Foucault is simply expanding the concept here and losing track of its empirical specificity. The charitable reading, I think, is that these writings and lectures are all part of Foucault's tentative account to explain "the difference today introduces," that is, to clarify and articulate what forms of power and modes of subjectivity are at work in our shared present.

The workings of digital data seem to be an important part of that shared present, as can be seen more clearly if we consider two key aspects of Foucault's later developments of biopolitics. In the lectures of 1977/1978, Foucault traces biopolitics beyond the police state to the vastly different *laissez-faire* world of liberalism and its more ambiguous neoliberal successors. In doing so, he thematizes the manner in which biopolitics functions through (a) the government of risk and (b) the transformation of the market into a site of veridiction. We will see how these set the stage for the contemporary age of Big Data and digital capitalism in the following sections, while at the same time, perhaps, providing a troubling glimpse of the edges of the biopolitical present.

VI. RISKY LIVES AND THE DATA IMPERATIVE

Koopman distinguishes infopower from other contemporary, Foucault-inflected accounts of data-driven or informational power, and especially Bernard Harcourt's "expository power," in part because he rejects the centrality of the *digital* in favor of *data as such* in thinking about contemporary forms of domination.[51] For Koopman, among other things, focusing too closely on our contemporary digital condition risks obscuring the empirical facts, namely, the "scale at which we have been invested by information for more than a century".[52]

But I think it is possible to both stress that the power that works on us most deeply today is fundamentally digital, an ensemble of Big Data practices and machine-learning-driven algorithmic decisions, while also appreciating the long history of this process. To do so, it is helpful to understand the "digital" beyond the merely electronic and "digital data" more broadly than simply what is stored in servers and clouds. The digital is the numeric, and the digital revolution is, among other things, made possible by the realization that any piece of *data* can be represented numerically or purely syntactically and, hence, can be computed. That is, digital data, as opposed to information (recall §4 above), represented numerically, is what makes possible the economic and epistemic conditions in which we find ourselves. *This* is a difference that makes a difference in the present; if we obscure it, it is not clear what distinguishes the "data" comprising the contents of 19th

in Foucault's works only in the concluding section of *HS1*, which had only been translated into English the year before.

[51] *How We Became Our Data,* 170

[52] *How We Became Our Data,* 169

and early 20th-century spreadsheets, card catalogues, tables, and charts from simple "facts". And it is not at all clear that the centrality of facts to our lives represents either a historical novelty or, *on its own*, is the relevantly significant precursor to data, as it functions in our own lives, as the material on which quantitative and statistical analyses can be run.[53]

We know that biopower, historically, has been associated with the "avalanche of printed numbers" that marked the birth of statistics and the modern, quantitative social sciences.[54] But I do not mean to simply conflate the birth of digital or numerical data with biopolitics as such; to do so really would be to ignore its empirical and historical specificity. The rise of biopolitics coincides with an explosion of demographic data about the population, but this does not capture the way in which we are, as Foucault says, subject to "both individualization and totalization." So, how have we, as individuals, become numbered, digitized, and datafied?

In his continuing exploration of biopolitics, its character and history, Foucault ultimately comes to believe that "only when we know what… liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is". In contrast to reason of state, liberalism is a form of government that eschews the constant, guiding presence of police and pastoral power in favor of indirect incentives to action: a "government of things" that allows individuals to freely pursue their desires. But it shares the same foundations as *raison d'État*, even if fundamentally modifying them: the goal of "making life live," of promoting above all the "wellbeing" of the "population," even if what wellbeing amounts to has expanded beyond the merely biological.

In order to allow this *laissez-faire* approach to the pursuit of wellbeing to function, liberalism as a form of power or mode of government works by *managing freedom:*

> The new art of government therefore appears as the management of freedom, not in the sense of the imperative: "be free," with the immediate contradiction that this imperative may contain. The formula of liberalism is not "be free." Liberalism formulates simply the following: I am going to produce what you need to be free. I am going to see to it that you are free to be free. And so, if this liberalism is not so much the imperative of freedom as the management and organization of the conditions in which one can be free, it is clear that at the heart of this liberal practice is an always different and mobile problematic relationship between the production of freedom and that which in the production of freedom risks limiting and destroying it…Liberalism must produce freedom,

[53] Cf. Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18:1 (1991), 93-124; Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (1998); Barbara Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact*: *1550-1720* (2000). More work needs to be done to distinguish these concepts. One sees precisely the sort of "data-gathering" through surveys and tests referred to as "facts" (e.g., Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-state, 1900–1949* (2011)), and - at the same time - simple facts construed as information (e.g., James Cortada, *All the Facts: A History of Information in the United States Since 1870* (2016)).

[54] See Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers," in *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond*, ed. Nicolae Morar and Vernon W. Cisney (2015), 5-80.

> but this very act entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats, etcetera.[55]

Biopolitics in its liberal mode, then, shifts from a biological to an *economical* approach to the promotion of wellbeing, now construed as something like "satisfaction of subjective preferences," pursued freely by individuals. The exercise of power will then be over the conditions in and through which that freedom is exercised. This will crucially involve the management of *risk*.

Foucault discusses the centrality of risk management to the formation of liberal biopolitics at some length in his discussion of the formation of German ordoliberalism. The basic idea is that, in order to provide the conditions in which individuals are "free to be free," there must be basically stable conditions and provisions for when things go awry, when one incurs loss or injury, both through one's own action and, especially, through no fault at all. The question is how these risks will be managed. In the ordoliberal case, the ultimate aim is a privatized social policy in which the State will not bear responsibility for these risks but rather a system of private insurance.[56] The ultimate aim of social policy must, thus, be economic growth and increased wellbeing, which will allow all access to this insurance and hence a guarantee against excessive risk. This is later contrasted with the English and French approaches to insurance and risk, though with the proviso that throughout the 1970s the French "socialized" approach to risk would come under challenge. But the basic point remains that the question of figuring out how to manage risks, both economic and vital, is central to a Foucauldian conception of biopolitics.[57] This makes sense, given the central importance of "security" in his first developments of the concept; insurance is a specific transformation of security offered by both private firms and the state.

Risk and insurance are, similarly, central to the practices of digital capitalism in the age of Big Data. Kieran Healy and Marion Fourcade have argued, convincingly, to my mind, that the "data imperative" that most firms and organizations are subject to, to collect as much data as possible even in advance of any clear sense of its value, is in the service of deeper imperatives to score and rank individuals in terms of risk in order both to evaluate and extract value from them.[58] This makes sense because, as Daniel Bouk has similarly shown, the drive for massive amounts of individualizing numerical data, and the techniques and formats for standardizing and storing it, were in large part inventions and refinements by insurance providers and agencies: what Bouk calls "risk-makers," who

[55] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 63-64.
[56] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 143-145.
[57] Indeed, on Foucault's view, the making legible of life in terms of risk is perhaps an important link between the biological and economic dimensions or phases of biopolitics. As he stresses, "one of the current interests in the application of genetics to human populations is to make it possible to recognize individuals at risk and the type of risk individuals incur throughout their life." (*The Birth of Biopolitics*, 227)
[58] Fourcade, Marion, and Kieran Healy, "Seeing like a market," *Socio-economic Review* 15:1 (2017), 14-16; see also Steffen Mau, *The Metric Society: On the Quantification of the Social* (2019), esp. Ch. 3&4.

had the task of making the individual legible as a bearer of risk.[59] These were the early major actors in the construction of the "statistical individual," i.e., the quantified person. So, Koopman is correct that we have been informed and invested by data for well over a century by those who sought to manage, minimize, and profit from the risks we face. But the meaning of that investment is different than he believes: not primarily a matter of categorization but rather the digitization or, better, numeration of individuals.

I cannot summarize here all the details, the grand strategies and small narratives, that Bouk presents, but I want to note four important points. First, the construction or constitution of the "statistical individual," that is, the individual about whom a great mass of individual and individuating numerical data is collected, was riven through by a tension between two tendencies on the part of the risk-makers, namely, between "classing" and "smoothing." The former aims to provide increasingly precise and refined assessments of individuals by placing them in ever more fine-grained classes, ideally resulting in an entirely individualized or personalized evaluation of risk, while the latter aims to reduce individual differences by aggregating larger and larger groups to find overarching regularities. Neither was perfectible, and both enjoyed substantial support, so the techniques of each played a role in the construction of the statistical individual. In other words, the quantification of the individual was both "totalizing and individualizing," in the sense that Foucault described in his Tanner Lectures. Second, while risk-makers originally aimed at the precise measurement of risks in order to predict mortality accurately, while assessing these in terms of longevity, these processes ultimately led to the possibility of providing an *economic* value for individual human lives, even if amassing the relevant information proved a struggle. The infusion of the biological with the economic that Foucault sees in liberal biopolitics was performed, in part, in the quantification and evaluation of risk.[60] Third, risk-makers eventually extended their interest from merely evaluating and predicting mortality (and the subsequent loss of economic value) to *avoiding and controlling it*, that is, extending life through medical intervention and public health measures. In this, the work of gathering data and governing risk become the privileged tools of the helping professions through which much of the biopolitical work of "making life live" takes place.[61] Fourth, these techniques and formats for formulating risks laid the groundwork, in the US, for the establishment of Social Security and thus for the indexing of the individual by the State, along with their economic evaluation.[62] In all of this, the gathering of precise quantitative information or data about individuals, through a range of means, played a role in the development of biopolitics.

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[59] Dan Bouk, *How Our Days Became Numbered: Risk and the Rise of the Statistical Individual* (2015), 115.

[60] Bouk, *How Our Days Became Numbered*, Ch. 4; cf. p. 219.

[61] *How Our Days Became Numbered*, 157-8; 172-177; 217; 225-227.

[62] *How Our Days Became Numbered* 207.

VII. FROM THE INFORMATION-PROCESSING MARKET TO DIGITAL VERIDICTION

Foucault's "historical ontology of our selves" concerns itself with the ways in which we have been formed, as expressed in our thought and actions, in order that those thoughts and actions might be transformed: "no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think".[63] That is to say, it is a particular type of experimental reflection on the self. Despite Foucault's insistence that the Socratic injunction to know oneself needs to be contextualized in a broader cultural imperative to care for oneself, the task of knowing oneself cannot simply be ignored. And it is in reflecting on what it is to know the self, today, that the themes from the preceding sections will finally come together. We have already discussed, at some length, how the data episteme inculcates a new ethos for us as knowers; we need to explore further what it now means to know oneself.

What transformations take place as biopolitics becomes a matter of *economic* government, of the production of wellbeing through neoliberal means? As others have noted, one of the major - if not the central - defining features of neoliberalism is a set of *epistemic* commitments.[64] And Foucault is well aware of this, famously claiming that, in the context of the turn to neoliberal economic governance, "Economics is an atheistic discipline; economics is a discipline without God."[65] What he means is that, for the neoliberal, there is no possible way to grasp all the interests, motivations, and desires of all individuals, such that a single sovereign ruler could appeal to them, governing through incentives; any rule that presumes such knowledge will, inevitably, be intolerably coercive because ignorant. Rather, information about the individuals in society, while never accessible to any individual in its totality, is processed by the market. Indeed, for Hayek, this processing is modelled explicitly on the neural networks that would inspire subsequent digital computing and research into artificial intelligence.[66]

As Foucault puts it, the market becomes a "site of veridiction".[67] It produces, or speaks, the relevant truths by which (neo)liberal biopolitics can govern. Veridiction is contrasted with jurisdiction, the speaking or production of deep normative truths with the simple speaking and production of judgment: the question "who are you" replaces the question "what have you done?"[68] The market tells us *who we are* because the deep normative truths that the market produces, and that allow us to be effectively and economically governed, are our *desires*.

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[63] "What is Enlightenment," 114

[64] Philip Mirowski, "Postface: Defining Neoliberalism" in *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, ed. Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (2009), 417.

[65] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 282.

[66] Mirowski, "Postface: Defining Neoliberalism," 435; see also Matteo Pasquinelli, "How to Make a Class: Hayek's Neoliberalism and the Origins of Connectionism," *Qui Parle* 30:1 (2021), 159-184.

[67] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 33.

[68] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 34-35.

Foucault's interest in veridiction, in a "critical history of truth-telling," was, if not the same thing as the critical ontology of ourselves, also a constant theme over the last decade of his life.[69] In one of his most sustained discussions of the topic in 1982, he uses the example of Leuret's distinctive "moral" method of eliciting avowals of madness from psychiatric patients and claims that the case inspired his interest in the history of the relation between the techniques, practices, and rituals of "truth-telling" and the formation of subjectivity through subjection to certain norms, ideals, and so on.[70] Leuret obviously appears in *The History of Madness*, but the specific example Foucault gives is detailed most thoroughly in his lectures on *Psychiatric Power* in 1973-1974.[71] This gives us license, I think, to see Foucault's long investigation of biopolitics through the interrogation of sexuality, biopolitics, and ancient practices of the self as, importantly, about veridiction. We see it play out in the attention given to the importance of confession in classical penal regimes, along with the centrality of "examination" in modern regimes, in the explosion of discourse around the "deployment" of sexuality, and in Foucault's late fascination with *parrhesia*. All these ways of telling the truth about ourselves expose us to power. But beyond the simple - if various - injunctions to speak the truth about oneself, this history also concerns the ways in which we have been *dispossessed* of that truth. That is, Foucault charts a history where our control over the *meaning* of the important truths about ourselves, their significance for making sense of our lives and making practical decisions, is handed over to new epistemic authorities. While much more research needs to be done here, this pattern can be traced in broad strokes from the "crisis of democratic *parrhesia*" in classical Athens, over whether and how qualified individuals could speak frankly in democratic assembly, to the rise of the philosopher figure as spiritual guide, the history of confessional power in the pastorate, the psychoanalyst interpreting and deciphering the dreams and fantasies of the patient, and - in the biopolitical present – to the "artificial intelligence" of the information-processing market.

This is part of what Foucault is after when he pursues the questions: "How have certain kinds of interdictions required the price of certain kinds of knowledge about ourselves? What must one know about oneself in order to be willing to renounce anything?"[72] As I mentioned above, the truth about ourselves demanded of us under the rule of liberal biopolitics is the truth of our desire, which has become central to the way in which we are governed.[73] While Foucault does trace the long history of "desiring man," in the context

[69] Stuart Elden construes Foucault's central concern during this period as the "problem of confession," but I think that confession is one specific modality of veridiction or truth-telling. Cf. Stuart Elden, "The Problem of Confession: The Productive failure of Foucault's History of Sexuality," *Journal for Cultural Research* 9:1 (2005), 23-41.

[70] Michel Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice* [2012] (2014), 12-14.

[71] Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973—1974* [2003] (2006). Leuret is a near-constant presence, but see especially the lectures of 5 and 19 December 1973 and 9 January 1974.

[72] "Technologies of the Self," 224.

[73] I have discussed this at some length elsewhere. Cf. Patrick Gamez, "The Place of the Iranian Revolution in the History of Truth: Foucault on neoliberalism, spirituality, and Enlightenment," *Philosophy and Social*

of his history of sexuality, to both pagan and Christian practices in classical and late antiquity, what it is to "desire" neither remains constant nor plays the same role in the way we are governed.[74] So, for example, it is not clear that the experience of sex in classical antiquity was the experience of *desire* as opposed to the exploration of pleasures; the Platonic imposition of *eros* is still not the same as the Christian experience of a "flesh" that needs deciphering in our thoughts, inclinations, and agitations, and it is different yet from sexuality as articulated in psychoanalysis and other human sciences. Nevertheless, they are related, and it is relatively easy to see how our desires have become central to our self-understanding. After all, on the dominant philosophical model of practical rationality, the Humean theory, human motivation basically boils down to "belief + desire", and to *act* is to be motivated thusly.

Hume, of course, shows up in Foucault's genealogy of biopolitics to the extent that he represents a crucial theoretical articulation of the "subject of interest," that is, the subject of desire or *homo oeconomicus*. *Homo oeconomicus* represents an irreducibly new subject of governance, motivated fully by its interests, and governed by norms of efficiency.[75] It is these subjects, taken as a totality, who elude the knowledge of the sovereign and whose truth must be revealed, or produced, by the market: on the assumption of a more or less perfectly efficient ideal of rationality, their market behavior discloses preferences and priorities; the information needed to incentivize them and to score and rank their risks.

And while we know that there is no perfectly economically rational subject, this is not a problem in principle; there are extant theories of bounded rationality, for example, and we can view individuals as satisficers rather than perfectly rational optimizers. The empirical and philosophical inadequacies of *homo oeconomicus* do not, in fact, undermine the foundations of liberal biopolitics. But, nevertheless, we now have a more powerful alternative in digital data produced and gathered through an emerging Internet of Things; the tension between the rational agent and the subject of desire whose motives escape reflection or awareness may be resolved.

Once the market is seen as an information processor that transcended the limited knowledge of the sovereign, it seems possible - and is quickly becoming actual - that a superior information processor takes its place. As I pointed out above, a hugely important feature of our current age of Big Data is that our data is now digital. All data can be encoded numerically or, even more simply, as a binary trace, and, by the same token, anything that can leave a binary trace can provide data. This is a condition of the possibility of Zuboff's "behavioral surplus." As, for example, users interact with online platforms and smart devices, their behavior leaves traces which can then be subject to analysis.

Criticism 45:1 (2019), 107-111. Also see Miguel De Beistegui, *The Government of Desire: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject* (2018).

[74] On the "history of desiring man," see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure* [1984] (1990), 5-6. For an example of this sort of transformation of desire, see also *The History of Sexuality vol. 4: The Confessions of the Flesh*, [2018] (2021), especially Part II, Ch. 3, on the "libidization of sex" in Augustine.

[75] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 271-273.

Among the earliest purposes to which this data was put was to predict consumer behavior, precisely to reveal our desires in order to predict our actions and, at the same time, score and rank the risks we present, thereby allowing those with access to the relevant analytics to reshape our choice architecture or "nudge" us into kinds of further behavior.[76] As Zuboff reports, the explicit aim is to turn "sensors into actuators" in an "economy of action"[77]. As she puts it, while "it is still possible to imagine automated behavioral modification without surveillance capitalism, it is not possible to imagine surveillance capitalism without the marriage of behavior modification and the technological means to automate its application"[78]. Every instance of our behavior becomes a site or opportunity for veridiction. Now, however, as I noted above, the epistemic authority that can interpret what veridiction reveals is no longer the political economist or the psychoanalyst. Rather, epistemic authority belongs to the opaque algorithm that can discern the correlations of the traces we leave, and the "ethic" of self-understanding will demand our submission to the algorithm.

We have already discussed, in §4, that the shift in the ethos of knowing in the digital world amounts to submission to complicated programs that can detect patterns in data that are foreign to ordinary human understanding. Because of the sheer amount of online activity and the range of sensors embedded in our lives, the sorts of data that comprise the truth about ourselves are not the sorts of social demographics that we might have thought; rather, the truth is revealed in arcane details, such as how long a cursor hovers over a word on a webpage or the number of steps one walks before noon. Indeed, the relevant data might not even be our "own," so to speak; the activities of the people I know, and their interactions with strangers, may also reveal my desires and predict my behaviors in ways I cannot possibly know. Nevertheless, my truth is revealed; the occult profile built from my behavior is *me*, my truth, every bit as much as, at one point, one might have thought that one's sexuality or faith constituted one's true self.

As subjects of knowledge, the production of our selves – of the *truth* about ourselves – involves, to a large degree, the renunciation of interpretation and submission to algorithmic prediction. What about our position as objects of knowledge in the age of data?

VIII. THE INHUMAN HERMENEUTICS OF THE BEHAVING SELF

For Foucault, the Enlightenment project of taking stock of the present involved relating oneself to an "event," that is, to the emergence of an interrelated complex of ways of knowing, objects of knowledge, forms and norms of power, and the kind of subjectivity

[76] Fourcade and Healy use the term "automated veridiction" to refer to the way in which radically individualized, Big Data-driven profiles might be seen to reveal the "truth" of the individual in terms of their risk scores; to my mind, the more crucial dimension is that the epistemic material, so to speak, becomes something new, namely, digital traces of behavior – or data. This is our truth, from which our desire and risk can be read. See Fourcade and Healy, "Seeing like a market," 20-21.

[77] *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 560

[78] *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 567-568

induced by them. But there is no absolute way of doing so; all history is a "history of the present," and the appearance and salience of each of these factors depends on our attitudes now; on our "decision-making will to be governed" or our aim of "no longer being, thinking, or doing" as we are, think, and do. In Foucault's work, this was ultimately an attempt to no longer be governed by categories of sexuality, the economic imperatives of liberalism, or biopolitical demands for maximum wellbeing. These aims made particular transformations of knowledge, power, and self in his day salient, even if he still traced these histories back, in some cases, millennia.

On the one hand, as I have tried to show, the workings of Big Data in our lives are still very much biopolitical. The demands placed on us are, at least in broad strokes, the same that Foucault faced, even if they are intensified and accelerated in many respects. In this regard, Foucault remains very much our contemporary.

On the other hand, there are signs that we are nearing the end of biopolitics or, perhaps, its closure. So, for example, Foucault characterized biopower as both "totalizing" and radically "individualizing." In part, I take it, that is because of technical limitations; so, for example, as we saw in §6, risk-makers had to make use of both "smoothing" (or totalizing) and "classing" (or individualizing) techniques to evaluate human lives and predict human deaths. But Big Data both allows and aims for progressively more individual or personalized knowledge and control; totalization seems to be an increasingly obsolete artifact of previous technical limitations as we trend towards absolutely personalized insurance, for example, or medicine.[79]

The move towards understanding, predicting, and interpreting the individual in completely individual or singular terms, of course, is bound to have cultural and social effects. Social categories and demographics were once thought to have an *explanatory* role; I might explain my actions as being caused, at least in part, by the fact that I am Canadian, or a male, or whatever. The patterns detected amongst the digital traces of our behavior by a machine learning algorithm, however, might not be explanatory at all; whatever understanding of our selves they might provide is utterly inhuman, and mediating categories are unnecessary for the "post-social" individual.[80]

The gratuitousness of such mediating or explanatory categories, one might worry, could threaten our very sense of ourselves as *agents*; we no longer need to *act*, in intelligible ways, out of some combination of belief and desire, but merely to behave. Indeed, just as liberal biopolitics shaped subjects as "entrepreneurs of the self," extending competitive market transactions across all of society, we are now induced to simply *stay engaged*, keep behaving, keep paying attention, keep generating traces, and keep fueling the attention

[79] "Seeing like a market," 23; see also Andreas Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities* [2017] (2020). Some have challenged the desirability and feasibility of such radically individualized profiles in insurance, but even the challenge demonstrates the force of the ideal. Cf. Laurence Barry and Arthur Charpentier, "Personalization as a Promise: Can Big Data Change the Practice of Insurance?" *Big Data & Society* 7:1 (2020), 1-12.
[80] This, of course, needs to be developed further. For a starting point, see Eran Fisher and Yoav Mehozay, "How Algorithms See Their Audience: Media Epistemes and the Changing Conception of the Individual," *Media, Culture & Society* 41:8 (2019), 1187-1189.

economy. The Christian flesh and contemporary sexuality differ greatly, but they are both deep interior truths that require one's participation, which one has agency in producing, and can provide grounds for resistance. In the same way, the "desires" that are revealed in my sheer, brute behavior can predict my behavior. But there is no longer a need for interiority or to see our actions as the expression of an inner truth; the correlation of traces is all that is needed to predict our behavior to a frightening degree. If our behavior is now our truth, it is difficult to deny one so superficial yet so effective.

Foucault thought that the historical ontology of the present would be an "experimental" and practical one; a "possible transgression." The politics of truth embodied in Enlightenment was an art of intractability, yes, but also creativity. He held out hope that we could articulate *new* truths about ourselves, establish new forms of life that would express different norms, values, and ideals; that we could affirm for ourselves. It is difficult, upon sober reflection, to see how one might challenge the new forms of subjectivity on the horizon which demand only that we continue to behave. That is, it is not clear how one could establish a "decision-making will not to be governed" when the resources for willing and decision-making, like attention and self-understanding, are in short supply. One struggles to articulate what it would even mean to transgress against such a power. But if Foucault is still our contemporary, our task must be to establish the conditions under which our Enlightenment remains possible.

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