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## Art, Work: Subsumption, Posthumanism and Artistic Responses to Surveillance Capitalism

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## Abstract

This dissertation brings together multiple discourses, including surveillance studies, autonomist Marxism and posthumanism, as the groundwork for a novel discussion of contemporary visual art— in particular surveillance art, that is, art that addresses and problematizes the omnipresent digital monitoring now part of everyday life. Because in this dissertation contemporary art is defined as necessarily political, aesthetic (in the Kantian sense) and responsive to conditions of current history and society, I use Marxist theory to identify the particular features of contemporary capitalism that this art is responding to. I first characterize post-Fordist capitalism, focusing on the increasing reliance on extracting network value from what Maurizio Lazzarato called immaterial labour. I discuss Marx’s theories of formal and real subsumption vis-a-vis their impacts on production, technology and subjectivity, and conclude that we need a new term that adequately emphasizes the novel imbrication of technology and subjectivity. In particular, I claim that surveillance capitalism, rising from military technologies and research, characterizes capitalist valorization under hypersubsumption. I then look at the impact of surveillance on labour and subjectivity, with a particular focus on unwaged immaterial activities. Do these activities count as work? To answer that, I propose looking at a combination of Marx’s concept of unproductive labour with a modified type of constant capital. I conclude that the effects of hypersubsumption on labour, consumption and production have produced a new type of capitalist subjectivity: coerced posthumanism, which I contrast with Marx’s authentic species-being. In order glimpse a post-capitalist species-being, I articulate a theory of contemporary art by bringing together Jacques Rancière’s dissensus with Peter Osborne’s notion of contemporary art; both theorists show how contemporary art is necessarily political— what’s more, it is oriented towards an open future. I then apply their ideas to particular artists who have responded to capitalist surveillance by creating ‘artveillance’ (art about surveillance). I evaluate the political effectiveness of three categories of artveillance as experiments in post-capitalist sensoriums.

## Keywords

surveillance, artveillance, contemporary art, posthumanism, autonomist Marxism, hypersubsumption, technology, capitalism.

## Summary for Lay Audience

This dissertation brings multiple disciplines and areas of research together to present a new theory of contemporary art. The areas I use include surveillance studies, autonomist Marxism and posthumanism. I use autonomist Marxism, a strand of Italian Marxism that focuses on the revolutionary power of the worker, to identify the defining features of capitalism today. Autonomists would say we are in a period of post-industrial capitalism, or what they'd called post-Fordism. I claim that today, capitalism's increasing reliance on surveillance, which rose from military technologies and research, characterizes capitalist value-making under a period I dub "hypersubsumption." I focus on the transformations in capitalism that have occurred with the advent of networked technologies, algorithms and digital platforms, which have enabled corporations to profit from what theorist Maurizio Lazzarato calls 'immaterial labour.' I look at the impact of surveillance on unpaid immaterial labour and subjectivity. I ask: do these activities count as work? I conclude that under hypersubsumption, unwaged immaterial labour is work done for free— or for certain privileges and pleasures— produces a category of labour I call "coerced posthumanism," which I contrast with Marx's idea of authentic human species-being. I propose that capitalism has created its own version of species-being, which provides the enticement to continue working for free on digital platforms, or to have data voluntarily monitored and harvested. Finally, I generate a theory of contemporary art by bringing together philosopher Jacques Rancière's concept of opposing communities of sense with art theorist Peter Osborne's notion of contemporary art; for them, art is necessarily

political. I then compare three categories of contemporary art about surveillance with my theory of contemporary art.

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# 1. « Introduction »

In 2021, while I was in the process of writing this dissertation, a news story was brought to my attention that was somehow extremely believable and shocking at the same time: the Bologna Museum in Italy had installed an artificial intelligence (AI) based camera system to track and process how visitors interacted with the artworks.<sup>1</sup> The museum worked with the Italian National Agency for New Technologies [ENEA], a government organization that promotes and creates new technologies, to outfit itself with 14 cameras that monitor interaction between visitors and works of art. The project, known by ENEA as ShareArt, collects data on museum goers' facial expressions, as well as the duration of time they look at a work of art, the distance they are looking from, and even the path they take to get there. ENEA claims that its AI can even determine visitors' age, gender, race and socio-economic class. The project's designers would have us believe that this beneficent AI is merely trying to help cultural institutions stay competitive in today's highly technological world of smart devices and data mining. It is hailed as obviously and imminently useful to cultural institutions worldwide— we need to know what makes people appreciate art, they say. Curators can use information about visitor paths and viewing duration in laying out exhibitions for maximum interest and ease of access. Of course, museums need to be intimately aware of their visitors' behaviors.

As the author of this article mentions, the cameras and AI systems in ShareArt can also be used for purposes beyond their design as benign curatorial tools: “ShareArt can also be used to improve the safety of museums, ENEA claims. Just one suggested technique would be to verify that attendees are using masks correctly and applying social distancing rules.”<sup>2</sup> Nowhere in this article is it mentioned that people have been consulted

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Charr, “Museum Uses Artificial Intelligence to Watch Visitors,” *Museum Next*, August 10, 2021, <https://www.museumnext.com/article/museum-uses-artificial-intelligence-to-watch-visitors/>.

<sup>2</sup> Charr, n.p.

on or agree to be monitored; presumably, entering the museum and enjoying its contents is taken as tacit consent; it is not uncommon for large museums to have security cameras, after all.

This article had a powerful effect on me because it congealed all the themes of this dissertation into a single event. Here an art museum brazenly embraces the non-consensual surveillance and data gathering of their patrons in order to become more streamlined and competitive—more “interesting”—thereby garnering more visitors. The museum is working with a government sponsored R&D company that is providing this technology, including an opaque AI with a presumably proprietary algorithm whose function seems to be social sorting. This is not only the commodification of art but the commodification of attention through mass surveillance technologies, which could easily slide into sorting ‘desirable’ museum visitors from less desirable ones. I do not know whether any artworks critical of surveillance hang in this museum, it would be ironic if they did.

My dissertation explores the relationship between artveillance—a term Andrea Mubi Brighenti introduced in a 2009 article to refer to artworks, installations and performances that deal directly with themes of surveillance<sup>3</sup>— and contemporary capitalism<sup>4</sup>. It relates the emergence of such art to transformations in the mode of production from a Fordist to a post-Fordist phase, and the associated rise of ‘surveillance capitalism’<sup>5</sup> as a primary value-generating vehicle. Using Marx’s frameworks of formal and real subsumption<sup>6</sup>, it argues that contemporary capitalism is entering a new stage of ‘hypersubsumption.’ In what follows, I will explore the characteristics integral to

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<sup>3</sup> Andrea Mubi Brighenti, “Artveillance: At the Crossroads of Art and Surveillance,” *Surveillance and Society* Vol. 7 No. 2 (2010): 137-148.

<sup>4</sup> Following David Harvey, “capitalism” here means “any social formation in which processes of capital circulation and accumulation are hegemonic and dominant in providing and shaping the material, social and intellectual bases for social life.” (David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2014).)

<sup>5</sup> Shoshanna Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> “Results of the Direct Production Process,” *Marx and Engels Collected Works* Vol. 34, 1861-1864, trans. Ben Fowkes, (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010): 95-104. Electronic book.

hypersubsumption with respect to changes in production, consumption and subjectivity. The first three chapters provide a structured overview of these changes that leads up to the final two sections, which articulate a theory of contemporary art that is then brought to bear on various instances of surveillance art.

Questions I examine include: what are the effects of post-Fordist capitalism on technology and governance, and what theoretical models can be used to account for these effects? How do these changes relate to technological developments that have expanded vision beyond the merely human faculty of seeing? How has the ubiquity of surveillance and digital media deviated from Foucault's traditional notion of biopower to incorporate the primacy of dataveillance? What is the relationship between surveillance, capitalism and immaterial labour? How do the military origins of commercial surveillance technology affect its consumer applications? How is human subjectivity affected by changes to forms of capitalist domination? What lessons can we learn from aesthetic experiments and techniques that seek to subvert or change these structures? What types of artworks, if any, serve as effective counter-politics to hegemonic capitalist regimes?

## 1.1. « Overview of Capitalism »

The project begins with an historical account of the transformation from industrial to Fordist and post-Fordist capitalism, framed within the transition from formal to real subsumption. According to Marx, formal subsumption is the first step in the process by which capitalism takes over a mode of production, where the productive forces are taken as they are and merely subordinated to capitalist production. Under this form, capitalism is still restricted materially and logistically. Real subsumption, however, is capitalism itself creating technologies of production that are sufficient for capitalist value extraction. Real subsumption is a fundamentally technological change that facilitates the ultimate expansion of capital to productive and social forces. The only barrier to capital becomes capital itself.

Hypersubsumption, a term I introduce in this chapter to refer to contemporary capitalism, emphasizes capitalism's reliance on technology, which has reached a fever pitch with the advent of digital technology and the rise of immaterial labour, waged and unwaged, as the primary means of creating surplus value, which this dissertation, following Matteo Pasquinelli, refer to as "network value."<sup>7</sup> Hypersubsumption follows on the heels of real subsumption, which has already taken the means of production and changed them to suit capitalist needs. This process is intensified even further with hypersubsumption, under which new technology provides the means for these novel creations of subjectivities and then mobilizes this non-waged creation of subjectivity into value through surveillance. Throughout its first three chapters, this dissertation articulates the defining features of hypersubsumption.

Hypersubsumption marks capital's transition from a system of Foucaultian biopower<sup>8</sup> to Gilles Deleuze's free-floating, networked "society of control"<sup>9</sup>, or what Donna Haraway called, in her landmark "Cyborg Manifesto," the 'informatics of domination'<sup>10</sup>: a feedback relationship between cybernetics, labour and capitalism. The first chapter is concerned with the mechanisms of control under hypersubsumption, particularly with the emergence of the cybernetic control of future possibilities through digital technology. Cybernetics is the study of observing information about a particular action and using that as input for a new series of actions designed to produce or disrupt a specific behavior— this is called a feedback loop. First order cybernetics was pioneered

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<sup>7</sup> Matteo Pasquinelli, "Google's PageRank Algorithm: A Diagram of the Cognitive Capitalism and the Rentier of the Common Intellect," *Deep Search: The Politics of Search Beyond Google*, eds. Konrad Becker and Felix Stalder (London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Biopower is the name Michel Foucault gives to a term he coined in *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1978) to refer, on page 140, to the modern state's use of "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations."

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (January 01, 1992): 3-7. [https://cidadeinseguranca.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/deleuze\\_control.pdf/](https://cidadeinseguranca.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/deleuze_control.pdf/).

<sup>10</sup> Donna Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 28.

by mathematician Norbert Wiener<sup>11</sup> after the devastation of WWII, and referred to control mechanisms for machinic behavior. Following the famous series of *Macy Conferences on Cybernetics* of the 1940s and 1950s, Warren McCulloch created second order cybernetics, addressing behavioral feedback loops in the human mind.<sup>12</sup> Cybernetic control through digital means is the total subsumption of the “general intellect”<sup>13</sup> into capitalist value production, or as communization theorist Jacques Camatte eloquently puts it, with the introduction of cybernetics into production, “[c]apital becomes the master of all the activity that the proletariat performs in the factory. Capital incorporates the human brain, appropriates it to itself, with the development of cybernetics; with computing, it creates its own language, on which human language must model itself etc. Now it is not only the proletarians—those who produce surplus-value—who are subsumed under capital, but all men, the greater part of whom is proletarianized.”<sup>14</sup>

To further explore the impact of cybernetic control on capitalism, the first chapter then takes a closer look at digital incarnations of “immaterial labour” and their relationship to the production of subjectivity. Immaterial labour, which will be a vital term to the remainder of the dissertation, was introduced by autonomist theorist Maurizio Lazzarato in refer to labour that produces the cultural and informational content of a commodity.<sup>15</sup> We find that digital labour relies on surveillance technology in order to create surplus value. Because cultural and social content is produced through unwaged immaterial labour during so-called “free time,” the valuable data that it creates as a by-

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<sup>11</sup> Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1948).

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of this history, see Stuart A. Umpleby, “A Short History of Cybernetics in the United States,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 19, vol. 4 (2008): 28-40.

<sup>13</sup> Marx introduces the general intellect in his famous “Fragment on Machines” from the *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, (London, England: Penguin Books, 1973), to describe the condition under which human intellect, creativity and knowledge have been objectified and turned into direct forces of production.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community*, trans. David Brown, (London: Unpopular Books, 1988), 72.

<sup>15</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour,” *Radical Thought In Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Michael Hardt and Paolo Viano, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 133.

product must be identified and then collected, which requires an infrastructure of massive surveillance and tracking apparatuses: smart devices, customer purchase algorithms, ads on emails and websites—the list of interfaces that use surveillance is extensive.

The first chapter then emphasizes the relationship between unwaged immaterial production and the creation of subjectivity, arguing that the self-production of subjectivity by users interacting with digital platforms is the primary mechanism for producing the network value that is integral to capitalist surplus value production under hypersubsumption. As Lazzarato himself notes in his treatise on immaterial labour, “[t]he production of subjectivity ceases to be only an instrument of social control (for the reproduction of mercantile relationships) and becomes directly productive, because the goal of our postindustrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator—and to construct it as ‘active.’”<sup>16</sup> The desire to become a digitally legible individual has become a driving force of both consumption and production, which are now superpositioned into a directly productive marshaling of subjectivity into valorization.

It is no coincidence that both surveillance and cybernetics have their origins in the military. In fact, the driving force of most technological developments or singularities has been aggressive or predatory, and this is easy to see in today’s armed forces, where unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones are literally, and aptly, called “Predator” or “Reaper.” As theorists ranging from Paul Virilio<sup>17</sup> to Antoine Bousquet<sup>18</sup> argue, with the direct pipeline from military R&D to consumer use, militarization is now encroaching on cultural production and the time and place of warfare itself is expanding. In my discussion I refer to the relationship between surveillant data gathering and militarized techniques of “seeing,” taken together as “scopic violence.” Hypersubsumption follows on the heels of real subsumption, which has already taken the means of production and changed them to suit capitalist needs. This process is intensified even further, in the sense

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<sup>16</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), n.p.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti, (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2006)

<sup>18</sup> Antoine Bousquet, *The Eye of War: Military Perception from the Telescope to the Drone*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

that new technology provides the means for these novel creations of subjectivities and then mobilizes this non-waged creation of subjectivity into value through surveillance. I argue that that the militarized origins of these vital technologies are thus forever imbued in them through scopic violence, such that this violence, in the form of visualization and extraction, is actually also a fundamental feature of hypersubsumption.

## 1.2. « Chapter Two: Surveillance »

The second chapter focuses exclusively on surveillance, starting with an overview of the current field of surveillance studies to show the connections those scholars already make between surveillance, violence and capitalism. I am particularly interested here in the creation of what Antoine Bousquet calls “the martial eye,”<sup>19</sup> or the militarization of seeing itself, which transforms the sense beyond mere sight to a predatory synesthesia linked to the controlling techniques of modern statecraft as espoused by the likes of James C. Scott.<sup>20</sup> Surveillance develops from the military to consumer and government uses, and has now become a series of technologies that sort and extract not only valuable data but also desirable or undesirable persons, be they unwanted citizens or unwilling consumers. The dual functions of surveillance as extractive of the value created by subjectivity and as repressive technology of state and non-governmental organizational violence is fundamental to capitalist hypersubsumption, and the two functions work in tandem. The martial gaze constitutes contemporary digital surveillance, which in turn is integral to contemporary capitalism.

Central to the discussion of digitized surveillance is Shoshanna Zuboff’s idea of “surveillance capitalism.”<sup>21</sup> She argues that ubiquitous surveillance has fundamentally

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<sup>19</sup> Bousquet, *Eye*, 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Shoshanna Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2019).

mutated capitalist value production into one reliant on cybernetic control through totalized surveillance. This chapter looks at the consequences of pervasive surveillance on society and production, and asserts that surveillance's omnipresent violent gaze puts us all into a state of constant war, as expanded on by theorists like Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato in their comprehensive treatise, *Wars and Capital*:

The two world wars are responsible for realizing, for the first time, “total” subordination (or “real subsumption”) of society and its “productive forces” to the war economy through the organization and planning of production, labor and technology, science and consumption, at a hitherto unheard-of scale. Implicating the entire population in “production” was accompanied by the constitution of processes of mass subjectivation through the management of communications techniques and opinion creation.<sup>22</sup>

Scopic violence, surveillance capitalism and subjectivity creation are all enmeshed under hypersubsumption. Furthermore, as the expansion of militarized vision has supplanted human sight, a capitalist sensorium takes over the human one.

From here, chapter two will show how military production and the scopic field relate, and the transformation from traditional modes of governance to dataveillance, and reflects on the effects of cybernetic technology and algorithms on governance and citizenship. In particular, I will discuss Marx's concept of the general intellect and the manner in which cybernetics, surveillance and logistics transformed the face of production and instituted the primacy of immaterial labour. Chapter two looks the rise of ubiquitous surveillance and its effects on changes in biopower, which has put the globe into a state of constant warfare, where “there is absolutely no difference between the tracking and capturing of information about a NASDAQ transaction, the tracking and capturing of a terrorist's movements, or the tracking and capturing of consumer trends.”<sup>23</sup> This chapter posits that surveillance technologies integral to capitalism have never (and have no desire to) shed their loyalties to militarization, globalization and imperialism; on

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<sup>22</sup> Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, trans. Ames Hodges (London: Semiotext(e), 2018), 21.

<sup>23</sup> David Panagia, “The Algorithm Dispositif: Risk and Automation in the Age of #datapolitik,” *The Routledge Companion to Media and Risk*, (England: Routledge, 2020), n.p..



the contrary, these same techniques of violence are a key aspect of surveillance capitalism.

### 1.3. « Chapter Three: Coerced Posthumanism and Species-being »

If the first two chapters looked at the impacts of hypersubsumption on capitalist value production, this chapter focuses on the impacts of the former on labour, and the novel relationship between labour and subjectivity created through immaterial labour, which produces the all-important network value. I begin by looking at Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, in which she traces the development of workers from serfs to proletarians in conjunction with the changes in production that transformed feudalism into primitive accumulation and industrial capitalism. Federici argues that the transition to capitalist production is marked by an increasing concretization of the human body into a mechanized paradigm, being seen as a machine for working, and that this coincides with the rise of misogyny and violence against women.<sup>24</sup>

This chapter does not focus so much on the latter phenomenon, but rather uses Federici's narrative about capitalist development as a framework to for my own mapping of capitalist development as it increasingly relies on immaterial labour. I focus in particular on the cultural and affective production aspect of immaterial labour performed by users when they are not at their official jobs. Because the activities that constitute this type of immaterial labour are performed through digital interfaces and telecommunications devices, they are the ones most closely associated with popular visions of "posthumanism". The chapter therefore gives an overview of the field of posthumanism, from "The Cyborg Manifesto" to Rosi Braidotti's myriad texts on critical posthumanism<sup>25</sup>, and posthumanism's relationship to contemporary technological

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<sup>24</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Berkeley: Autonomedia, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> See for example Rosi Braidotti. "Posthuman Critical Theory," *Journal of Posthuman Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 9-25 or Rosi Braidotti. "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," *Theory, Culture and Society* 36, no. 6 (2019): 31-61.

development. I conclude, along with theorists like new materialist Ray Brassier,<sup>26</sup> that the dominant discourses about posthumanism rely problematically on categories of subjectivity created by neoliberal capitalism. It examines Marx's categories of "unproductive" and "productive" labour, labour from "Capitalist Production as the Production of Surplus Value,"<sup>27</sup> "constant" and "variable" capital from Chapter 8 in *Capital* Vol. 1<sup>28</sup>, measuring these categories against activities mobilized to produce network value. Through a discussion as to whether unwaged immaterial labour should be considered labour proper, we arrive at the unique influence that coercion has on today's unwaged immaterial labourers; In particular, this chapter posits that hypersubsumption, which relies on unwaged immaterial labour to produce network value, eschews traditional forms of overt repressive violence in favor of coercion in order to entice users to participate in value-creating activities. Users are coerced into interfacing with surveillant and extractive digital platforms through the urge to create and maintain subjectivities that are legible to contemporary capitalism. Users must maintain this interface in order to reap the many benefits of legibility— including citizenship (through being sorted as desirable by a function of surveillance), convenient consumption, and most importantly, access to a world of other like subjectivities that make up their own pseudo-society. I call these labouring subjectivities "coerced posthumans."

Coerced posthumanism is what provides the labour for Mario Tronti's global social factory<sup>29</sup> referred to in chapter one. By introducing the social aspect of coerced posthumanism, chapter three is able to discuss the former against Marx's concept of

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<sup>26</sup> Ray Brassier, "The Human" (unpublished manuscript, n.d. ), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Marx, "Results of the Direct Production Process," *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, n.p. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/economic/ch02b.htm/>.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 1992), 316.

<sup>29</sup> Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital*, trans. David Broder, (London: Verso Books, 2019), n.p..

“species-being” from the *1844 Manuscripts*<sup>30</sup>, in order to show how capitalist sociality is a debased form of species-being; that is, hypersubsumption. Hypersubsumption dominates the technological interfaces that allow unwaged immaterial labourers to create and maintain their social networks and digital subjectivities, limiting the latter to the imperatives of capitalist production. This brings chapter three back to the other question of species-being: human senses and the sensible. Under hypersubsumption, the human senses are impoverished, and should in fact be thought of as posthuman senses. This assertion paves the way for the next two chapters to present ideas about how contemporary aesthetics can challenge the capitalist dominion over the sensible by creating new communities of sense.

#### 1.4. « Chapter Four: Theories of Aesthetics and Contemporary Art »

Chapters four and five work together to create an account of contemporary art that is then mobilized to appraise specific artistic responses to contemporary surveillance. Chapter four approaches the question of contemporary art through art theorist Peter Osborne’s dialectical materialism, providing a summary of his version of art history through which he arrives at the conclusion that contemporary art is postconceptual art.<sup>31</sup> In a nutshell, Osborne proposes that truly “contemporary” art is art that is able to return the material and conceptual aspects of a work of art, without overdetermining the work through either. Prior to the contemporary age, both of these aspects had been jettisoned in earlier periods of art history in favor of one or the other. This trait is specific to contemporary art that comes after Romanticism, artistic modernism and postmodernism. Contemporary art can

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<sup>30</sup> As will be discussed at length in Chapter Three, species-being is a concept Marx introduces in one of his earlier works, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 2009); this work, which predates *Capital*, introduces the four kinds of alienation of human beings under capitalism, and posits species-being as a non-alienated form of man.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Osborne, “Contemporary art is post-conceptual art,” Public Lecture, Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Villa Sucota, Como, 9 (July 2010): 10-11.

retain concern with both the material and the conceptual facets of art precisely because contemporary art is the art of the present. The art of the present is art that can *critique* the present, and thus must confront within its very ontology the situation of globalized neoliberal capitalism. The dissertation will provide a detailed explanation of Osborne's complex argument about what constitutes contemporary art in chapter four.

Where Osborne champions a return of the conceptual dimension of art (along with the material dimension) through a dialectical movement of overcoming the negation of both dimensions, French philosopher of art Jacques Rancière favors the re-emergence of the aesthetic dimension of art in the traditional sense, wherein "aesthetic" refers to the sensible. Because I intend to synthesize the approaches of the two thinkers to provide my own interpretation of contemporary art, before proceeding to elaborate on Osborne's theories, we look first at Jacques Rancière's theory of "dissensus" and regimes of the sensible. Dissensus refers to "a perturbation of the normal relation between sense and sense. The normal relation, in Platonic terms, is the domination of the better over the worse."<sup>32</sup> The "normal relation" is the hegemonic community of sense that dominates legible forms of visibility in society. For Rancière, the present is the domain of the aesthetic regime of the senses, the realm of the politics of aesthetics: "the politics of aesthetics, which means the way in which the aesthetic experience—as a refiguration of the forms of visibility and intelligibility of artistic practice and reception—intervenes in the distribution of the sensible."<sup>33</sup> The hegemonic community of sense is the one that legislates which communities are visible and which are not, by normalizing a certain relationship between the senses; this means that contemporary art disturbs this dominant distribution of the sensible, making visible other communities of sense.

We return to Osborne's theory of art by focusing on the temporal aspect of his thesis—namely, what makes contemporary art the art of the present. It is revealed that contemporary art is art that glances into the future, into speculative post-capitalist

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<sup>32</sup> Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Autumn 2009): 3.

<sup>33</sup> Rancière, 5.

utopias. Both Osborne and Rancière are concerned with art that overcomes dominant regimes, in one way or another. This chapter concludes with a synthesis of their ideas in the context of the sensible and contemporary art. That way, the final chapter is able to assess specific works of art according to a criteria that explicitly relates to the surveillance and scopic violence of hypersubsumption.

## 1.5. « Chapter Five: Surveillance Art »

Art makes manifest the competing ways that war and surveillance are discussed and valued in mass culture through interpretations of how such technologies are made sensible and experienced. Chapter five explores artistic responses to surveillance, particularly in the form of art that addresses drones. Following Andrea Mubi Brighenti, I refer to these works as “artveillance,” or art that is operating in “the domain of the reciprocal influences and exchanges between art and surveillance. The recognition of such a domain of enquiry has two major implications: on the one hand, more obviously, it invites us to consider art as ‘technological’, in the sense that art is always tied to a technology of production and a technology of mediation (and re-mediation).”<sup>34</sup> While Brighenti uses the term to consider the relationship between art and technology as a general historical and social phenomena, I situate artveillance in relation to hypersubsumption, described in chapter one as the contemporary condition of capitalist production and consumption, in which artveillance’s primary technological mediator, image-based surveillance, plays a major role.

The works in this chapter are divided into three categories: sousveillance, camouflage and counter-production. Artists like James Bridle, pioneer of “The New Aesthetic” movement, fall under sousveillance, which literally means seeing from below—an obvious antidote to surveillance’s “god’s eye” vision. Camouflage art attempts to hide from surveillance. The chapter’s vanguard of camouflage art is Adam Harvey, famous even in popular culture for his dramatic makeups that hide wearers from facial

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<sup>34</sup> Andrea Mubi Brighenti, “Artveillance: At the Crossroad of Art and Surveillance,” *Surveillance & Society* 7, no. 2 (2009): 137.

recognition by disturbing the familiar plays of light and dark the algorithms are trained to recognize as facial planes. Harvey is also an anti-surveillance fashion designer, creating hoodies, athleisure and even burqas that hide from cameras by creating unreadable heat signatures. Harvey, along with conceptual mask-maker and art theorist Zach Blas, represents a different set of ideas about how to hide from the martial eye, and we will investigate how each artist relates to surveillance's various human taxonomies.

The final and richest category, counter-production, was created to describe the work of experimental geographer Trevor Paglen. According to Gary Kafer, experimental geography “rearticulates the documentation of material space along alternative perceptual systems, while also gesturing to a spatial understanding of knowledge production.”<sup>35</sup> Kafer refers to Paglen's *Limit Telephotography*, a series of photographs of top-secret U.S. military bases taken by Paglen from sometimes as far as 65 miles away. Paglen collaborated with astronomers to apply techniques of celestial photography to his terrestrial endeavors. The images are pictures of military installations in name only—instead showing the epistemological and material boundaries of documentary photography and its production. The other Paglen work discussed in this chapter is his *Untitled* drone series—a set of photographs of military drones afloat in the sky. Paglen captures the surveillant flyers as tiny specs, sometimes indistinguishable against enormous skyscapes rich with dominant hues of gold, red, blue and white. The drone series examines the looming role of the eponymous machines in the human imagination, set off through art-historical references to American photography of grandiose landscapes that ignited frontier spirits to colonize and expand empire. Both of Paglen's projects are not so much about the photographs themselves as they are about the limits of knowledge, cultural production and explorations of alternative sensual schemas. Because of this, I posit that he is a flawed example of chapter four's synthesized definition of contemporary art. One thing that Paglen and Rancière share is that neither labour under the illusion that

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<sup>35</sup> Gary Kafer, “Political Agency in Trevor Paglen's *Limit Telephotography*,” *Contemporaneity*, Vol 5, No 1 “Agency in Motion” (2016): 55.

artworks create anything other than the *potential* for something modes of social or political engagement.

## 1.6. « Further Considerations »

This dissertation is by no means exhaustive in its treatments of the various areas of thought it seeks to mobilize, nor do the thinkers it puts together necessarily agree—in fact, some positions are vehemently opposed. Communitarian theories like those of Théorie Communiste (TC) clash with strains of Italian autonomist Marxism over the self-organization of the working class and the primacy of the mass worker as a revolutionary force against capitalism. However, this disagreement does not affect the strands of communitarian and autonomist theory I have tied together within this project; I primarily call on Jacques Camatte’s capitalist ontology of valorization in relation to autonomist theories of immaterial labour and Hardt and Negri’s social worker. Because I am using these thinkers to describe the situation of contemporary capitalist domination, rather than trying to articulate a theory of class struggle or revolutionary action, the opposing sides are not in active conflict.

It is also necessary to acknowledge the impact of feminist Marxist theories that posit the effect reproductive domestic activity and labour have on traditional divisions between communitarian and autonomist workerism. Theorist Marina Vishmidt, whose work on speculative aesthetics will be discussed later in this dissertation, points out how the addition of reproductive labourers into the terrain of workers’ struggles dovetails with the need for gender abolition in overcoming capitalist valuation as part of communitarianism: “The discussion of ‘women’ as a category of subordinate worker and social being in every class society, and its function within the capital relation in particular, relates to overcoming gender as part of the value-form as an immediate principle of communitarianism. The abolition of gender seems to me one way of producing

unity through rupture, through inevitable division of interests and positions in the reproductive apparatus and in the movement.”<sup>36</sup>

Feminist interventions, along with and intertwined with anti-racism and queer studies, also complicate and deepen many issues within surveillance studies and anti-surveillance art. Feminist anti-surveillance art has a long and vibrant history, which is no surprise considering the interest of feminist theory in deconstructing the male gaze, a concept already explicitly linked to cinema and technological gazing.<sup>37</sup> Women are particularly vulnerable to surveillance used as a patriarchal tool to control their bodies, desires, etc. Contemporary feminist art creates imaged-based works that not only reveal the ubiquity of surveillance, but also to tread the line between the obscene and the unseen, participate in counter-surveillance, or, in the case of artist and filmmaker Martine Syms, make overt the imbrication of sexism and racism within the surveillance economy. The relationship between Blackness and surveillance in particular has merited extensive scholarship; One of the most influential books on the topic is Associate Professor Simone Browne’s *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*,<sup>38</sup> which details how the long history of racism against Black bodies and the policing of Black life is both a constitutive practice of surveillance and a continuation of the Transatlantic slave trade.

Though this dissertation only discusses the influence of feminist theory, queer theory or critical race theory (among others) on surveillance in passing, this is not because these issues are not vitally important to surveillance studies or contemporary artveillance. Their deliberate exclusion is for two reasons: one, there already exists a wealth of literature by other authors who can focus on these topics in a way that does them justice, whereas this dissertation never could do so due to the space constraints that come from bringing together so many different areas of thought. Secondly, while Black

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<sup>36</sup> Marina Vishmidt and Neil Gray, “The Economy of Abolition/Abolition of the Economy: Neil Gray in Exchange with Marina Vishmidt,” *Variant* 42 (Winter 2011): 10.

<sup>37</sup> The Male Gaze is a term coined by Laura Mulvey in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18 and refers to the dominance of the male power to look.

<sup>38</sup> Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).



people, undocumented immigrants, the poor, women and other people of color are the overt targets of institutional surveillance, the white, middle-class cisgender men whose artwork I focus on are extensions of surveillant technologies of domination. This dissertation will discuss the domination of sight as it manifests in the machinic martial eye of surveillance, integral to contemporary capitalism. Surveillance's domination of the sensible is part of the tactics used by the hegemonic community of sense for the domination of the sensible. A key part of that domination is the normalization of white, middle-class (largely heterosexual) men's communities of sense. Studying works created by this group is itself an attempt to answer one of the larger questions implied by this dissertation: can technology rooted in capitalist domination be reprogrammed for anti-capitalist purposes?

I cannot say that this question is ever answered with certainty. Rather, it continues to plod along in the milieu of other questions that appear organically alongside and because of it. The goal of this dissertation is to bring artistic experiments to bear on the brutal situation of contemporary capitalism. As with the reception of art, I had no control over what would happen during these encounters. Perhaps my own communities of sense were put into turmoil. However, to get to those questions we will have to first make our way through the history of capitalist domination vis-a-vis changes in technology, labour and subjectivity.

2.

## 2. « Chapter One: Capitalist Development »

This dissertation uses Marx's concept of the capitalist "subsumption" of labour to establish a context in which to examine contemporary surveillance art. I therefore begin by explaining what Marx meant by subsumption, and the two stages he describes in its unfolding: "formal" and "real" subsumption. The chapter then traces how these concepts can be concretely identified in the historical co-evolution of capitalism and technology through early industrial, Fordist, and then post-Fordist phases, giving particular attention to the role of cybernetic technologies in post-Fordism. I go on to review some important theorizations of the social transformations that have accompanied capital's post-Fordist embrace of digitization, notably Giles Deleuze's account of the "society of control" and the propositions of Maurizio Lazzarato, Antonio Negri and others in the tradition of autonomist Marxism<sup>39</sup> about the "general intellect" and "immaterial labour." Building on such work (though also departing from some of its conclusions) I argue that what is generally described as post-Fordism should be understood as the advent of a new stage of capitalist subsumption beyond the "formal" and "real" phases Marx described—a "hypersubsumption," in which capitalist domination is organized via diffuse and omnipresent networks of cybernetic control, and by the exploitation of not only waged but also unwaged immaterial labour, all inherently dependent on surveillance technology to facilitate the self-creation and self-exploitation of individual subjectivities.

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<sup>39</sup> Autonomist Marxism, which focuses on the struggle of the proletariat as the driving force of changes in capitalism, has become an enormous subset of Marxist discourse. Some primary texts include Mario Tronti's *Workers and Capital* trans. David Broder (New York: Verso, 2019), Franco "Bifo" Berardi's *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), Paolo Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's masterful trilogy, which includes *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2005) and *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).

## 2.1. « Formal and Real Subsumption »

According to Marxist scholar David Harvey, “technology can be defined as the use of natural processes and things to make products for human purposes. At its base, technology defines a specific relation to nature that is dynamic and contradictory.”<sup>40</sup>

Technology has always been integral to capitalism’s development, as an essential element in a process that Marx, following Kant and Hegel, called “subsumption.”<sup>41</sup> In German idealist philosophy, subsumption refers to the subjugation of a particular under an abstract universal.<sup>42</sup> Marx initially used the term to describe the subjugation of use-value, which is particular to a specific object, to the infinite abstraction of exchange-value in a commodity, facilitated through money, and then extended this account to describe the envelopment and transformation of labour.

According to Endnotes: “In the English translation of the German, ‘subsumption’ is often rendered as ‘domination’ rather than ‘subsumption.’ While this translation is problematic in the sense that it obscures the logical/ontological significance of this concept, it is appropriate to the extent that it identifies something of the violence implied here.” The violence is that of capital, which consumes and digests labour (and perhaps eventually the entirety of society) under its overarching imperative to self-valorize. At the end of this process, not only the means of production but workers themselves are changed in its image. Subsumption is not only domination, but involves the violent transformation of a particular into a universal for a specific purpose by means of a final cause (the reason for its being, not the methods by which it arrives there).

The question is what propels the goal of a piece of technology—is it its intent at creation—the efficient cause, the way it is used, what it is made from or into? According

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<sup>40</sup> David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 92.

<sup>41</sup> Endnotes, “The History of Subsumption,” *Endnotes 2* (2010): n.p.

<sup>42</sup> Due to Marx’s indebtedness to Hegel as an intellectual predecessor, this dissertation presents the latter’s concept of subsumption from the *Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*,<sup>43</sup> there are four causes: efficient, final, formal and material. The material cause of a statue, for example, is the bronze it is cast from, whereas the formal cause is the statue's mold. The artist, as creator, is the efficient cause. The final cause is the underlying reason for its coming into being. In the analogy with technology, the efficient cause of the introduction of ATMs was to perform the dull, time-consuming money dispensing function in order to free bank tellers up for other tasks. The final cause, however, is capitalism's need for money—the abstract form of exchange value—to move at ever faster speeds in order to conduct and facilitate the maximum number of transactions. This can be best achieved with the human factor kept to a minimum. As the very reason for the being of a thing, the final cause is actually ontologically *a priori* to the thing. It predates and predetermines its existence logically and structurally, though not temporally. Within the historical system of capitalism, the final cause of a thing, be it a technique of production, a commodity or even a worker, is determined by the capitalist imperative of creating surplus value. Thus, for capitalism to fulfill its final cause—self-valorization—it enters into a developmental feedback loop with its environment: I call this loop the process of subsumption.

For Marx, capitalist development goes through two phases: “formal” and “real” subsumption. Formal subsumption is the initial relationship between advancing, though not fully developed, capitalism and society. It corresponds to the production of *absolute* surplus value, which is generated by extending the working day. What changes are the relations between existing modes of production and capital, and laborer and capitalist. In Marx's words, “[t]he more completely these conditions of labour confront [the worker] as the property of another, the more completely is the relation of capital and wage labour present formally, hence the more complete the formal subsumption of labour under capital. As yet there is no difference in the mode of production itself. The labour process continues exactly as it did before—from the technological point of view—only as a

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<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeves (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2016).

labour process now subordinated to capital.”<sup>44</sup> Formal subsumption increases its hold through expanding alienation, by setting up a relationship of domination between the capitalist and the laborer, where each remains formally free. This is the relationship described in *Capital*, Vol. 1<sup>45</sup> wherein the capitalist and the laborer apparently meet in the market to sell their wares as equally free owners. Under this form, capital is still restricted by other social and political forces. Though the freedom of the laborer is, in actuality, only the freedom to work or starve, there is still a semblance of individual relationships between workers and capitalists.

In formal subsumption, capitalism has not yet taken over the means of production themselves, which remain at the level of craft techniques, nor has it become the socially typical mode of production. This subsumption is “formal” in that as far as the modes of production are concerned, it only takes earlier methods and employs them to generate “absolute” surplus value. Absolute surplus value relies on extending labour time. Because the value of a commodity, per Marx’s theory of value, is determined by the socially necessary labour time in it, its value is thus the socially necessary time it takes to make the commodity minus the time, in the form of wages paid, that it takes the laborer to reproduce themselves (i.e., a “living” wage or cost). Thus, in order to increase profit, capital can merely extend the working day. Following this method, however, capital can only increase profit so much, both due to material hinderances like the bodily needs of the workers, and the limitations of craft production processes themselves. It does not create its own technologies but instead relies on what already exists and acts on that.

Real subsumption, on the other hand, fundamentally changes the character of the mode of production itself. This form of subsumption is intrinsically tied to technological development. As machines come to increasingly replace and augment human labour, “objectified labour materially confronts living labour as a ruling power and as an active

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<sup>44</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, 95.

<sup>45</sup> For an extensive discussion of labour time and its relationship to the production of surplus value, see Marx’s *Capital* Vol. 1, Chapter 6, “On the Sale and Purchase of Labour-Power.” *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 1992).

subsumption of the latter under itself, not only by appropriating it, but in the real production process itself; [...] The development of the means of labour into machinery is not an accidental moment of capital, but is rather the historical reshaping of the traditional, inherited means of labour into a form adequate to capital. The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital”<sup>46</sup>

In the phase of real subsumption, capital begins to develop the productive forces of social labour for its own purposes. Only at this point does the application on a large scale of science and of machinery to direct production become possible. Here, therefore, there is a change not only in the formal relation but in the labour process itself. “On the one hand the capitalist mode of production—which now first appears as a mode of production *sui generis* [in its own right] — creates a change in the shape of material production. On the other hand, this change in the material shape forms the basis for the development of the capital-relation, whose adequate shape therefore only corresponds to a particular level of development of the material forces of production. The worker’s relation of dependence in production itself is thereby given a new shape.”<sup>47</sup>

Under real subsumption, capital has been “set free” and there are no longer relations between individual capitalists and labourers. Social relations call forth new techniques of production and infect formerly immune industries. “Neither the individual’s own consumption nor the immediate needs of a given circle of customers remain a barrier to production; now the only barrier is the magnitude of the capital itself.”<sup>48</sup> Real subsumption relies on using fixed capital to create “relative,” rather than absolute surplus value. What capital needs is to make production more efficient—effectively to cut out as much of the process as possible. As Camatte writes: “Capital seeks to free itself from the proletariat, subsuming it under its power, immeasurably developing the productivity of

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<sup>46</sup> Marx, 694.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works Vol. 34, 1861-1864*, Trans. Ben Fowkes, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), Electronic book.

<sup>48</sup> Marx, 106

labour, which means the increase of the power of dead, past labour, resulting in the vertiginous fall in the amount of living labour incorporated in the production process.”<sup>49</sup> The presence of machines drives down the time it takes to make a commodity exponentially, and therefore reduces price. Thus, under real subsumption, surplus value is produced, which does not rely on the extension of the working day (unlike absolute surplus value), but instead relies on quantity of commodities produced through the intensification of the production process. This form of capital reduces the price of individual commodities, but only in order to maximize aggregate profits.

The transition from formal to real subsumption means that capitalism is not only facilitated through technology, but is now the very motor for creating new technologies. As Marx tells us in *The Grundrisse*, advanced technologies of automation are capital’s way of creating a form of production adequate to itself: “In machinery, objectified labour materially confronts living labour as a ruling power and as an active subsumption of the latter under itself, not only by appropriating it, but in the real production process itself... The development of the means of labour into machinery is not an accidental moment of capital, but is rather the historical reshaping of the traditional, inherited means of labour into a form adequate to capital.”<sup>50</sup>

The distinction between formal and real capitalist subsumption represents a fundamental shift from capital being an economic form to its being the dominant social form. In real subsumption, the forces of production organize not merely the making of commodities or the production of value but characterize and shape the entire movement of society and the construction of subjectivities under its regime. Capitalism is, according to Marx, fundamentally a social relation, and contemporary capitalism really has turned the world into what Mario Tronti called a “social factory,” in which “the whole of society

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<sup>49</sup> Camatte, *Capital and Community*, 67.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 692.

lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its domination to the whole of society.”<sup>51</sup>

## 2.2. « Tracing Capitalism »

Marx wrote about the passage from formal to real subsumption in the first volume of *Capital*, published in 1867, and evidently regarded it as a movement visible in the development of the steam-power driven factories of his own era. However, debates about the historical timing of the transition continue to this day.<sup>52</sup> Many Marxist historians see “real subsumption” only truly arriving with the advent of Fordism, a method of production that took hold as an evolution of Taylorist<sup>53</sup> impositions on the industrial factories of Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century in a process best has been best described by the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci in his essay “Americanism and Fordism”<sup>54</sup> from *The Prison Notebooks*. According to Gramsci,

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<sup>51</sup> Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital*, trans. David Broder (London: Verso Books, 2019), n.p.

<sup>52</sup> There is voluminous literature on subsumption. Some critical texts include Carlo Vercellone, “From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism,” *Historical Materialism* 15, no. 1 (2007): 13-36, Christian Fuchs, “Universal alienation, formal and real subsumption of society under capital, ongoing primitive accumulation by dispossession: Reflections on the Marx@ 200-contributions by David Harvey and Michael Hardt/Toni Negri,” *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society* 16, no. 2 (2018): 454-467, Joshua Clover, “Subsumption and crisis,” *The Sage Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, (London: Sage, 2010), and Guido Starosta, “Real Subsumption and the Genesis of the Revolutionary Subject,” in *Marx’s Capital, Method and Revolutionary Subjectivity* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> Named after Frederick Taylor, Taylorism refers to widespread attempts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to apply scientific management techniques to production in order to increase efficiency and worker compliance. The stereotype of the ignorant worker arises largely from this movement, as the ideal Taylorist situation involves separating each moment of production into discreet, highly specialized movements that could be performed, ideally, by a trained monkey. A discussion of Taylorism and its early precursors, including German forestry sciences and their imbrication with state biopolitical regimes can be found in James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, eds. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).



Fordism is a uniquely American evolution of Taylorism that grew out of the semi-automated assembly-lines of automotive factories of Detroit in the twentieth century. Fordism focused on the standardization of work and workers, and the integration of consumption into the cycle of production. Fordism represented the unification of ruling class interests and capitalist technological capability. Because workers could produce more commodities in a workday thanks to the aid of machines, products could be sold more cheaply, and eventually, with militant union organization, workers could be paid a higher wage. Gramsci analyzes the rise of Fordism in America and contrasts it to fascism in Italy. As opposed to traditional Taylorism, Fordism, with its rationalization of work and its brutal treatment of workers as animals, also attempts to manage the moral life of workers outside the factories (e.g., prohibition). It self-consciously proposes an ideology in order to reproduce ideal workers for itself.

Fordism sought to resolve the contradictions internal to capitalism and aimed at a “passive revolution.” That is, a dramatic social transformation instigated from the top down, by the ruling class, of full capitalist modernization without bloodshed. However, according to Gramsci, despite its disciplinary powers, Fordism has more “revolutionary capacity” than capital’s previous phase of artisanal production because workers are more disposed to be thoughtful during their work time—the repetitive nature of single tasks left the mind time to wander. In addition, Gramsci argues that the collective nature of large-scale factory work lends itself to collective organization (an idea bolstered by the strong state of unions at the time). All of this helped heighten tensions between the classes and thus intensify capital’s inherent contradictions.

The question for Gramsci was whether the emphasis on groups of factory workers cooperating could be translated into a socialist workers’ collectivity. Fordism focused on standardization of work and workers, and the integration of consumption into the cycle of production. While the working conditions in industrial factories were generally brutal, physically exhausting and mentally repetitive, there was still a strong possibility of worker solidarity based simply on proximity. Just as capitalism should be thought of as a holistic mode of being based on the circulation of value in the cycle of capitalism *as a*

*whole*—not about each individual capitalist—the worker, though alienated by the menial and isolating position of her labour, could take part in the production of the entire commodity as a whole; each part of an automobile was made in the same factory and each worker could have a relationship to it as a worker in that Ford factory. Additionally, workers were able to clock off and come home from their workplaces. Despite Henry Ford’s notorious initial attempts to police the private lives of his employees, a distinction between work and leisure remained spatially preserved, if not ideologically. After all, the workers in their off time would be obliged use their disposable income to consume commodities produced by capital—a form of consumption that is essential to the functioning of capitalism.

However, this by no means marked the end point of capital’s relentless drive to the machinic remaking of labour, for Fordism was to be followed by “post-Fordism.”<sup>55</sup> Post-Fordism is the term widely used to characterize a new phase of capitalism’s techno-social organization that emerged in the early 1970s, after the crushing defeats of student and worker revolutions in 1968. Confronted by a slow but inexorable decline in the rates of profit it had enjoyed in the decades following the Second World War, capitalist forces sought to further intensify the extraction of surplus value, and mobilized the technological developments of the time—specifically computers and digital networks—to do just that. Post-Fordism marks the advent of a post-industrial, decentralized workplace, with intensified workplace “flexibility,” alongside globalization, deregulation and privatization. It includes the rise of the “gig worker” and the rise of “immaterial labour” which we will discuss later in this chapter— that is, the increasing importance of both

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<sup>55</sup> Post-Fordism, which will be discussed in depth throughout this dissertation, describes a period of capitalist development that emerged in the 1970s as capitalism became globalized, incorporated more advanced telecommunications and cybernetic technologies, and worker identity became more fractured and disparate. Some important works about post-Fordism are Carlo Vercellone’s “From the Mass-Worker to Cognitive Labour: Historical and Theoretical Considerations,” in *Beyond Marx*, eds. Marcel van der Linden and Karl Heinz Roth (Leiden: Brill, 2013) and his article “From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism,” *Historical Materialism* 15, no. 1 (2007): 13-36, David Harvey’s *Condition of Postmodernity* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), and Maurizio Lazzarato’s work on immaterial labour.

waged and unwaged cultural and intellectual work facilitated by telecommunications technology.

Some characteristic features of post-Fordism are described in the collection *Digital Labour: The Internet as Playground and Factory*.<sup>56</sup> The authors are concerned with the changes to labour in a market increasingly governed by cybernetic and internet technologies, and with the affective, emotional and sociocultural responses that have become commodified. They focus particularly on the advent of “playbor” or the “Google model of labour,” which tries to make work pleasurable in order to blur the distinction between work and home without the worker noticing that their hours have become more and more extended. On the other side of the coin, when a person is “at home” producing cultural content, their position as “not at work” facilitates an easier exploitation of the cultural commodities they produce, precisely because being at home makes it more difficult to see their activity as labour. Additionally, the book shows how the rise of precarious or freelance, part-time, gig and other non-benefitted work is facilitated directly through globalization, making factory and other material production cheaper. For example, a mother is able to work from home freelancing for an internet company due to the cheap availability of laptops made by immiserated workers at Foxconn. The rise of social networking and digitally available news and advertising means the everyday person is a constant consumer of products tailored to their desires by algorithms that generate not only products but prices and related objects. I will argue that this post-Fordist phase of capitalist domination should be considered a new stage of capitalist subsumption. However, to prepare for this argument I first review the work of a lineage of theorists who have made broadly a similar propositions.

### 2.3. « Societies of Control and Immaterial Labour »

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<sup>56</sup> Trebor Scholz, ed., *Digital Labour: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (London: Routledge, 2013).

Gilles Deleuze's 1992 "Postscript on the Societies of Control"<sup>57</sup> details what he refers to as the shift from Foucault's disciplinary societies of physical enclosure to a network of free-floating control. Foucault located disciplinary societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arguing that they reach their height at the outset of the twentieth. They initiate the organization of vast spaces of enclosure. The individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another, each having its own laws: first, the family; then the school ("you are no longer in your family"); then the barracks ("you are no longer at school"); then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the pre-eminent instance of the enclosed environment.<sup>58</sup> Foucault's disciplinary society exists under his model of biopolitical governance.<sup>59</sup> The aforementioned spaces of enclosure are spaces of social organization. In Louis Althusser's terms, the above individual would be interpellated as a subject in and through the hospital, school and family. In perhaps the most famous and comprehensive treatise on the matter, Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"<sup>60</sup> emphasized the need to think the economic base of capitalism along with its superstructure precisely because it is the latter, with its ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) that reproduces the worker in the image of capitalism. Under this schema, institutions like churches and schools co-raise young citizens under various ideologies to be good subjects of capitalism. In a section on Christianity, Althusser uses the example of submission to God to illustrate how the structure of all particular ideologies reveals the dual nature of the term "subject," as well as subjectification:

Let me summarize what we have discovered about ideology in general.  
The duplicate mirror structure of ideology assures simultaneously:

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<sup>57</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3-7.

<sup>58</sup> Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 3.

<sup>59</sup> The concepts of governance and biopolitics will be explored at length in another chapter. An introduction to the history of biopolitics can be found, among other places, in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (New York: Random, 1990).

<sup>60</sup> Louis Althusser, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *On Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2008).

1. the interpellation of ‘individuals’ as subjects;
2. their subjection to the Subject;
3. the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects’ recognition of each other, and finally the subject’s recognition of himself;
4. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right; Amen — ‘*So be it*’.<sup>61</sup>

Individuals become subjects. The polyvalent nature of the term “subject” means it can refer to a thing or topic, a political subject, or being subjected to something. In the case of ideology, once the individual becomes a subject, they are necessarily subjected (or self-subject) to a greater Subject; in the example above, the Subject is God, but for all intents and purposes, capitalism is the Subject *par-excellence*. Under ideology, workers are reproduced as human capital in a mirror image of the production of capitalist technology under real subsumption. Subsumption and subjectification have the same inflection of domination at their core.

Control societies, by contrast, exert domination through cybernetic networks, changing the composition of the surveillant gaze and how it operates on the populace. Maša Galič, Tjerk Timan and Bert-Jaap Koops expound on Deleuze’s idea of modulation as a distinction between Foucault’s biopolitical surveillance and surveillance under control societies: “...modulations take place in ways that are often invisible for the subjects or citizens...Deleuze states that modulations happen in invisible or opaque networks that are imperceivable [sic] to individual citizens. As a result, surveillance also moves away from being a present and often physical force on individuals, to become more abstract and numerical.”<sup>62</sup> We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair but rather with masses, samples, data, markets or “banks.” They also point out how under Foucault’s model of discipline, the focus is on institutions that attempt to create long-term social stability. The control societies, however, ascend along with the

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<sup>61</sup> Althusser, 55.

<sup>62</sup> Maša Galič, Tjerk Timan and Bert-Jaap Koops, “Bentham, Deleuze and beyond: An overview of surveillance theories from the panopticon to participation,” *Philosophy & Technology* 30, no. 1 (2016): 19.

expansion of private corporations as dominant social and political entities; corporations are explicitly concerned with making profit, rather than controlling social structures. In order to extract the maximum profit, these corporations must constantly surveil and monitor workers, workplaces, the markets, etc. Thus, cybernetic control is a vital mechanism for creating and maintaining control societies. Whereas a disciplinary society is interested in creating docile, manageable bodies, a control society wants to create consumers from whom it is able to extract profit. Instead of surveillance being used to repress, punish or train bodies, it is now largely used for constructing and monitoring consumption patterns. Some scholars elucidate the relationship between control societies, surveillance and militarization even more explicitly; Anna Natale, Dolores Galindo and Flavia Lemos have written that “[c]apitalism does not work through exclusion, on the contrary; it needs contact, commitment, exchange, and commerce. There is no society of control without worldwide market, and this control is possible if, maintained and recycled with the use of the latest surveillance and defense technologies. In this market, great corporations are responsible for the expansion of weaponry production and capitalize themselves in military and civilian contexts[.]”<sup>63</sup> Natale et. al. go on to trace the history of the expansion of military research and strategies into the civilian and consumer sectors, as well as the ongoing reliance on algorithmic surveillance by corporations. In a control society, the relationship to power has become virtualized; one is always being watched, or watching oneself, and always waiting to be seized, captured or preyed upon. Perhaps it is money that expresses the distinction between the two societies best, since discipline always referred back to minted money that locks gold in as numerical standard, while control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies. The old monetary mole is the animal of the spaces of enclosure, but the serpent is that of the societies of control.<sup>64</sup> For Deleuze, the

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<sup>63</sup> Anna Natale, Dolores Galindo and Flavia Lemos, “A Descriptive Cartography of Drone Art: Strategies of Resistance in Military Conflicts,” *artciencia.com Revista De Arte, Ciência E Comunicação*, 19 (2015): n.p.

<sup>64</sup> Deleuze, “Postscript,” 5.

serpent, with its rounded, shifting coils, is the new spirit of capitalism—a combination of the mutation of machines with the evolution of society outside of the walls of the factory and into the world, where circulation, or sidwinding, is king.

A similar line of thought about post-Fordist capitalism has been developed by Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Maurizio Lazzarato and other members of the school of autonomist Marxism. Their analysis rests on a passage from Marx's *Grundrisse*, "The Fragment on Machines," which autonomist theory has made famous:

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real-life process.<sup>65</sup>

For Lazzarato and Negri the "Fragment on Machines" prefigures post-Fordist capitalism's harnessing of the world's social and intellectual powers via cybernetic technologies. What the fragment from *The Grundrisse* suggests, however, is not only that machines would come to dominate whole sectors of production but that a *relationship* between humans and machines would come to characterize and dominate production.

As Maurizio Lazzarato explains, the autonomists contend that in the era of cybernetic technologies, capitalist valorization processes focuses on "immaterial labour."<sup>66</sup> Immaterial labour, or the harnessing of the world's social and intellectual powers for generating value, is "the labour that produces the informational and cultural

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<sup>65</sup> Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nioclaus, (1839-41) (New York: Penguin Classics, 1993): 692.  
doi:10.1007/978-1-349-05221-9/.

<sup>66</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): 131.

content of the commodity.”<sup>67</sup> It is split into two types of content: the informational, which “refers directly to the changes taking place in workers’ processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control,”<sup>68</sup> and the cultural: “the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.”<sup>69</sup> The two types of content of immaterial labour are functions of the general intellect, constituted by the social and intellectual (a.k.a. creative) powers of humanity.<sup>70</sup>

Immaterial labour thus includes many activities, such as taste-making, political opining,<sup>71</sup> and most recently, generating content on social media platforms, that have historically not been counted as labour by orthodox Marxists, either because there is no tangible commodity produced, and/or it is unwaged. But the autonomist contention is that

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<sup>67</sup> Lazzarato, 132.

<sup>68</sup> Lazzarato, 132.

<sup>69</sup> Lazzarato, 132.

<sup>70</sup> The general intellect, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, refers to a productive force that is not a direct material infrastructure—e.g., factories—but is instead a harnessed version of the natural critical powers of humans. As such, it is a vastly important concept particularly for theorists of immaterial labour, digital labour, cognitive labour etc., because it refers to the activities necessary for producing commodities unique to the digital economy. For some works that rely heavily on the general intellect, see Frank Berardi, “What does Cognitariat Mean? Work, Desire and Depression,” *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2005): 57-63, Paolo Virno, “General Intellect,” *Historical Materialism* 15, no. 3 (2007): 3-8, Matteo Pasquinelli, “On the origins of Marx’s general intellect,” *Radical Philosophy* 2, no. 6 (2019): 43-56, Tony Smith, “The General Intellect in the Grundrisse and Beyond,” in *Marx’s Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse*, eds. Riccardo Bellofiore et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), Marcello Musto, “Dissemination and reception of the Grundrisse in the world,” in *Karl Marx’s Grundrisse*, ed. Marcello Musto (London: Routledge, 2008), and Serhat Kolođlugil, “Digitizing Karl Marx: The New Political Economy of General Intellect and Immaterial Labor,” *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 27, no. 1 (2015): 123-137.

<sup>71</sup> It has been argued by some that while creators of cultural content are exploited, their activities should not be considered labor, precisely because they are unwaged and “voluntary.” See Marc Andrejevic, “Exploiting YouTube: Contradictions of user-generated labour,” eds. P. Snickers and P. Vonderau, *The YouTube Reader* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009). I will discuss this so-called voluntarism, along with the distinction between what constitutes labor and not, in later chapters.



it marks a profound shift in the way labour is subordinated to capital. As Lazzarato puts it, “the worker's personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command. This transformation of working-class labour into a labour of control, of handling information, into a decision-making capacity that involves the investment of subjectivity.”<sup>72</sup>

Of course, as many critics of Hardt and Negri have relentlessly pointed out,<sup>73</sup> immaterial labour is not strictly immaterial, nor has immaterial production surpassed material production, or diminished the role of very material infrastructures in circulating so-called immaterial labour. However, Hardt and Negri acknowledge these points: “When we claim that immaterial labour is tending towards the hegemonic position, we are not saying that most of the workers in the world today are producing primarily immaterial goods...[t]he labour involved in all immaterial production, we should emphasize, remains material—it involves our bodies and brains as all labour does. What is immaterial is its product.”<sup>74</sup> The importance of immaterial labour as it has been explored by theorists like Hardt, Negri and Lazzarato is that it characterizes a fundamental change in the way value is produced, consumed and circulated under global capital, and how these changes have fundamentally undermined the traditional categories of consumer and worker. The widespread introduction of sophisticated machines not only blurs the traditional distinction between workplace and home, creating a constant time for work and therefore constant value production, but also removes the worker from a defined position in the

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<sup>72</sup> Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour,” 133.

<sup>73</sup> For some examples, see David Camfield, “The Multitude and the Kangaroo: A Critique of Hardt and Negri's Theory of Immaterial Labour,” *Historical Materialism* 15, no. 2 (2007): 21-52, Nicholas Thoburn, “Difference in Marx: the lumpen proletariat and the proletarian unnameable,” *Economy and Society*, 31, no. 3 (2011): 434-460, Jakob Rigi, “Peer production and Marxian communism: Contours of a new emerging mode of production,” *Capital & Class* 37, no. 3 (2013): 397-416, Frederick Harry Pitts, “A crisis of measurability? Critiquing post-operaismo on labour, value and the basic income,” *Capital & Class* 42, no. 1 (2018): 3-21, and Paul Thompson, “Foundation and Empire: A critique of Hardt and Negri,” *Capital & Class* 29, no. 2 (2005): 73-98.

<sup>74</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 109.

chain, thereby removing the role of the human in production and destroying the identity of the worker as worker.

An example of this process is the rise of so-called “prosumption.” In 1980, the futurist Alvin Toffler coined the term “prosumer”<sup>75</sup> a derivative of dotcom business lingo indicating production by consumers. A prosumer, therefore, is a producer who also consumes. The prosumer is intimately related to the rise of immaterial labour, as the introduction of algorithmic Point of Sale (POS) and marketing systems have allowed companies like Amazon to track what people buy and then use these past purchases to predict what they might want in the future. However, companies like Amazon do not just altruistically suggest what a person might want to buy based on a “neutral” examination of their past tendencies. On the contrary, the opaque technology of search engines allows companies to push certain sponsored products and even adopt variable pricing based on individual customer profiles that extend far beyond merely what somebody buys. These companies can manipulate purchasing patterns using geographical information obtained from person’s IP address, what they have entered into a search bar, and even what they have spoken aloud in the presence of the ubiquitous but invisible microphones on our smart devices. As they say, Alexa is always listening. This is cybernetic consumption, where a network of technological devices serving the interests of various companies react to the choices made by a person and then feed them back predictions that seem based on that person's desires but are actually shaping those desires. It is a constant feedback loop, the coils of the serpent, a prison of prosumers without walls.

The prosumers or those who produce “immaterially” are not just high-tech or service workers in the Global North, and what they produce is not limited to immaterial data, information, affect or culture. Such a person may be a factory worker in a Mexican maquiladora who works on the assembly line to make very material objects like sodas, while simultaneously owning a smartphone and using their break to buy a new pair of shoes through Amazon. Both of these actions participate in the circulation of capital, and

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<sup>75</sup> Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave: the classic study of tomorrow* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1980).

both are vital to it; as was stated before, the infrastructures for immaterial production and consumption are very real.

What is at stake here is the relationship between subjectivity, technology and political control. According to Lazzarato, “[t]he capitalist needs to find an unmediated way of establishing command over subjectivity itself; the prescription and definition of tasks transforms into a prescription of subjectivities. The new slogan of Western societies is that we should all ‘become subjects.’ Participative management is a technology of power, a technology for creating and controlling the ‘subjective processes.’”<sup>76</sup> Moreover, future desire has reached a fever pitch through the integration of advanced digital machines.

In one of their more recent books, *Assembly*, Hardt and Negri, write about “extractive capitalism,” proposing that “[t]he center of gravity of the capitalist mode of production is today becoming—this is our general definition—the extraction of the commons, a process that entails both “the extraction of value produced in the innumerable circuits of social life and...the extraction of value from the earth and the various forms of natural wealth we share in common.”<sup>77</sup> The commons thus includes both Lazzarato’s immaterial labour and ecological systems. Extraction, the nominative form of “to extract,” means literally to draw out or pull out from a fixed position.<sup>78</sup> This definition comes from its first uses in fifteenth century France, which itself came from the Latin *extrahere*, from *ex* meaning out and *trahere* meaning to draw. An extract, in the context of the written word, is a “digest or summary of something which has been written at greater length.”<sup>79</sup> For Hardt and Negri, while production of commodities is still a central part of capitalism, it is now extended to wider parasitic extraction and harvesting, either from the planetary metabolism or from the general intellect. In the latter case, this

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<sup>76</sup> Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour,” 135.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 162.

<sup>78</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “extract,” [https://www.etymonline.com/word/extract?ref=etymonline\\_crossreference#etymonline\\_v\\_14124/](https://www.etymonline.com/word/extract?ref=etymonline_crossreference#etymonline_v_14124/). \*

<sup>79</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Assembly*.

harvesting is taking place specifically through surveillance technologies. Extractive capitalism is a useful term to build from, with a focus on the technological aspects of its infrastructure and its impact on social life as a whole, as well as its role in the production of subjectivity and control, and the feedback loop of subsumed subjectivity.

However, Hardt and Negri insist capitalism's reliance on the creativity and adaptability of the contemporary worker will also be its downfall. According to them, in order for capitalism to harness the social and intellectual powers of workers it must also loosen the restrictive, nearly carceral managerial controls that Deleuze's "Postscript" referred to as characteristic of Foucauldian disciplinary societies. Workers must be left to self-manage and self-motivate in order for their "natural" resources to be extracted. This is a double-edged sword, because the workers could just start using their creativity and time for themselves, reappropriating intellectual and ecological resources and constructing "the common—a common organized against the capitalist appropriation of social life, against private property and its markets[...]"<sup>80</sup> But *Assembly* does not adequately account for the role of inhuman mediations and interfaces that are the infrastructures of each capitalist extraction. The fruits of common production must be extracted via technology that has evolved through subsumption by capitalism; workers and consumers do not have access to Amazon's shopping algorithms, fish harvested en masse do not get redistributed to the fishermen, and so on. What is usually "returned" in the cycle is something integral to restarting the circuit of production-consumption: a suggested product for purchase. It is also vital to look at the effects of this form of production, particularly of immaterial labour, on those who are exploited at the same time as they consume. In the next section, I will present a perspective on post-Fordism that, while drawing on the insights of Deleuze, Hardt, Negri and Lazzarato, differs significantly in their conclusions and returns us to the issue of subsumption.

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<sup>80</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Assembly*, 244.

## 2.4. « Hypersubsumption »

How should we characterize our current capitalist phase in terms of subsumption, in a way that accounts for the importance of technological developments that blur the distinction between nature, machines and man, and also emphasizes the massive role played by immaterial labour, waged and unwaged, in the edifice that makes up contemporary capitalist domination? I contend that this situation can be termed “hypersubsumption.” This term originates in the work of Nick Dyer-Whiteford, who has used it to characterize a moment when capital “taps the psychophysical energies of species-life at every point on its circuit: not just as variable capital (labour), but also as a circulatory relay (consumerist consciousness, ‘mind share’), a precondition of production (the general pool of biovalues and communicative competencies necessary for ‘general intellect’), and even as constant capital (genetic raw materials).”<sup>81</sup> He and his co-authors have also used the term in relation to increasingly sophisticated artificial intelligences overtaking human abilities at multiple points across the circuit of capital.

My formulation of hypersubsumption differs somewhat from Dyer-Whiteford’s but agrees that it fundamentally involves posthuman forms of labour and hence relates to species-life and species-being (*Gattungswesen*). “Species-being” is a term Marx defines in the *1844 Manuscripts* as the opposite of capitalist alienation: it is the human capacity to transform its itself through socialized labour. Technology is implicitly fundamental to species-being, since technological objects are integral to how human beings affect the world around them. If we return to the definition of technology as a use of natural processes/materials to make products for human purposes (a variant on species being), or to augment or aid human life, then technological innovation appears as a fundamentally human activity.<sup>82</sup> It is through digital and telecommunications technology that capital’s

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<sup>81</sup> Nick Dyer-Whiteford, “The University in the Era of General Intellect,” in *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments against Neoliberal Globalization*, eds. Mark Coté, Richard J.F. Day, and Greig de Peuter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 60.

<sup>82</sup> There will be an extended discussion of the relationship between humans and different forms/formulations of technology, as well as technological ontology as a whole, later in this work. This section will also discuss the best way to frame humanity and technology and how they inform each other in their co-formation.

valorization process unites the productive force we have been calling immaterial labour. This process is, however, anathema to species-being, as it heralds the destruction of the sociality of work. Hypersubsumption, therefore, occurs with the total domination and inversion of humanity's species-being through technology.

Much has been made in recent years of the disintegration of worker identity and solidarity under post-Fordist capital by writers that choose, as I do, to focus on the “immaterial” in order to identify and critique the unique characteristics of capitalism today. The reasons for the loss of worker identity and the decline of unions are numerous and include the impact of neoliberal austerity policies and their destruction of social welfare programs which have traditionally supported the working class, as well as the rise of privatization and “free market” ideologies. But this work frames this situation through the condition of hypersubsumption via a novel relationship to technological automation on both the factory floor and in the “private” space of the home, as well as interstitial “social” spaces. It also accounts for the effects of technological innovations on individuality/subjectivity (and the impact of shifts in the latter on formulations of community and politics). It is emergent network technologies come to life, in tandem with globalized capitalism, that allow a new process by which the social factory ascends. The machines that have risen and have become, as Marx predicted, the organs of social practice. Machines not only produce commodities, as well as other machines, they are also the mechanisms by which informational and culture products of value are produced, and this production is the production of subjectivity itself—the production of surplus value through a cybernetic feedback loop between subjectivity, consumption and production.

Contemporary capitalism is a system within which the self-exploitation of workers is imperative to their production as workers and as global subjects. Therefore, another defining feature of hypersubsumption is an individualism, albeit of a different kind than the classic liberal conception. Under classical ideology the individual becomes a subject, with all this entails. Subject-subjectification is a two-sided coin; though there is domination and subservience to the state and other organizations, as well as to hegemonic

cultural and social norms, the subject is also afforded the status of citizenship. Even if this was not bestowed legally, at least one was brought into a community, which more often than not had a political outlet or function. This model of subjecthood was alluded to by Deleuze in his “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” when he mentions Foucault’s model of spatial incarceration, which corresponds to the apex of biopolitics.

Hypersubsumption focuses on the status of society and capital when the transformation into the social factory is complete. Negri was correct when, relatively early in his career, he wrote: “In operating circulation, capital itself as sociality, as the capacity to engulf within its own development, in an ever more determined manner, every socially productive force. The subjectivity that this synthesis confers on capital represents what capital itself has achieved through the process of subsumption, through the ever more coherent and exhaustive acts of subjugation of society.”<sup>83</sup> Despite all this, however, he still believes in the identity of the laboring class as it is constituted in/through opposition to capitalist production; moreover, he believes in the necessity for a new working-class subjectivity to rise up in opposition to capitalism. But does not the loss of an apparently coherent worker identity become the real loss of the possibility of identifying (and therefore organizing) as workers, not because of the loss of traditional forms of work but of traditional modes of the reproduction of laborers, and of the category of production itself?

Under hypersubsumption, the barrier to a coherent worker identity is a technologically mediated individualism that has moved us beyond biopolitical questions of subjectivity and ideology. As Harvey puts it, under post-Fordist capitalism “workers are isolated and individualized, alienated from each other by competition, alienated from a sensual relation to nature (from both their own nature as passionate and sensuous human beings and that of the external world). To the degree that intelligence is increasingly incorporated into machines, so the unity between mental and manual aspects

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<sup>83</sup> Antonio Negri and Jim Fleming, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991), 121.

of laboring is broken.”<sup>84</sup> The key aspect here is alienation and atomization, through the breaking of the subject into discreet blocks of information consumed by capital, and the experience of the datafied self as highly individualistic. The prosumer produces themselves in the act of consuming themselves. This also means that the ideology of hypersubsumption is post-Althusserian, in that ideology no longer relies on any apparatus other than the freedom to take oneself to the marketplace.

This new individualism is inextricable from the destruction of classic worker identity, due to the evolution of capital itself. As Ben Noys says: "the capitalist response of decoupling the worker from work would also dispense with the affirmation of worker's identity as an essential 'moment' for capitalist reproduction."<sup>85</sup> Traditional Marxist notions of "labour" are far from the only value-making activities. The identity of the worker is no longer necessary for capitalism—in fact, it has become anathema to it. Instead of a pool of workers reproduced by ideology and managed through biopolitics, there is a pool of surplus value being collected from a mass made up of isolated nodes that light up according to their digital footprints.

Whereas capitalism traditionally relied on the creation of surplus value, first through the extension of the working day under formal subsumption and then on the automation of valorization through real subsumption, fueled by heavy investment in technological advances, it has now closed the gap between consumption and production, and no longer needs simple ideological interpellation to reproduce either its labour-power or its consumers. The condition of hypersubsumption is better described by the somber words of Camatte, rather than the optimism of Hardt and Negri: "Overproduction is determined by the fact that there is production for the sake of production, and not for the consumption of whoever it may be. Production is production of surplus-value. Commodities are only vectors of it and present no interest except inasmuch as they

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<sup>84</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 135.

<sup>85</sup> Benjamin Noys, "The War of Time: Occupy, Communization and the Military Question," *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* 10, no. 1-2 (2013): 88.



preserve this character in the total process of capital. But then, if one can speak of consumption, it is consumption by capital itself.”<sup>86</sup>

## 2.5. « Problems of Periodization »

Does hypersubsumption represent a truly new era of capitalist development? Questions about how to characterize current trends in capitalism are vital for opening spaces of criticism in the tradition laid out in Max Horkheimer’s 1937 essay, “Traditional and Critical Theory.”<sup>87</sup> In this essay, Horkheimer proposes that philosophy, by engaging with social and political questions, should become a critical discourse on society itself. Though his was a sociological program meant to engage dialectically with history, what is important is the focus on philosophy’s ability to engage with the sensual material world and the importance of doing so to enact real change, particularly in class relations. Taken far enough, critique is a form of revolutionary political activity.

Questions about characterizing late capitalism come along with questions about the nature of periodization. Theorists like David Harvey use Marx’s concept of alienation from the *1844 Manuscripts*<sup>88</sup> to describe shifts in capitalism as dialectical developments of historical materialism, or movements in history that are cyclical and relational. He is extremely critical of periodization, writing that “it is perhaps comforting to explain away the recent stresses within capital as if we are confronting the birth pangs of an entirely new capitalist order in which knowledge and culture (and biopolitics, whatever that is) are the primary products rather than things. While some of this is undoubtedly true, it would be an error to imagine any radical break with the past and a double error to

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<sup>86</sup> Camatte, *Capital and Community*, 81.

<sup>87</sup> Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Continuum, 1989).

<sup>88</sup> Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 2009) identifies four forms of alienation as a direct result of capitalism’s institution as the domination social and economic form: alienation of worker from product, alienation of worker from work (or the act of producing), alienation from species-being or the essence of the human as productive, and finally alienation from other workers.

presume that the new forms escape the contradictions of compound growth.”<sup>89</sup> For Harvey, there is no development that does not spawn a contradiction, and no non-contradictory response to a contradiction. This is the dialectical movement of capitalist development, which under this model mutates from and according to its existing shape in a progression, rather than evolving into something entirely new with each development.<sup>90</sup>

Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, find it most fruitful to look at real and formal subsumption as they create new periods in capital’s history that represent radical breaks with previous modes of production. They rail against the perspective of dialectical historical development, claiming “the proletarian subject is not simply the product of a historical process, a ‘thing’ produced and dominated by capital, but also a mode of ethical and political conduct, liberating itself from within capitalist relations to go beyond capital.”<sup>91</sup> This distinction is vital because Harvey, a die-hard dialectical materialist, sees revolutionary political possibility in what he deems the inherent contradictions in all avenues of life under capital, while Hardt and Negri’s perspective focuses on the potentialities of workers in relation to fundamentally new modes of production that are created.

Endnotes sums up the question of periodization succinctly, but without Negri’s hyperbolic optimism: “The question is how to think rupture without either sliding into a dogmatic and abstract schematism, or an equally dogmatic appeal to immediate historical

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<sup>89</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 238.

<sup>90</sup> Other work critical of periodizing capitalist development includes Bob Jessop, “What Follows Fordism? On the Periodization of Capitalism and Its Regulation,” in *Phases of Capitalist Development*, eds. Robert Albritton, Makoto Itoh, Richard Westra and Alan Zuege (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), and Andreas Bieler, Ian Bruff and Adam David Morton, “Acorns and fruit: From totalization to periodization in the critique of capitalism,” *Capital & Class* 34, no. 1 (2010): 25-37. For some famous historical examples of periodization, see Rudolf Hilferding, *Finance Capital: A Study in the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*, trans. Morris Watnik and Sam Gordon (London: Routledge, 1981), Vladimir Lenin, “Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism,” in *V.I. Lenin Collected Works Vol. 22*, trans. Yuri Sdobnikov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), and Ernest Mandel, *Long Waves of Capitalist Development* (London: Verso, 1995).

<sup>91</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Assembly*, 73.

experience.”<sup>92</sup> Unlike Hardt and Negri, who readily characterize large-scale shifts in capitalism as radical breaks, Endnotes’ project is to “trace the discontinuities”<sup>93</sup> present within contemporary capitalism, which they frame as a capitalism in crisis with no revolutionary workers’ parties of the past to respond. It is clear that having some way of describing contemporary capitalism is vital for tracing new strategies and forms of struggle. The question is whether periodization is real and necessary, or merely an arbitrary marker imposed on history in order to create totalizing sentiments that do more harm than good to revolutionary efforts. Yet the problem with a model of dialectical development is its tendency to reduce every change to an eternal return, which may mean missing real seismic shifts in the terrain of struggle. Does history necessarily have to progress either by ruptures or as fundamentally smooth and changeless?

My proposal leans toward tracing capitalist development through phases of subsumption, via the introduction of hypersubsumption focuses on both logical and material questions of the effects of new technology on the social and political world. My work looks at these developments through the arc of capitalism as an “ontology” whose goal, as we have seen, is fundamentally a “return of the same.” It always returns to self-valorization.<sup>94</sup> The concern with drastic changes in formations of subjectivity as a result of this was already prefigured in Marx’s original discussion of formal and real subsumption as an unease with the way capitalist expansion through the coopting and eventual transformation of technology instantiates real material changes on surrounding social world. Under hypersubsumption, capitalism returns the social body to work, mediated through capitalist technology, as the only way to participate socially, and the only way to be “embodied.” That is, alienation does not just appear naturalized but now constitutes sociality, productivity and collectivity all in one. Fueled by capitalism’s new modes of value creation, technological changes are cybernetic controls on the future and

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<sup>92</sup> Endnotes, “History,” 130.

<sup>93</sup> Endnotes, 130.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, “The Powers of the Exploited and the Social Ontology of Praxis,” *tripleC* 16, no. 2 (2018): 415-423.

society is a control society, facilitated by unimaginably fast digital technologies that are birthed completely within the grasp of capitalism and thus answer to its core mandate of self-valorization. In Camatte's words, "[t]he immediate process of production is the indissoluble unity of the labour process and the valorization process...the production of subjectivity as the content of valorization."<sup>95</sup>

Hypersubsumption is capital ridding itself of labour through production itself, capitalizing on unproductive labour and consumption by turning consumption into free labour, funneled through fixed capital. The content of valorization is the production not of subjectivity but of dominated individualism. Capitalism has achieved ultimate value extraction through feeding on free activity (facilitated by this same technological mediation). Most importantly, this phase of capitalist development has subsumed labour under its ontology of self-valorization: each person, user or prosumer is a node of capitalist production (not simply reproduction) onto themselves, internalizing the capitalist maxims of competition, individuation and consumption. Capitalist production has become fundamental to the production of subjectivities, where the phases of consumption and production have merged. As Camatte says, following Marx's sentiments about machines and subsumption entails understanding the exploitation of workers by the means of production—technologies.

The institutions of formal and then real subsumption themselves have created this very milieu in which capitalism thrives; capitalism is able to extract value from the common, for example, because its final cause of valorization has ontological priority thanks to the environs created through earlier developments of capital. Capitalism, for example, creates its own malleable workforce—the precariat<sup>96</sup>—perfect for the unstable employment typical under immaterial economies. Capitalism has become capable of creating value out of forms of life that it previously did not use. It not only works by

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<sup>95</sup> Camatte, *Capital and Community*, 18.

<sup>96</sup> According to Guy Standing's comprehensive book on the subject, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), the precariat is an emerging (arguably now fully articulated, since this book was written more than 10 years ago) class comprised of workers who move frequently between jobs, whose livelihoods are by definition "precarious."

forming a narrow, synoptic view of the world only as useful for capitalism and then actually creating material changes to this world, but also by constantly creating the subjectivities that it desires, and only those. We can see how the condition of hypersubsumption changes the very character of labour, consumption and production. It puts into question the status of subjectivity and identity, both collective and individual. But it also challenges the very fundamental spatial and temporal freedoms supposedly afforded to legible subjects under older forms of capitalism; the spaces of control are no longer mere visible enclosures. In order to account for the relationship between capitalist circuits of production and consumption under hypersubsumption and contemporary forms of subjectivity and labour, as well as hypersubsumption's relationship to the larger themes of extraction, globalization and governmentality, we now turn to a discussion of the state of contemporary surveillance. Constant watching is necessary because there is no designated “production time”—one is always potentially producing. It is thus through surveillance, capture and sorting that contemporary capitalism achieves new heights of valorization.

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### 3. « Chapter Two: Surveillance and Militarization »

A person walking down the streets of London, England, or any city in the United Kingdom, will have their image quickly picked up by a familiar device, an off-white rectangle situated somewhere above their head. This object is known as a closed-circuit television camera or CCTV. The Data Installation and Supplies Network estimates that there are approximately 1.5 million CCTV cameras currently operating in the UK.<sup>97</sup> These ubiquitous machines are often operated by private companies and used by police and state governments alike, ostensibly to prevent crimes, catch offenders, foil terrorist plots, etc. The proliferation of contemporary devices that surveil their users in various ways—including but not limited to CCTVs, smart phones, watches, televisions, “smart home” devices (even smart water bottles that monitor how much water you drink and then chastise you for not hydrating enough), laptop cameras, and fitness trackers—have led to an immense increase in the volume of works known as surveillance studies. This diverse field of inquiry looks at the technological, political and philosophical implications of a society saturated with devices that watch our every move and, moreover, collect and transmit this information to private companies and state governments.

This chapter will discuss the rise and development of surveillance technologies starting with their origins in the military research, and their imbrication with national-security state politics. It will look at the changing attitudes towards uses of surveillance technology as industrial capitalism shifts to the current model of neoliberal, globalized capitalism characterized by what the previous chapter referred to as hypersubsumption, and will trace the evolution of intimate monitoring into the use of surveillance to directly create profit through the extraction of information—a.k.a., “surveillance capitalism.”<sup>98</sup> Finally, it traces the entanglement of military technologies with aesthetic techniques to

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<sup>97</sup> "12 Facts about CCTV Surveillance in the UK - Data Installation & Supplies." Disnetwork. August 21, 2018. <https://www.disnetwork.co.uk/12-facts-cctv-surveillance-uk/>.

<sup>98</sup> Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

show how these two are synthesized into a “martial gaze,”<sup>99</sup> which constitutes contemporary surveillance. Contemporary surveillance would not be possible without its military origins, and is also still beholden to them; the relationship between the military and the image-production and data gathering that constitutes “surveillance capitalism” is a cornerstone technique of hypersubsumption. The militarization of scopic regimes is important not only because of the entanglement of the latter with surveillance capitalism but because of the way the martial eye supplants the human eye, and the capitalist sensorium overtakes the “human” one. This will be vital to the discussion of species-being and capitalism in the following chapter.

Surveillance studies theorists define surveillance as “any form of information-gathering meant to enable intervention.”<sup>100</sup> Most surveillance studies readers prominently feature Michel Foucault’s panopticon theory, from his 1975 treatise, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.<sup>101</sup> Foucault’s focus on the prison designed by Jeremy Bentham highlights the role of this institution in controlling and rendering docile the individual body through the internalization of the surveillant gaze. “Panopticon,” which literally translates to “all seeing,” refers to a circular prison with a guard tower at the center. The guard has a 360-degree view and can see each prisoner’s cell, but the inmates cannot see when the carceral eye is fixed on them; as a result, the prisoner behaves as though they are always being watched, and thus becomes self-policing and self-disciplining. Foucault’s study of the nineteenth-century prison model makes clear how this model coincides with the height of industrialization and the transition to twentieth-century modernity: a time when the factory walls were prisons of their own kind, soon to be under the watchful eye of Taylorist productivism. As we saw in the previous chapter, the individual worker had their quota to meet. The workday was measured in hours of work, which in turn produced profitable commodities in the form of surplus value that

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<sup>99</sup> Antoine Bousquet, *The Eye of War*, 10-11.

<sup>100</sup> Kirstie Ball and Laureen Snider, eds., *The Surveillance-Industrial Complex: A Political Economy of Surveillance* (London: Routledge, 2013), 7.

<sup>101</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

was the time for the reproduction of the worker, paid in wages, subtracted from the total time the worker spent at work. As Maša Galič, Tjerk Timan and Bert-Jaap Koops summarize, “[o]ne of the key ideas or effects of the prison-Panopticon (and similarly designed Panopticons) was to create an extension of perception beyond visible locales and the reduction of temporal relations to spatial relations, thus enhancing the possibility of the disciplinary panoptic power. Surveillance is carried out from one single point, and it is the inspector in his central lodge who possesses this extended power.”<sup>102</sup> Surveillance thus became a technology of power, epitomized by control of physical space and individual bodies under the biopolitical regimes of states seeking to manage their populations.

As we saw in the previous chapter, after the disciplinary society comes Gilles Deleuze’s “control society,” a concept clearly meant to respond to Foucault’s concept of power in a way that addressed the major changes in forms of power and control that arose with the advent of new, network technologies:

Control societies continue the de-individualisation that Foucault sketched but evolve into de-humanisation. What this means is that, whilst the infrastructures of discipline in schools and hospitals are normative and shaping behaviour, they still involve a recognition of individuals as human subjects via the representative norm in particular settings; in contrast, in a control society, individuals are not targeted directly as human subjects, but rather through representations. The system of power lies less with foundational and formal institutions and more with ad hoc and informal networks; it works via representations that communicate and decide internally.<sup>103</sup>

Control societies work through diffuse networks of power, and mark the ascension of corporations over institutions. Unlike states, corporations are not interested in disciplining populations through normalization in order to create stability. Their aim is profitability in the short term, and instead of regulating individual bodies through rigid

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<sup>102</sup> Maša Galič, Tjerk Timan and Bert-Jaap Koops, “Bentham, Deleuze and Beyond: An Overview of Surveillance Theories from the Panopticon to Participation” *Philosophy & Technology* 30, no. 1 (2017): 12.

<sup>103</sup> Galič et al., 18.



orderings of physical space (like the prison), the individual itself becomes a malleable system of variables to be manipulated for profits. As Galič et al. describe:

It is no longer actual persons and their bodies that matter or that need to be subjected and disciplined, but rather the individuals' representations. It is the divided individual—consumers and their purchasing behaviour—who has become important to monitor and control. Deleuze coins this the *dividual*. Where society is becoming fragmented, so does the individual; the Panopticon blurs and the individual is split up into pieces, with the power of consumerism demanding all kinds of attention from citizen-consumers. In a Deleuzian society, the point is no longer making bodies docile, but to mould consumers, whose data-bodies become more important than their real bodies.<sup>104</sup>

Control is still a technology of power, and its ubiquitous instantiation in digital devices objects becomes integral to the machinations of profit. Surveillance is vital to this system, as the worker must be constantly monitored in order to maximize profit. However, no longer is the space of the factory the key to profitability; rather, the flexible worker now takes the factory with them and “works from home”—a polyvalent phrase that can refer both to the freelancer or employee who literally do their work from home, usually on a laptop, and to the more insidious “citizen-consumers” referenced in the quote above. Control societies must always monitor their citizens because the actions of these citizens plugged into various nodes of the network generate data, which is then turned into profitable information that can be sold and traded on:

The data double, however, goes beyond representation of our physical selves—it does not matter whether the double actually corresponds to the ‘real’ body...The doubles flow through a host of scattered ‘centres of calculation’ (e.g. forensic laboratories, statistical institutions, police stations, financial institutions and corporate and military headquarters) in which they are re-assembled and scrutinised for developing strategies of administration, commerce and control; however, the whole system is based on the (capitalist) idea of ‘surplus value’ or, in this case, ‘surplus information’. The chief idea is that from all the data that people generate in daily behaviour (using credit cards, browsing the Internet, using smartphone applications, working, travelling, walking on the street, etc.), profit should be made.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Galič et al., 20.

<sup>105</sup> Galič et al., 22.

As surveillance technologies become further enmeshed and normalized in everyday sociality, they merge with ideological constructions, forms of subjectivity and individuation, social participation and state security. Uniting all of these is the search for surplus value.

Some scholars have even moved beyond Deleuze's prescient portrayal of control societies. Didier Bigo, for example, uses the notion of the "banopticon" to describe the social sorting functions of surveillance, and the outgrowth of militarized securitization into moldable consumers and desirable citizens:

The strategic function of the banopticon . . . is to profile a minority as 'unwelcome'. Its three features are exceptional power within liberal societies (states of emergency that become routine), profiling (excluding some groups, categories of proactively excluded people, because of their potential future behaviour) and the normalizing of non-excluded groups (to a belief in the free movement of goods, capital, information and persons). The banopticon operates in globalized spaces beyond the nation-state, so the effects of power and resistance are no longer felt merely between state and society... The banopticon guards the entrances to the parts of the world inside which DIY surveillance suffices to maintain and reproduce 'order'; primarily, it bars entry to all those who possess none of the tools of DIY surveillance (of the credit card or Blackberry kind) and who therefore cannot be relied on to practise such surveillance on their own.<sup>106</sup>

The "ban" of the banopticon refers to this technology's emphasis on saying "no"—on *not* allowing people and goods through state and national borders, and also purging certain "undesirables" from ever entering the bounds of civil society. The banopticon can be read as a synthesis of the panopticon and control society under the auspices of neoliberalism; as with the panopticon, surveillance technologies are used to watch the denizens of a region in order to impress ideological and social norms upon them and mold "good" citizens. Those from within the populace who are deemed to be outside the norm (those with different racial, ethnic, sexual or gender identities, for example—to name only a few) are scrutinized more closely, and within this zone traditional prisons and other repressive state institutions also still exist. However, while the panopticon polices those

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<sup>106</sup> Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 56.

already deemed “bad” after they have transgressed some social norm, today’s surveillant technology can use patterns of behavior to predict whether somebody will transgress in the future. These cybernetic surveillant technologies thus ban people before the fact, speculating that they will never be desirable citizens, and by operating on the future itself, deny them the opportunities of fluid movement so prized and touted under globalized capitalism. The specific operation of these technologies, along with their effects on future temporalities, will be discussed at length later.

Due to the rise of corporate influence on state and social institutions, the banopticon also has features of societies of free floating control. Docile, self-policing bodies are made from citizen-consumers (or prosumers, or users...) who readily use what Zygmunt Bauman, in the quote above, calls the tools of “DIY surveillance”—the smart phone and credit card—to plug into the vast networks of information and fast moving capital and participate in its exchange of goods, which have become normalized as social goods granted to all normative citizens. As Bauman points out, the current state of globalized capitalism has created a new world of globalized circulation of information, goods and people and exists beyond national borders and even physical bodies (the data double). In the above quotation, Bauman also notes an important conceptual distinction within Bigos’ banopticon that was absent in the earlier models of surveillance societies, precisely because the globalized world of information capitalism did not exist then. The banopticon uses surveillance to police the movement of goods and people across borders of a given nation in the form of overtly visible repressive technologies like policing, border enforcement and terrorism taskforces. However, within those same borders the banopticon also operates on the citizens and residents of that nation, in which the residents themselves are using the tools of control societies to create individual portable panopticons without even feeling like prisoners. The surveillant function of the banopticon within this world is not to create normative bodies for a steady society—the unwanted have already been filtered out by its externally watchful mechanisms. Its function here is to use tools of ubiquitous tracking to pull good consumers into more consumption, while using the same tools that track behavior in order to predict future

purchasing patterns. Surveillant devices follow each person like miniature “kill boxes”<sup>107</sup> they cannot live without, precisely because these objects grant them entry into a seamless world of social and material goods. Conversely, these same surveillant devices track negative, disruptive or merely low-spending patterns and identify undesirable consumers who are then blacklisted from the nebulous goods of targeted marketing, online deals and internet promotions.

### 3.1. « The Digitization of Surveillance »

The tracking and sorting functions of surveillance would not be possible without developments in technology that combine algorithmic data gathering, cybernetic theory and the ubiquity of computing. Ubiquity here refers not only to the vast swaths of geography covered in some way by digital networks, but also to the growing interactivity and specificity of devices that make it easier to watch, gather and sort through a growing cache of information. Cybernetics, pioneered by Norbert Wiener during the Cold War, is the science of using positive feedback loops to affect future behavior.<sup>108</sup> Orit Halpern explains that “[a]s the etymology of the word suggests, cybernetics is a science of control or prediction of future action. In further adjoining control with communication, it is an endeavor that hopes to tame these futures events through the sending of messages.”<sup>109</sup> Cybernetics relies on the abstraction of behavior and those behaving into entities that can be quantified so that a future outcome can be manipulated and controlled.

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<sup>107</sup> According to Scott Beauchamp (Scott Beauchamp, “The Moral Cost of the Kill Box,” *The Atlantic*, February 8, 2016), The term “kill box” is used in U.S. military jargon to refer to a mobile 3D space upon which soldiers and allies are free to fire. Because of ultra-sophisticated surveillance technology, kill boxes have effectively taken on the size and shape of human bodies—a kill box exists anywhere a person deemed to have undesirable behavioral patterns may go. Thus, kill boxes are used to circumvent national sovereignty and state borders in the unceasing War on Terror. This notion will be expanded on at length in the upcoming discussion of military drones.

<sup>108</sup> Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1948).

<sup>109</sup> Halpern, *Beautiful Data*, 41.

Contemporary cybernetics relies on patterns discerned by algorithms capable of processing huge amounts of data at once and turning that data into communicative information. An algorithm can be provisionally defined as: “the ‘description of the method by which a task is to be accomplished’ by means of sequences of steps or instructions, sets of ordered steps that operate on data and computational structures. As such, an algorithm is an abstraction, ‘having an autonomous existence independent of what computer scientists like to refer to as ‘implementation details.’”<sup>110</sup> Abstraction is a key feature of both capitalism and cybernetics; cybernetics harnesses the abstract nature of scientific models, while capitalism turns concrete labour into abstract “labour power” through an appeal to so-called “socially necessary labour time.” The latter might actually be looked at as a type of scientific model—a predictable, scientific workplace was in fact what Taylorism, with its appeals to clocks, precision and increased worker surveillance, was striving for. To sum up, there are obvious and important reciprocities between capitalism’s reduction of social relations to the empty category of “money,” which matters only in terms of the capitalist marketplace, and cybernetics’ translation of social relations into digital “data.” As Orit Halpern describes of cybernetics and its forefathers: “Rather than describe the world as it is, their interest was to predict what it would become, and to do it in terms of homogeneity instead of difference. This is a worldview composed of functionally similar entities—black boxes—described only by their algorithmic actions in constant conversation with each other producing a range of probabilistic scenarios.”<sup>111</sup>

Market research, for example, has adopted the system of cybernetic probability calculation—originally a military project—and applied it to consumer’s behavior, not only to predict what they will purchase but to steer their future buying habits through cybernetic control mechanisms. To accomplish this, both commodities and consumers have to be endowed with a high degree of visibility so that the behavioral feedback loops

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<sup>110</sup> Tiziana Terranova, “Red Stack Attack! Algorithms, Capital and the Automation of the Common,” #Accelerate, *The Accelerationist Reader*, eds. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (United Kingdom: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2014), 382.

<sup>111</sup> Halpern, *Beautiful Data*, 44.

are constructed from as much raw information as possible. Ubiquitous computing thus works as a form of surveillance that tags and locates not only traditional martial “enemies” in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) but also monitors users in order to engage in valuable data mining. Visibility not only allows for the greatest accuracy in manipulating patterns of consumptive behavior, it also creates an optimally frictionless distribution network for the commodities each user is buying, and implements its banoptic functions to ensure a friction-free world of consumers.

### 3.2. « Surveillance Capitalism »

Surveillance studies scholar Shoshanna Zuboff has proposed that the contemporary era is characterized by “surveillance capitalism,” in which the logic of accumulation has been entirely modified by surveillance technology into a new mutation of capitalism that is primarily reliant on cybernetic techniques of control. This process of behavioral modification is essentially a violent project that continues the logic of its military origins, which are discussed below, but Zuboff primarily focuses on the relationship between cybernetics, profit and information in a new subspecies of capitalism. I suggest, however, that this subspecies, however, is actually integral to hypersubsumption as described in the previous chapter, because it is the primary means through which immaterial labour is valorized, and as such cannot be divided from other exploitative forms of value extraction that link the Global North and South. These processes rely on the same scopic technologies used in military contexts, where surveillance is a violent act rooted in martial developments, thus extending “battle space”— a space of literal fighting— to encompass the world-market. As Zuboff says:

My argument here is that we have not yet successfully defined “big data” because we continue to view it as a technological object, effect or capability. The inadequacy of this view forces us to return over and over again to the same ground. In this article I take a different approach. “Big data,” I argue, is not a technology or an inevitable technology effect. It is not an autonomous process, as Schmidt and others would have us think. It originates in the social, and it is there that we must find it and know it. In this article I explore the proposition that “big data” is above

all the foundational component in a deeply intentional and highly consequential new logic of accumulation that I call surveillance capitalism.<sup>112</sup>

Zuboff points to this as a mutation in capitalism that is intentional and enduring, consolidating power for a few, through a technological refinement of productive capabilities: “Under this new regime, the precise moment at which our needs are met is also the precise moment at which our lives are plundered for behavioral data, and all for the sake of others’ gain. The result is a perverse amalgam of empowerment inextricably layered with diminishment.”<sup>113</sup> However, a recent trend has emerged among big tech companies like Facebook of offering end-to-end encryption for Facebook and Instagram messaging services.<sup>114</sup> What are we to make of that development in light of the argument about the vital role of surveillance in producing profits for large companies? After all, end-to-end encryption guarantees that nobody can access your data without your permission, not even law enforcement or the telecoms that facilitate your communications. In some cases, like that of the popular app Signal, encryption software deletes your messages after they are sent, so no record exists of previous exchanges.

The promise of encryption has wide appeal, but has in some cases turned out to be too good to be true. Just recently, users deleted their period-tracking apps en masse after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to overturn abortion protection provided by *Roe v. Wade* and the subsequent fear that governments could use the data stored by these apps to prove that they obtained illegal abortions.<sup>115</sup> As a result, the period tracking app Stardust gained popularity after promising users end-to-end encryption “so it would not be able to

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<sup>112</sup> Shoshanna Zuboff, “Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization,” *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 1 (2015): 75.

<sup>113</sup> Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 56.

<sup>114</sup> Emma Roth, “Facebook to Launch End-to-End Encryption for Messenger Calls and Instagram DMs,” *Make Use Of*, August 13, 2021, <https://www.makeuseof.com/facebook-launches-e2e-encryption-messenger-calls-instagram/>.

<sup>115</sup> Sarah Perez and Zach Whittaker, “Period tracker Stardust surges following Roe reversal, but its privacy claims aren’t airtight,” *TechCrunch*, June 27, 2022, <https://techcrunch.com/2022/06/27/stardust-period-tracker-phone-number/>.

hand over any of your period tracking data to the government.”<sup>116</sup> However, because users log into Stardust with a phone number, rather than a third-party login service, the company can and does sell the phone numbers to a third party analytics service so they can capitalize on the wealth of behavioral data provided by users of the app. From there, governments could simply subpoena the analytics companies for user phone numbers. The app also tracks metadata about their users, like location and date tags, which Stardust notes they can also be compelled to turn over to law enforcement. The Stardust app is ultimately not end-to-end encrypted—if it was it would simply not be able to access user data.

Even taking this instance into consideration, is Facebook’s goal of end-to-end encryption by 2023 not indicative of a transformative, consumer-driven mandate for privacy? Critics like Frank Bajak say no, claiming that this is part of a larger capitalist push by Facebook “to expand lucrative new commercial services, continue monopolizing the attention of users, develop new data sources to track people and frustrate regulators who might be eyeing a breakup of the social-media behemoth.”<sup>117</sup> Adding end-to-end encryption, for example, would actually expand Facebook’s ability to provide e-commerce, by offering more secure payment services. This would help Facebook’s goal of being an all-in-one provider hub for digital goods and services, and would also help the company build even more complete user profiles based on the conglomeration of a multiple-user data stream. The point is that surveillance capitalism is actually not the adversary to personal privacy and freedom—rather, surveillance capitalism, though hungry for big data, is motivated primarily by capitalism’s ultimate logic of valorization. Exploiting meta data is simply one way to achieve this, and a key feature of contemporary capitalism is precisely its flexibility and its ability to adapt and mutate to changing social and material conditions. It achieves this largely because it already

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<sup>116</sup> Perez and Whittaker, n.p.

<sup>117</sup> Frank Bajak, “How Facebook stands to profit from its ‘privacy’ push,” *Associated Press*, March 8, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/north-america-ap-top-news-facebook-facebook-privacy-scandal--mark-zuckerberg-a510374d496d4fea8dd69abf4096fd6b/>.



controls the means of production, which are fundamentally capitalist from the start. Privacy is just another market to conquer.

According to Zuboff, contemporary capitalism that is characterized by the extraction of “big data” has itself not been sufficiently theorized, precisely because data mining has been considered a unique, isolated and purely technological phenomena, without consideration of fidelity to capitalism’s logic: “While “big data” may be set to other uses, those do not erase its origins in an extractive project founded on formal indifference to the populations that comprise both its data sources and its ultimate targets.”<sup>118</sup> Under surveillance capitalism, targeting is the routine mode of finding profitable information. Negri’s term “extractive capitalism” can sound somewhat passive, as if the system waits for resources to arise before pouncing on the opportunity. But Zuboff’s is a capitalism characterized by surveillance that is actively predatory. It relies on the interactivity and the social worlds created by online networks and allows for creative DIY spaces to emerge, but far from passively waiting, it actively creates these spaces and then incessantly monitors them. As technology scholars Vincent Manzerolle and Atle Mikkola Kjosen note in an article about commodities, logistics and targeting (using apps as examples), “[t]he apps economy is not a collection of apps; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by buttons, diagrams, and algorithms. When money begins to attract commodities, money’s guardians become targets—prey stalked by commodity capital.”<sup>119</sup> In other words, the ubiquitous connectivity provided by smart devices and social networking platforms exists precisely because these systems are able to immediately and clearly perceive—or target—each user and respond to their needs. This is referred to as “personalization” and is touted as an achievement by tech giants. The “democratizing” potentialities of these technologies not only do not alleviate their repressive deployment, but are in many cases promoted in order to distraction from

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<sup>118</sup> Zuboff, “Big Other,” 75-6.

<sup>119</sup> Vincent Manzerolle and Atle Mikkola Kjosen, “Dare et Capere: Virtuous Mesh and a Targeting Diagram,” *The Imaginary App*, eds. Paul D. Miller and Svitlana Matviyenko (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 144.

the social disparities they create and prey upon. Surveillance is extraction through targeting.

Mark Andrejevic, among others, points to this change in capitalism facilitated by the rise of “big data” and is deeply concerned by the divide between the users and producers of data and those with the technological capacities to sort through and thereby profit from it. “If we take seriously the notion that online forms of interaction and socializing can double as productive immaterial labour, we might describe the infrastructures that support them as productive resources, access to which is determined by those who own them.”<sup>120</sup> The disparity between the owners of the means of digital production and those who do the work exists as strongly as ever, precisely because so-called immaterial, unproductive or voluntary activity, performed for free, is in fact work. The contracts are even there, in the form of privacy policies and user data policies that users must submit to in order to gain access to the platforms they want. What users get is the means of creating their individuality through digital commodification.

Zuboff makes explicit the relationship between algorithmic capitalism and subjectification. She claims that “[s]ubjectivities are converted into objects that repurpose the subjective for commodification. Individual users’ meanings are of no interest to Google or other firms in this chain. In this way, the methods of production of ‘big data’ from small data and the ways in which ‘big data’ are valued reflect the formal indifference that characterizes the firm’s relationship to its populations of ‘users.’ Populations are the sources from which data extraction proceeds and the ultimate targets of the utilities such data produce.”<sup>121</sup> The convertibility of subjectification and commodification facilitated by digital technologies like social media are “stacked” or superimposed upon each other in the name of the surplus value generated from mining

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<sup>120</sup> Mark Andrejevic, “Surveillance and Alienation in the Online Economy,” *Surveillance & Society* 8, no. 3 (2011): 286.

<sup>121</sup> Zuboff, “Big Other,” 79.

big data, or what Zuboff elsewhere calls the “behavioral data surplus” generated through innovations in surveillance combined with better customization of online platforms.<sup>122</sup>

“Behavioral surplus,” or the massive amount of consumer data generated by users of online platforms and smart devices, is far from passive. On the contrary, the information generated through the surveillant mechanisms of data capture and storage is put into action by the owners of these platforms. The data itself goes to work, in a manner of speaking. As David Panagia argues: “if information behaves, and if humans are indistinct from machines in their emission of quanta of information (i.e., data), then cynegetic tracking, capture, and prediction of future outcomes (i.e., risk) is possible... through the operational logic of negative feedback, it’s not only the case that information behaves but information behaves back from the future to control and guide achievement.”<sup>123</sup> The feedback loop of cybernetic control acts directly on the subjectivities created through and by the work that constitutes this form of information and thus creates the very subjectivities that further produce it, in the name of being better citizen-consumers. The same technology that fuels the repressive sorting of the banopticon, both materially and ideologically, operates a second time to refine users by subtly banning non-normative consumptive behaviors. Predatory surveillance—capturing data and then using it to guide future outcomes—is the hypersubsumption incarnated. It facilitates the growth of the social factory as it extends across the world, crossing national and geospatial boundaries alike.

### 3.3. « Surveillance and Social Sorting »

Surveillance technologies make possible what Oscar Gandy and later, David Lyon, call “social sorting” or “panoptic sorting,” which according to the latter not only verifies identities but also ascribes worth and assesses risks to individuals, thereby stratifying

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<sup>122</sup> Zuboff traces the “discovery” of behavioral data in the third chapter of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

<sup>123</sup> David Panagia, “The Algorithm Dispositif: Risk and Automation in the Age of #datapolitik,” *The Routledge Companion to Media and Risk* (England: Routledge, 2020), 14.

people, through surveillance, into different social, political and economic classes.<sup>124</sup> Oscar Gandy cannily and bleakly notes, “I see the panoptic sort as a kind of high- tech, cybernetic triage through which individuals and groups of people are being sorted according to their presumed economic or political value. The poor, especially poor people of color, are increasingly being treated as broken material or damaged goods to be discarded or sold at bargain prices to scavengers in the marketplace.”<sup>125</sup> Gandy associates this form of sorting with panopticism because of its imbrication with surveillance technology, while Lyon merely calls it “social sorting.” Calling it social sorting reveals the progression from Foucaultian panopticism, which relied on institutional technologies of power like prisons and hospitals, to current forms of technology which encompass the latter but also include more complex, diffuse devices like smartphones that have made self-surveillance both portable and desirable. The prisoner in the panopticon internalizes the watchful gaze of the guard only after being caught, tried and sentenced to a physical prison, whose enclosure represents the individual prisoner’s body imprisoned and divided from society for the scopic carcereal regime—the prison’s walls and their design are also literally seminal in bringing forth this form of self-watching. Like those walls, the rectangles of glass and metal that make up a subset of surveillant devices— smartphones—are material technologies that maintain surveillant power.

Unlike the prisons, however, these devices are highly mobile—they are agents of Deleuze’s free-floating control, not spatially bound to one plot of land or one enclosure. That means that because users choose to carry these devices around (that “choice” will be complicated in a moment), power and repression no longer operates through modern spatial restrictions. Through the rise of capitalism in its hypersubsumptive phase, our technological devices are mobile shackles controlling not space but time—maintaining our attention in the present to read and control our futures through data. Social sorting has a twofold function: it seeks to control the future of mobility of goods and people through

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<sup>124</sup> David Lyon, *Surveillance as Social Sorting* (London: Routledge, 2003). It is no coincidence that Lyon’s book and its observations come on the heels of extreme increases in surveillance that happened post-9/11.

<sup>125</sup> Oscar Gandy Jr., *The Panoptic Sort* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 15.

borders as well as the purchasing patterns—which are also patterns of life—of the users within borders, turning them into normative consumers.

The macrocosmos of contemporary surveillance operates within Zygmunt Bauman’s framework of “liquid surveillance,” surveillant practices that shift in response to a society dominated by contemporary capitalism:

[A]ll social forms melt faster than new ones can be cast. They cannot hold their shape or solidify into frames of reference for human actions and life strategies because of their short shelf-life [...] surveillance, once seemingly solid and fixed, has become much more flexible and mobile, seeping and spreading into many life areas where once it had only marginal sway.<sup>126</sup>

Where once, in Marx and Engel’s *Communist Manifesto*, the “melting” metaphor referred to the dissolving of illusions to reveal the real class struggle that forms the basis of bourgeois society,<sup>127</sup> Bauman now uses it to convey the ability of commercial surveillance technology to confound distinctions such as that between public and private spaces.

This formulation is reminiscent of Althusser’s Marxism, which eschewed the distinction between the economic base, seen as determining everything in the last instance, and the socio-cultural superstructure, which was discussed by some Marxists as a secondary feature of the base. Where Althusser took the unilateral arrow of causation and made it point both ways, Bauman’s liquid surveillance, with its inflection of technological development alongside social life within capitalism, turns the arrow into a never ending mobius strip, where each aspect informs, affects and transforms the others. Contemporary surveillance is invited into the home and onto the body, by those whose homes were deemed safe from the repressive arm of that same surveillance industrial complex. The dichotomy between security-surveillance and consumption-self-surveillance is integral to maintaining the profitability of the surveillance network. As Bauman puts it,

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<sup>126</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Surveillance*, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. Samuel Moore (Marxists Internet Archive, 2002), 15.

[the users] are simultaneously promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote... The test they need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them to recast themselves as commodities: that is, as products capable of drawing attention, and attracting demand and customers... members of the society of consumers are themselves consumer commodities, and it is the quality of being a consumer commodity that makes them bona fide members of that society... Making oneself a “sellable commodity” is a DIY job, and individual duty. Let us note: “making oneself,” not just becoming, is the challenge and the task.<sup>128</sup>

As we saw in the first chapter, amongst the most profitable commodities under post-Fordist capitalism are those produced by immaterial labour, allowing the harnessing of the general intellect and society’s creative powers, while at the same time promoting this as a necessary self-creation. No longer does capitalism have to pay wages to the worker for their own reproduction—rather, the worker reproduces themselves as citizen-consumers through the act of surveilled consumption, which they have internalized as necessary in order to count in society, to have a social *life* as opposed to social death.

### 3.4. « Surveillance, Logistics and Profit »

As Hardt and Negri describe, Marx’s own works made explicit the connection between war and the expansion of capitalism: “Marx uses primitive accumulation to name the violent processes that take place prior to the capitalist mode of production and are necessary for it to begin, processes that create the two classes.”<sup>129</sup> Violent dispossession is integral to starting the mechanism of capitalism, and also integral to its continued functioning; For Marx, primitive accumulation was a step in pre-capitalism that was eventually overcome by full capitalist production. However, we can see primitive accumulation continuing to play out in a vicious cycle of production and consumption between the so-called First and Third Worlds under neoliberalism’s neo-colonialism, which continues to take resources at will in order to feed globalization. As Hardt and

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<sup>128</sup> Marx and Engels, 31-4.

<sup>129</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Assembly* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 179.

Negri point out, “Contemporary Marxists emphasize instead that primitive accumulation continues alongside capitalist accumulation throughout the world, constantly renewing its violent mechanisms of enclosing the common, creating class divisions, and generating global hierarchies.”<sup>130</sup> Primitive accumulation, or its contemporary incarnation, which David Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession<sup>131</sup>, is necessary for the formal subsumption of society by capitalism, which is followed by its total subsumption. “This is the meaning that should be given to the Marxian figures of the “real subsumption” of labour under capital – which can be extended to the subsumption of society itself under capital. This is not a matter only of the totalitarian extension of consumption and its eventual alienating effects (as followers of the Frankfurt School maintained), but also the incarnation of capitalist production in society, that is, in the languages of the market as in the vital connections of society.”<sup>132</sup>

Hypersubsumption, therefore, includes within itself the ever-shifting processes of accumulation, formal subsumption and real subsumption, which are all facilitated by the violence of abstraction that is the essence of value under capitalism. This form of abstraction, whose most extreme incarnation is the money form, is also the abstraction of the self as subject in the world of consumption through DIY surveillance that was discussed earlier, as well as the way the banopticon abstracts real people into desirable and undesirable populations through literal acts of physical exclusion and national borders.

While the governmental impulse to surveil its citizens is nothing new, the degree and tactics of contemporary surveillance have led the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), among others, to coin the term “surveillance-industrial complex” to describe the “distributed mass-surveillance that is [sic] now underway, which combine the long-standing police impulse to expand private-sector information sources with awesome new

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> David Harvey, “The New Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession,” *Actual Marx* Vol 35 (1), (2004): 71-90.

<sup>132</sup> Hardt and Negri, “The Powers of the Exploited and the Social Ontology of Praxis,” *tripleC* 16(2) (2018), 416.

technological capabilities for vacuuming up, storing and keeping track of vast oceans of information.”<sup>133</sup> Under this regime, governments are privatizing security and surveillance functions in order to circumvent privacy laws. They also use current laws to compel companies to turn over their user data. The use of multiple private firms allows surveillance to be diffuse and multifaceted, with all manner of different technology at its disposal, while simultaneously, governments are creating more “watch” programs and other surveillance networks under the auspices of security and freedom.

The private and the public sectors work together to create the surveillance-industrial complex, and it is no accident that this term harkens back to the familiar idea of the military-industrial complex. The increasing encroachment of war-time practices and language in peacetime, as well as the feedback loop between military and civilian technology and techniques, as well as private-sector business interests, is fundamental to understanding the functioning of contemporary capitalism, as well as the need to frame it in terms of hypersubsumption, with an emphasis on surveillance in particular.

The fundamental purpose of the surveillance-industrial complex is maintaining hegemonic class and private property relations; its goal is to smoothly facilitate the globalized movement of people, goods and information in a way that maximizes profits. To do this, it relies on militarized techniques of repression, but also on military technology, an increasingly militarized police force and the normalization of military techniques in non-war spaces as well as the subjectivities such encroachments produce.

Central within this process is an organizational relationship in which technologies with military origins have been taken up by the civilian sector: this is particularly apparent in the field of logistics, or the organization of supply chains. Logistics arose and was refined in the military as a way to get food and ammunition to soldiers on the front lines. Under capitalism, logistics has become the vital administration of the swift

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<sup>133</sup> Jay Stanley, “The Surveillance-Industrial Complex,” ACLU Report, August, 2004, 2. <https://www.aclu.org/other/surveillance-industrial-complex/>.



movement of goods and services.<sup>134</sup> As Jasper Bernes has written, “[l]ogistics, we might say, is war by other means, war by means of trade. A war of supply chains that conquers new territories by suffusing them with capillarial distributions, ensuring that commodities flow with ease to the farthest extremities.”<sup>135</sup> Logistics would of course be impossible without the surveillant technologies of global positioning and tracking—the same technologies operating within the military to identify and follow potential targets for elimination. “It should be obvious by now that logistics is capital’s own project of cognitive mapping. Hence, the prominence of “visibility” among the watchwords of the logistics industry. To manage a supply chain means to render it transparent.”<sup>136</sup> The current iterations of logistics, which render everything transparent in order to facilitate the smoothest possible horizontal movement, have not abandoned the system’s military origins.

### 3.5. « Martial Vision: a History of the Surveillant Gaze »

Antoine Bousquet’s *The Eye of War: Military Perception from the Telescope to the Drone*<sup>137</sup> traces the rise of technologies to expand and augment visual perception and how they eventually gave rise to the scopic techniques of surveillance seen today. Bousquet focuses in particular on the military appropriation of drawing, painting, map and

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<sup>134</sup> There is a wealth of literature on the connection between capitalism and logistics. For some, see: Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Craig Martin, “Shipping Container Mobilities, Seamless Compatibility, and the Global Surface of Logistical Integration,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 45 (5) (2013): 1021-1036; Edna Bonacich and Jake B. Wilson, *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Jesse LeCavalier, *The Rule of Logistics: Walmart and the Architecture of Fulfillment* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2016); Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *The Politics of Operations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Alberto Toscano, “Lineaments of the Logistical State,” *Viewpoint* 4 (2014): n.p.; and of course the authors mentioned in this chapter.

<sup>135</sup> Jasper Bernes, “Logistics, Counterlogistics and the Communist Prospect,” *Endnotes* 3 (2013): n.p.

<sup>136</sup> Bernes, n.p.

<sup>137</sup> Bousquet, *The Eye of War*.

telescope making and eventually the photo and video camera and shows that the militarization of aesthetic techniques has always been commonplace, and has actually been integral to Western warfare since the Renaissance. His book traces the history of visual perception as it has become imbricated with a “martial gaze”<sup>138</sup> whose goal is to turn seeing into annihilation, equating visibility with vulnerability. Bousquet’s book is especially useful because it turns to the technologies of perception. The book develops the term ‘martial gaze’ to grasp the military entanglements of the technical history of vision, in its entanglement with the military and its relationship to perception. Bousquet claims that human perception has been colonized and then supplanted by machinic vision through increased focus on rationalization and mechanization, and looks at particular technical objects and their milieu to illustrate the sociohistorical forces of the time.

Bousquet, in *The Eye of War*, devotes the penultimate chapter to the drone as the epitome of machinic vision, which he claims has taken over the human sensorium and supplanted human perception. The history of perception is a history of the rationalization of vision, particularly in the industrial age. Certain aspects, such as sighting, targeting, mapping and sensing, were brought to fore by specific technologies of vision. Perspectival drawing, for example, which emerged during the Renaissance, was quickly rationalized through the mathematization of vision into geometric equations. This was then taken up by the military forces of the day, who saw its potential for visualizing the enemy at a distance. Similarly, modern cartography, which utilized the already mathematical aspects of vision, refined geospatial representations to convey vital information. The military uses of mapping were obvious: information about enemy movement and position. Mapping thus became a vital part of military strategy. Mapping became a means of dominating space through scientific rationalization—the map as instrumentalized tool. The map, because of its use for strategic and tactical purposes, is a martial technology for supporting vision such that it can be manipulated for control and conquering. Maps as late as the 18th century were unsystematic and did not represent 3D considerations such as topography. Introduction of scientific cartography standardized

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<sup>138</sup> Bousquet, 10-11.

maps based on geometric principles. These maps could be used during military campaigns to visual strategies before actual orders were issued— testing future outcomes. As 19th-century warfare expanded the boundaries of the battlefield beyond any single commander’s eye, new maps were created for synoptic oversight.<sup>139</sup> Mapping also led to the rise of automated missile guidance, which turned mapping into a form of continuous communication (the transmission of information to the user), culminating in destruction — an active geospatial interface that has been operationalized for military purposes.

The rise of cybernetics in the twentieth century also saw the rise of ‘cognitive cartography’ or an exchangeability between mapping cognitive systems and enhancing cognition of maps. According to Bousquet, cartography has increasingly merged with the science of human perception. In the computing age, the understanding of maps as static has given way to mapping as a fluid, every changing, dynamic stream of information that has to interact with the plasticity of human cognitive processes, which interface with geospatial representations of streams of data. Mapping is now becoming integrated with tracking movement thanks to a growing global network of sensors sending data to central control centers in real time.

Under the martial gaze, machinic vision has taken over many of the functions of sight that were formerly done by humans; what’s more, these machines have expanded the very definition of ‘sight’ to include non-visual data through the use of sensors and other non-sopic instruments like sonar and radar, which not only far exceed human sensual capacity but in some cases grant access to realms of sense (like microwave frequencies) that humans could never have achieved otherwise. The important point of Bousquet’s book is the way the militarization of these perceptive techniques creates machines with singular, rationalized goals and capacities; their ‘vision’ therefore is the martial gaze, which has subjected the possibilities of vision to the whims of militarized capitalism.

During the first and second World Wars, manned aircrafts were flown first on recon missions that relied purely on human sight to spot enemy encampments, weapons

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<sup>139</sup> Bousquet, *Eye of War*, 127.

etc.. This was then replaced by aerial photography, and the planes were equipped with cameras. No longer did armies have to rely solely on faulty human vision— now it was the job of the humans not to see the battlefield but to look at it through the camera in order to capture it in a photo. These photos were then turned into useful intelligence through the new human function of parsing the information obtained from these aerial cameras. At the same time, bombs were becoming more sophisticated as well. Originally launched from a stationary position at a stationary target, bombs were attached to planes for mobile drops. Eventually targeting, with the help of global mapping and sophisticated sensors, evolved into self-guiding missiles.

It's vital to see the similarities between so-called battle space technologies and civilian platforms that are supposedly user-centered and rely on pleasure and excitement. "The technologies that on the battlefield of the future will make decisions between life and death, when analyzed in terms of their techniques, may be the same technologies, control architectures and mechanisms that can be used in different fields of our culture."<sup>140</sup> Military uses of technologies of perception have instrumentalized all sorts of vision. The rise of the digital and algorithmic sorting, as well as machinic 'sensing' or modes of seeing and gathering data have revolutionized the way we think about vision and who or what is being looked at. The production of commodities generated by predatory surveillance is vision— the act of seeing itself, when it is surveillant, produces value.

### 3.6. « Drones and Vision »

The martial gaze ultimately instrumentalizes the humans under its watch. "The regime of global targeting has made perceptibility synonymous with vulnerability."<sup>141</sup> The U.S. military drones, particularly the popular Reaper and Predator models, combine all the forms of Bousquet's machinic vision with the techniques of neoliberal globalization—

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<sup>140</sup> Tero Karppi, Marc Böhlen and Yvette Granata, "Killer Robots as cultural techniques," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2018): 120.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

the nowhere and anywhere war, a global increase in surveillance, ubiquitous semi-autonomous technology. Drones also trace the material evolution of the increasingly war-like function of vision through military coopting and enhancing of technology. We can see the technological history of vision and violence encapsulated in the figure of the drone. Nowhere is the superposition of surveillance, warfare and digital technology more stark than here. A drone by definition is simply an un-piloted air or space craft<sup>142</sup>, hence the term UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle). The drone, a conjunction of artistic visual techniques synthesized with military surveillance and sorting, should be seen as the epitome of capitalist technology. Now the epitome of self-guided aircrafts, originally drones were used in the U.S. purely for visual reconnaissance; it is only after 9/11 that they were armed with Hellfire missiles and turned into lethal roving machines. Drones use digital targeting, which singles out individuals based on behavioral patterns, not traditional indicators of allegiance like uniform, nationality, etc. Targeting becomes more like a global hunt and dispersal and camouflage techniques continue to arise. The GWOT is a form of war that crosses boundaries and borders into and between populations, sporadic violence which gives rise to increased securitization within a country.<sup>143</sup> All spaces become potential battlespaces, which leads to the difficulty of locating military agency in an age of networks of commanders and operators, as well as the enmeshing of humans with technology.

To summarize the process of drone warfare, I turn to Laura Wilcox:

In US practices of drone warfare, decisions about targeting are made on the basis of a ‘disposition matrix’ based on human intelligence (HUMINT) and signal intelligence (SIGINT) from different American agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), and the National Security Agency (NSA) (Gettinger, 2015). This ‘disposition matrix’ consists of many files in a flexible database that can be searched using ‘big data’ techniques and advanced algorithms (Weber, 2015). This information contributes to the ‘kill lists’ of known persons in ‘personality strikes’, but is also used to

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<sup>142</sup> Elizabeth Howell, “What is a Drone?” *space.com*, October 3, 2018. <https://www.space.com/29544-what-is-a-drone.html/>.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

target persons exhibiting a ‘pattern of life’ associated with being a terrorist but for whom intelligence officials may not have human intelligence. Rather, the subjects of ‘signature strikes’ may ‘exist as digital profiles across a network of technologies, algorithmic calculations, and spreadsheets’ (Shaw, 2013: 540). ‘Signature strikes’ are not aimed at targeting known individuals, but rather on producing packages of information that become icons for killable bodies on the basis of behavior analysis and a logic of preemption. The production of a killable body stems from a process in which images and information analyzed by algorithmic processes are individuated into ‘baseball card’-like files.<sup>144</sup>

As we can see, drone strikes operate through the same logic at work in data mining—gathering massive stores of information for algorithmic processing in order to predict how somebody will act in the future.

Laura Wilcox, following Grégoire Chamayou’s formulation that the rise of the drone comes with the neoliberal state’s increasing militarization of its internal police force and the turning surveillance tech against its own population in the name of security. For him, the salient aspect of the drone is its all-seeing, God-like eye that gives its operator infinite vision from a distance<sup>145</sup>, expands on the ways that the intersections of race, class and gender affect the eye of the drone and those under its gaze: “[T]he ‘god-trick’ of Western scientific epistemologies: the illusion of being able to see everywhere from a disembodied position of ‘nowhere’ as an integral component of histories of militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy. This ‘god-trick’ is seemingly perfected in the weaponized drone, with its global surveillance capacities and purported efficiency and accuracy in targeting weapons, and, as such, has been a frequent inspiration for critical work on the use of drones in warfare.”<sup>146</sup> Wilcox connects the figure of the posthuman with the drone as a tool of necropolitics, whose all-seeing ‘eye’ deals asymmetric annihilation to those it watches. Like Bousquet’s vision-equals-death

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<sup>144</sup> Laura Wilcox, “Embodying algorithmic war: Gender, race, and the posthuman in drone warfare,” *Security Dialogue* 48 no. 1 (2017): 13.

<sup>145</sup> Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 2015).

<sup>146</sup> Wilcox, 13.

formulation, the key here is that the gaze of the drone might be all-seeing but its sight does not affect every body equally, though it is always violent in one way or another:

Drone assemblages as a mode of necropolitical violence—the violence of ‘distinguishing whose life is to be managed and those who are subject to the right of death’ (Allinson, 2015: 121; Mbembe, 2003)—is both a form of posthuman embodiment and is itself corporealizing in terms of the racialized and gendered bodies it produces as either killable or manageable. As such, an embodied reading of drone warfare suggests the limits of the ‘god-trick’ of drone warfare both in terms of its omniscient surveillance capacities as well as its global spread...in other words, how algorithmic war has generative effects beyond its stated purposes of rational target identification and destruction (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011; Holmqvist, 2013).<sup>147</sup>

The drone is a surveillant machine whose “generative effects” include the creation of subjectivities within its mode of securitization. Wilcox’s model connects the banoptic functions of the watchfulness of the drone, with its filtering function of good/bad citizen-consumers, and its effects as an ideological apparatus under hypersubsumed capitalism, which creates the subjected subjectivities it needs to populate the globalized world of value production.

The figure of the drone is most useful when it renders transparent the diverse machinations, failures and assemblages at work in the global network of surveillance capitalism; droning immediately brings to mind the conjunction of algorithms, kill chains, human operators and targets that is not as obvious with many other surveillance technologies. That is, it is obviously a conjunction of flesh, metal and labour, while simultaneously engaging with the mythic properties commonly associated with many technologies of the digital era and becoming cloaked in the resultant mystique. It is subject to both discourses. It is a unique combination of militarized violence through surveillance, the use of algorithmic sorting in cybernetic decision making, and the immaterial, through the boring technological work that its operators do on a daily basis. The drone, as an example or harbinger of visualness, is a technological apparatus that does not only *respond* to the GWOT— it perpetuates and refines it as it flies over the

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<sup>147</sup> Wilcox, 14.

globe, freeing ever more battlespace, expanding war and its potentialities.<sup>148</sup> Framed this way, it should be easy to see how the active powers of drones— and by extension the entire apparatus of militarized surveillance— mirrors the actions of hypersubsumed capitalism. Hypersubsumption is the point where capitalism both responds to and creates the subjectivities and technologies it acts upon.

The drone's martial gaze renders the battle space technologically transparent by its ability to “see” with sonar, in the dark, and even through the earth. It is important to conceptualize drone vision as the extension of sight beyond its traditional optic focus. We can follow Orit Halpern in proposing “visualness” as the quality that has supplanted vision within the contemporary relations of power and control:

Visualizations, according to current definition, make new relationships appear and produce new objects and spaces for action and speculation. While the language of vision perseveres, it is important not to assume a direct correlation between vision as a sense and visualization as an object and practice... For Deleuze visuality is closely linked to visibilités, or what in English I will label “visibilities.” Deleuze defines this term as “visualness,” implying that vision cannot only be understood in a physiological sense but must also be understood as a quality or operation. For Deleuze visibilities are sites of production constituting an assemblage of relationships, enunciations, epistemologies, and properties that render agents into objects of intervention for power. Visibilities are historically stipulated apparatuses for producing evidence about bodies, subjects, and now, perhaps, new modalities of population.<sup>149</sup>

Ironically, it is this heightened transparency and the power relations created by it that steeps this space in a fog of war, which blurs and destroys the boundaries of traditional geospatial conflicts. In particular, the distinction between civilian and combatant is broken in drone warfare precisely because of the drone's reliance on cybernetic behavioral models to detect “patterns of life” for targeting, as opposed to traditional individual positive identification. Visualness not only assesses and acts upon existing space but also circumscribes and defines the space and the possibilities for those

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<sup>148</sup> According to Deleuze, lines of flight are transfers of forces present in territory towards an outside vector otherwise associated with that territory, creating new productive forces. This concerns both accidental ‘leakages’ and intentional departures during deterritorialization.

<sup>149</sup> Halpern, *Beautiful Data*, 21-4.



living within it. The distinction between the cybernetic behavioral analysis used for drone warfare and for online marketing, for instance, is that online marketing is concerned with using the behavioral data surplus to steer future patterns of consumption, whereas the use of this information under droning decides future possibilities of life itself—whether a person will be targeted, thereby circumscribing their potentialities for motion in space—or whether a person will be killed, taking control of their future temporality through annihilation. As Greg Elmer and Andy Opel put it: “We are looking to expand the common definition of optics to include not only ‘seeing’ but also being ‘sighted’ :’that is, discovered, localized, identified in order to be hit or struck’ (Weber 2005: 8).”<sup>150</sup>

This global regime of violent capitalist surveillance has created a duality of subjects who are at once passive targets of the roving military eye and active operators within the performance of its watchful gaze. We must wonder, was the sovereign subject just a surface-level effect of the self-establishing essence of the technology of its time, which has now been displaced as technology becomes increasingly autonomous and human perception changes and becomes subordinate to it?

### 3.7. « Hypersubsumption and Total War »

It is important to understand the military-surveillance complex because is not simply an example of violent productive forces under hypersubsumption; rather, since surveillance is integral to contemporary capitalism, and this surveillance can only be facilitated through technological advances initially made by military researchers, surveillance is necessarily militarized itself, even when removed from its state to its civilian or consumer function. The definition of hypersubsumption should then be expanded to include a state of contemporary capitalism both productive of and produced by militarized surveillance, where valorization has taken on the characteristics of war and the martial gaze. Éric

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<sup>150</sup> Greg Elmer and Andy Opel, “Pre-empting panoptic surveillance: surviving the inevitable war on terror,” *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*, ed. David Lyon (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2006), 143.

Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato's *Wars and Capital*<sup>151</sup> claims that liberalism (and by extension capitalism) has, from its inception, been a philosophy of "total war": "So-called total war abolishes any distinction between civil war (internal) and major war (exterior), major and minor war (colonial), military war and non-military war (economic, propaganda, subjective), between combatants and non-combatants, between war and peace... This appropriation and integration, without which we could not think of war as state, and total war as state of a new governmentality"<sup>152</sup> Under late capitalism, social divisions have become even starker, while capitalist production expands beyond easily discernible objects and forms a stranglehold on society and culture through what seems to be voluntary servitude. This hypersubsumption of society under capitalism relies on militarized technology, the weaponization of vision, and the expansion of war into everyday affairs.

In *Wars and Capital*, Alliez and Lazzarato say "[t]he statement 'It's like being in a war' should be immediately corrected: it is a war. The reversibility of war and economy is at the very basis of capitalism... the economy pursues the objectives of war through other means (blocking credit, embargo on raw materials, devaluation of foreign currency)."<sup>153</sup> To put a finer point on it, Alliez and Lazzarato later continue: "Integrated Global Capitalism is the axiomatic of the war machine of Capital that was able to submit the military deterritorialization of the State to the superior deterritorialization of Capital. The machine of production is no longer distinguishable from the war machine integrating civilian and military, peace and war, in the single process of a continuum of isomorphic power in all its forms of valuation."<sup>154</sup> In less Deleuzian terms, they are saying that capitalism not only integrates governance and military forces, but absorbs their useful characteristics and turns them into necessary parts of its value-making operation.

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<sup>151</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*.

<sup>152</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, 166.

<sup>153</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, 13.

<sup>154</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, 20.

Threats are now seen as emerging from *within* populations, hence the same techniques of control, repression and counterintelligence seen in the GWOT are being used at “home” in countries traditionally far from neocolonial warzones. Theorists like Paul Virilio claim that contemporary capitalism is fundamentally characterized by a war-like nature that it turns on its own populace—populations already fully subsumed by capitalist production—in order to make a profit. He calls this process endo-colonization.<sup>155</sup> Ben Noys summarizes Virilio's expansive analysis: “[Virilio] proposes that the proletarian body is ‘produced’ through semi-colonization by the military class, which seizes goods and value to support their own indolent and parasitic existence.”<sup>156</sup> Endo-colonization turns everybody into the mere human capital described previously as the state of millennials in Harris’ work. As with external colonialism, the population become mere vessels for the expansion of capitalism through the devaluation of that population’s labour and the devastation of the native economy, except here the native economy is the “home” economy. It is easy to see this at work in the 2008 financial collapse, in which thousands lost their homes while a select few made millions during state-sponsored bank bailouts. Noys continues: “Virilio presciently captured the sense of new forms of asymmetric warfare and the ‘hostage-holding’ function of military control in contemporary mediatized societies. In this situation traditional forms of popular resistance and what Virilio calls ‘ecological struggles’, the ‘the simple freedom to come and go, as well as the freedom to remain, to stay put’ (Virilio 1990: 91), become put into question.”<sup>157</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, this process of controlling coming and going, a form of social sorting, can only be achieved through large-scale surveillance.

The salient points here are the particular ways that military tactics and technologies literally change the populace specifically for the purpose of creating further,

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<sup>155</sup> Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War: Twenty-five Years Later* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008).

<sup>156</sup> Ben Noys “The War of Time,” 3.

<sup>157</sup> Noys, 4.

more profitable commodities and a more efficiently consuming population.<sup>158</sup> To achieve this, it is necessary to import more and more techniques of violence and to erase the illusion of the distinction between “us and them” that is so important to the GWOT rhetoric and to the discourse of the Global North versus Global South more generally. This distinction was seen at work in the discussion of the banopticon, which posited a nationalized barrier to entry facilitated by repressive surveillance technology and an internal world of DIY self-surveillance that one gained access to only by being allowed past the first set of barriers. The banopticon proposes that these two worlds have been folded into the same surveillance apparatus. The effect of militarization as it intertwines with contemporary capitalism for the purposes of creating greater surplus value should make us question whether these two “worlds” are really separate at all: in a state of total war, are we all fundamentally subject to/subjects of the same violence?

Alliez and Lazzarato make clear the effects of total war on subjectivity and citizenship: “So-called total war abolishes any distinction between civil war (internal) and major war (exterior), major and minor war (colonial), military war and non-military war (economic, propaganda, subjective), between combatants and non-combatants, between war and peace.”<sup>159</sup> The traditional definition of war, popularized by military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz, as “the continuation of politics by other means,”<sup>160</sup> is seen by Alliez and Lazzarato as transitional and state-based, while total war is a new

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<sup>158</sup> In a chapter titled “The new military urbanism,” Stephen Graham traces the incursion of military technologies and strategies into cities. He argues that Due to globalization and increased urbanism, states are attempting to ‘respond to increased threats’ through military rationalization and technology, which marks a change in traditional governmentality. The rise of techniques of militarization in urban spaces uses material and social architectures to turn cities into fortified spaces and normalize military solutions/tactics for civilian issues. As Graham states, the introduction of widespread technologically-facilitated state surveillance is fundamental to the rise of the militarization of society: “the attempted extension of essentially military ideas of tracking, identification and targeting into the quotidian spaces and circulations of everyday life.” The focus is on attempting to identify and control future threats based on targeting behavioral patterns, which leads governments to surveil their own citizens (Stephen Graham, “The New Military Urbanism,” in *The Surveillance-Industrial Complex: A Political Economy of Surveillance*, eds. Kirstie Ball and Lauren Snider, (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>159</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, 166.

<sup>160</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War [Vom Krieg]*, eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 87.

governmentality. In fact, they advocate an inversion of the formula, arguing that politics is war by other means: “‘Total’ war should be understood as a war that mobilizes all productive (labour, science, technology, organization, production), social, and subjective forces of a nation for the first time.”<sup>161</sup> We can say that total war imports certain techniques from the GWOT—most notably, the idea of war at a distance, which keeps those in the Global North safe from the violent conflict zones in places like Iraq; war at a distance is accomplished through the development of drones that was just discussed: first as machines of visual reconnaissance, then, with the addition of explosive projectiles, as machines capable of targeting and execution. However, as the eye of war turned its gaze onto the internal populace, pure physical violence gave way to a more low-intensity warfare characterized by pervasive surveillance and the integration of military surveillance technologies with consumerism. The machines of post-Fordist capitalism put the globe into a state of total war. Under the regime of total war, everybody is a target to watch in the name of extracting behavioral patterns in order to maximize the creation of value. The annihilation of physical terrorist bodies in the name of securitization of the United States facilitates the expansion of surveillant military techniques within the country’s own borders, upon its own citizens, while ‘war at a distance’ keeps the violence seeming far enough away as not to imbricate the two in a united critique of advanced capitalism. The physical violence done to bodies and objects ‘over there’ also fulfills the first function of the banopticon, which is to prevent ‘undesirables’ from penetrating the social and civil spheres controlled by those who own the means of digital production in order to have a smoother reproduction of consumer subjectivities.

Total war relies on a state of absolute exposure by means of the surveillance-industrial complex. It is the absolute transparency of society attained by the god-like vision of capitalism and its instrument, the state, in order to maximize profits through social sorting, repressive violence and extractive accumulation. So we can provisionally answer the question of what becomes of the citizens of a state under endo-colonization:

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<sup>161</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, 180.

they become targets, living under the same predatory gaze as the insurgent targets in the GWOT. Hypersubsumption, therefore, is a state of total war.

The military origins of surveillance technology and cybernetics have important consequences. This wartime research engine produced what historian of science Peter Galison has defined as a new “ontology of the enemy, not the alien and animal opponent, not the distantiated space on the map of an airtime raid, but the “cold-blooded, machine-like opponent.”<sup>162</sup> This move eliminated the enemy as a visibly different being and produced an imagined closed world of networked communications between informatic entities. As Halpern explains, this emergent assemblage would be codified later under the Cold War ideal of “C3I: command, control, communication, and information ontology of the enemy, machine-like, maps, etc..”<sup>163</sup> The logic of the abstraction of the “enemy” is an extension of the profiteering logic at the heart of capitalism, with money as the apotheosis of abstraction, while commodities are abstracted from the labour that created them and ultimately fetishized under a “free market.” This allows for the exploitation of labourers even when they are doing work that does not overtly seem like work (i.e. the immaterial or the unproductive, the “free” activity that produces mineable consumer data, such as online shopping, social media, etc.).

### 3.8. « Conclusion »

As we have seen, the goal of contemporary capitalism’s hypersubsumption of society is to turn *everything* into a productive force for its own use—the creation of the global social factory. Vital to that goal is the abstraction and reconfiguration accomplished by contemporary telecommunications systems and cybernetics, which allow the use of cybernetic control techniques and outcomes upon the whole of globalized labour. Because almost all post-WWII technological developments, but especially cybernetics, come from military research, they combine the opposing functions of current digital networks—the repressive and violent with the joyous and satisfying—

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<sup>162</sup> Peter Galison, “The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision,” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (1994): 231.

<sup>163</sup> Halpern, *Beautiful Data*, 44.

into a single stony gaze that acts upon everybody simultaneously, though not necessarily equally. Abstraction is at the heart of the alienation of capitalism, and it is capitalism and its accumulative ambitions that drove the development of cybernetic technologies to be the ultimate abstraction machines, turning humans into schemas of data visualization and vague clusters of information. As Marx warned in the *Fragment on Machines*, machines have emerged that are sophisticated enough to instrumentalize their human operators.

In the next chapter we will look at the effects of hypersubsumption on the users and labourers that create valuable data and other products of immaterial labour. In particular, we will discuss the debate over whether unpaid cultural activity should be considered labour or not. Integral to this discussion will be a consideration of Marx's concept of species-being. In this chapter, we saw how capitalism in the stage of hypersubsumption mutated the means of production to be effective tools of surveillance capitalism. We also saw how surveillance capitalism descended from military technology, and in a sense, it never left these origins, as targeting, cybernetic control and precision are all important values of surveillance capitalism. Taken together these values make up one of the most violent effects of surveillance capitalism—the “martial gaze.” The martial gaze is therefore a capitalist bastardization of the human sensorium of vision. Instead of vision, it is “visualness.” In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx discusses what he calls the emancipation of human senses from capitalist colonization;<sup>164</sup> this is possible only when the sense organs become generic, human organs (as opposed to crude, non-human organs)—they can only do this by becoming non-egotistically social through refusal of private property: “The senses and enjoyment of other men have become my own appropriation. Besides these direct organs, therefore, social organs develop in the form of society; thus, for instance, activity in direct association with others, etc., has become an organ for expressing my own life, and a mode of appropriating human life.”<sup>165</sup> Instead of being appropriated by an object, which is what happens in the alienating process of commodity creation, the truly social human is able to enjoy life fully. This enjoyment comes through

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<sup>164</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 46.

<sup>165</sup> Marx, 46.

what Marx calls affirming the objective world—aka non-capitalist labour. By labouring and creating an object, “man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with all his senses.”<sup>166</sup> The next chapter will explore the devastating effects of contemporary capitalist production on subjectivity, labour, and the human sensorium, illuminating the duplicitous kind of alienation unique to contemporary society, and its effects on human species-being.

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<sup>166</sup> Marx, 46.



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#### 4. « Chapter Three: Labour and Posthumanism »

In the previous chapter, we focused on the relationship between the visual data gathering technologies deployed in regimes of ubiquitous surveillance, their martial, violent origins, and the means and techniques of production specific to capitalism in a state of hypersubsumption. The focus of this chapter is on the unique kind of labour and labourers that toil within contemporary capitalism. In particular, it focuses on characterizing network value, or the kind of value that is mined and extracted through seemingly unproductive processes. First, I discuss Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, which traces the development of the serf into the proletarian vis-a-vis a mechanized paradigm, using her discussion of the transition from feudalism to primitive accumulation and industrial capitalism as a model and stepping stone for my own mapping of capitalism and its reliance on immaterial labour that takes "cyborg" forms. Second, the chapter offers a summary of the field of posthumanism and its relationships to contemporary technologies. I argue that current threads of posthumanism use too narrow an idea of technology and labour, relying fundamentally on capitalist categorizations of the human. Third, the chapter discusses Marx's distinctions between productive and unproductive labour, and constant and variable capital, calling into question whether these distinctions still stand today, and if not, what formulations of labour are adequate to account for the contemporary creation of surplus value. Fourth is a discussion of unwaged immaterial labour, and an attempt to bring into focus the type of subject who does such work, by what means, and with what motivation. This brings me to a discussion of the special role of coercion in unwaged immaterial labour, and its effects on subjectivity, which leads to the introduction of the term "coerced posthumanism" to refer to the condition of myriad unwaged immaterial labourers in contemporary society. Lastly, in order to clarify the parameters of what is meant by

coerced post-humanism, I contrast it with what Marx calls *Gattungswesen* or “species-being.”

#### 4.1. « Radical Transformations »

Silvia Federici’s 2004 book, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*,<sup>167</sup> traces the passage of capitalism from feudalism to capitalism and compares it with the transition from Fordism to the post-Fordist capitalism of today. In her account of the early moments of capitalism, Federici brings to the fore a history that stresses the development of the proletarian body through a rationalist, mechanical paradigm, with particular focus on the role European and American witch hunts played in disempowering women so that they became mere vessels for the (unpaid) reproduction of labour. By connecting the end of feudalism with the Black Death that decimated Europe’s population, Federici shows how the plague was vital in the empowerment of the serf class, as it gave them access to land; due to the dramatic drop in population, the workforce had the power to demand higher wages and better working conditions. Federici uses this transition to emphasize the class struggle already under way during feudalism, to which the nobility, the state, and the church responded by banding together to suppress peasant power through laws that governed workers’ behavior, criminalizing prostitution and any sexuality that did not lead to procreation, and most importantly, expropriating peasants from their land while simultaneously enclosing the commons. The latter was vital for the independent life of the peasantry, as it gave them unfettered access to food, fuel and pastures, and was a place for them—women in particular—to come together for revelry and self-governance. According to Federici, the enclosure of the commons coincided with the rise of misogyny and a “trade off” whereby women became the new “common property”—men could treat them as they wanted, with little to no punishment for violent crime, and women were divested of political power and property ownership. At the same time, wage labour was on the rise, which further alienated

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<sup>167</sup> Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

workers. Already dispossessed from the land, now they were becoming expropriated from the products of their labour—two of the four types of alienation Marx discusses in the *1844 Manuscripts*.<sup>168</sup>

The rise of wage labour proceeded in concert with a state and church program to manage workers' physical and spiritual time, even outside the workplace, in order to mold them into the best possible workers for capitalism—or as Federici puts it, to turn them from workers into labour-power, “[the] pure abstraction of capitalism.”<sup>169</sup> What is most salient here is Federici's formulation of the machine as the prototype for both labour-power and the social management of labour, or in other words, the turning of the rhythms of the body into predictable activities that could be regulated and monitored, for “the body is the condition of the existence of labour-power.”<sup>170</sup> The rise of the machine in industry happened alongside the increasing instrumentalization of the body. Federici claims that in order for workers to become abstract labour-power, the body needed to become more machinic, which first necessitated a dehumanization:

...from the point of view of the abstraction process that the individual underwent in the transition to capitalism, we can see that the development of the ‘human machine’ was the main technological leap, the main step in the development of the productive forces that took place in the period of primitive accumulation. *We can see, in other words, that the human body and not the steam engine, and not even the clock, was the first machine developed by capitalism.*<sup>171</sup>

We can see Federici's argument in light of the transition from formal to real subsumption in capitalism, which was discussed in the first chapter; capitalist production could begin in earnest after sufficient resources were extracted during the period of primitive accumulation, and its rise (formal subsumption) corresponds to the creation of the “human machine,” through dehumanization, into abstract labour-power. Real

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<sup>168</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), 31. The other two forms of alienation are alienation from oneself and from the human “species-being,” which will be discussed more later.

<sup>169</sup> Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 135.

<sup>170</sup> Federici, 141.

<sup>171</sup> Federici, 146.

subsumption, as we saw, happened during industrialization. This chapter will use both Federici's argument and its structure to trace a similar development of individuals in relation to contemporary labour and capitalism, also relating to both primitive accumulation and something akin to dehumanization, which I will call coerced posthumanism. I will use the framework of the discussion of the expropriation of land from the peasantry, the dehumanization and subsequent mechanization of the body as abstract labour-power, and the oscillation between primitive accumulation and formal subsumption to create an parallel structure on the "other side" of history: namely, in the period of hypersubsumption, having passed through real subsumption, capitalism makes a series of moves against workers that are analogous to their early dehumanization and refashioning as proletariat; if Federici's schema moves through sovereign modes of power to biopower, then today we must look at the state of the individual as it is transformed by the shift from control societies to droning/surveillance capitalism. The direction of this transformation was famously first mapped by Donna Haraway in her landmark 1985 essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," is arguably the *urtext* of posthumanism (which is ironic because Haraway explicitly disavows origins and paternity). In it, Haraway argues for the emergence of a new kind of subject position based on the nexus between what she calls the "informatics of domination" (akin to "societies of control") and the relation between cybernetics, labour and capital. This new subject is a political position that harnesses the power of the liminal, the indeterminable, the hybrid and the illegitimate:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction...creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted. Modern medicine is also full of cyborgs, of couplings between organism and machine... Modern production seems like a dream of cyborg colonization work, a dream that makes the nightmare of Taylorism seem idyllic. And modern war is a cyborg orgy, coded by C3I, command-control-communication-intelligence, an \$84 billion item

in 1984's US defence [sic] budget. I am making an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality.<sup>172</sup>

Haraway would agree with Federici that under capitalism, labour itself is dehumanizing—it makes cyborgs of us all. Haraway underscores the role of technology in the figure of the cyborg.. For all intents and purposes, she is pointing to what was discussed earlier as the 'social factory' of hypersubsumption under capitalism, the engine of technological progress, which it forces along in service of creating value. Haraway's essay is one the most celebrated anticipations of a posthuman capitalism—a topic to which we now turn.

## 4.2. « Threads of Posthumanism »

In the popular imagination, “posthumanism” conjures images of Terminators, advanced artificial intelligences, killer robots who have defied their master's directives, and human beings with technologically-enhanced limbs, either of metal or some cross-species graft onto the body. This is not an entirely incorrect conception; as it stands, posthumanism encompasses all of that and more, and also complicates and deepens these images. It is a rather murky umbrella term for a series of discourses loosely related through an interest in technology, the body, and a suspicion of anthropocentrism and humanism.<sup>173</sup>

Recognizing the difficulty of defining posthumanism as a single coherent conceptual framework, Matthew Gladden begins by distinguishing between two broad types of posthumanism: analytic and synthetic. Analytic posthumanism “understands posthumanity as a socio-technological reality that already exists in the contemporary world and which needs to be analyzed,” while synthetic posthumanism “understands

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<sup>172</sup> Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist- Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-50.

<sup>173</sup> Some of the prevailing posthumanist literature includes: Chéla Sandoval, “Re-entering Cyberspace: Sciences of Resistance,” *Dispositio* 19, no. 46 (1994): 75-93; Shannon Lemoine, “Critical Studies: Science Language Culture,” Syllabus, Stanford University; Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Andy Miah, “Posthumanism: A Critical History,” in *Medical Enhancements & Posthumanity*, ed. Bert Gordijn (New York: Routledge, 2007).

posthumanity as a collection of hypothetical future entities whose development can be either intentionally realized or intentionally prevented, depending on whether or not human society chooses to research and deploy certain transformative technologies.”<sup>174</sup> Under synthetic posthumanism, Gladden includes science fiction, what he calls “philosophical” posthumanism, and popular posthumanism. Under the analytic heading he places critical and cultural posthumanism, feminist new materialism and anti-humanism. Analytic posthumanism roughly focuses on the present and on understanding socio-technical realities, rather than the future, as the conditions which form posthumanism are unclear (since by nature it is unpredictable, mutating, etc.). The synthetic branch, on the other hand,

...define[s] ‘posthumanity’ as a set of hypothetical future entities (such as full-body cyborgs or artificial general intelligences) whose capacities differ from—and typically surpass—those of natural biological human beings and whose creation can either be intentionally brought about or intentionally blocked, depending on whether humanity decides to develop and implement certain transformative technologies...they conduct an exploration of power structures or trends of the current day only insofar as these offer some insight into how future processes of posthumanization might be directed.<sup>175</sup>

Though these categories often bleed into each other and their representative thinkers do not make hard and fast distinctions between the topics they are interested in, taken together, they encompass the main ideas in posthuman theory that I am interested in here.

Critical and cultural posthumanism, alongside feminist new materialism and anti-humanism, often operate in tandem or in conversation with each other. Critical posthumanism is a methodology that deconstructs humanism into non-nihilistic, life-affirming possibilities (thus its future-orientedness), which often come from overlooked, unacknowledged subjects who have traditionally been structurally excluded from the sociopolitical matrix.

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<sup>174</sup> Matthew Gladden, “A Typology of Posthumanism: A Framework for Differentiating Analytic, Synthetic, Theoretical, and Practical Posthumanisms,” in *Sapient Circuits and Digitalized Flesh: The Organization as Locus of Technological Posthumanization* (Defragmenter Media, 2016), 39.

<sup>175</sup> Gladden, 41.

Cultural posthuman is similar to its critical counterpart, in that it also departs from humanism and focuses on presently-existing systems. It sees posthumanism as “a state that already exists within our contemporary world. It argues that the nature of posthumanity can be diagnosed by applying the tools of cultural studies to analyze elements of contemporary culture, including works of literature, film, television, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, fashion, computer games, tabletop roleplaying games, and religious and political speech.”<sup>176</sup> Haraway’s cyborg is an example of both critical and cultural posthumanism, as it is a methodology for deconstructing present binaries using the aforementioned cultural analysis. Critical posthumanism questions the relationship between the human, the posthuman and the non-human (and sometimes the inhuman<sup>177</sup>) as figures of thought, as well as posthumanism as a whole as an analysis of contemporary social conditions.

Italian theorist Rosi Braidotti is a widely recognized critical posthumanist,<sup>178</sup> whose work often utilizes Deleuzian concepts to deconstruct and subsequently shatter social binaries (most notably, gender) in order to laud the possibilities of new forms of collective existence. I turn to her work not only because it offers many examples of the logics of posthumanism as a form of politics, but also because the theorist Ray Brassier responds to Braidotti in his critiques of posthumanism, which I will be looking at as well. In a nod to new materialism, Braidotti also stresses the importance of human

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<sup>176</sup> Gladden, 50.

<sup>177</sup> Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of the “inhuman” in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) and *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1992) is one of the earlier iterations of what becomes posthumanism. Like Haraway, Lyotard’s ideas are rooted in postmodernism and the deconstruction of language through psychoanalytical social norms. He rejects humanism as a dominating force that uses education to twist the kernel of the inhuman—which is future-oriented, able to think critically about technology, includes society as composed of technological forces, and open to possibility—into a universal humanism mired in capitalism and imperialism. The connection between science fiction tropes and the figure of the posthuman can also be found in Lyotard’s work.

<sup>178</sup> Not only has Braidotti written articles like “Posthuman Critical Theory” (*Journal of Posthuman Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 9-25) and “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities” (*Theory, Culture and Society* 36, no. 6 (2019): 31-61), her book *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013) is an outline of the intersections between critical posthumanism and feminist new materialism.

relationships with non-human entities, including the rest of the living world, in order to slough off the anthropocentrism that plagues the “universal man” of post-Enlightenment thought. Braidotti’s work often uses the figure of the female as a model for the posthuman; she weaponizes normative notions of the female as the complement or other to the male and uses this discourse to criticize the limits of humanism, which she sees as inscribed on the body and liberated through technological experimentation. The figure of the female—which is not limited to those identifying as women, but is rather a social position that is currently occupied by minoritarian figures and also holds the potential to be occupied by others in the future<sup>179</sup>—has the power to deconstruct the very binaries of its origin: “Non-linearity, non-fixity and non-unitary subjectivity are the priority, and they are situated in close proximity to woman, the native, the dispossessed, the abused, the excluded, the “other” of the high-tech clean and efficient bodies that contemporary culture sponsors.”<sup>180</sup> Braidotti’s point highlights the Western world’s reliance and even parasitism on “other” bodies which feeds contemporary culture’s investment in sanitized bodies—the “poor, low tech and unclean” are the necessary other side to the “First World” as they provide raw material for extraction in the constant cycle of primitive accumulation and formal subsumption.<sup>181</sup>

Braidotti’s work, which displays the common thread between different types of mainstream posthumanisms, has been scathingly criticized by Ray Brassier, who describes it as plagued with an overall ontological xenophobia: “All-inclusive post-humanism supplants exclusionary humanism as the politically “progressive” optic consonant with the liberal ideal of inclusiveness that has become the humanities’ critical

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<sup>179</sup> Braidotti uses Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-woman” from *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) to further explore the confrontation between ontology and power.

<sup>180</sup> Rosi Braidotti, “Posthuman, All Too Human, Towards a New Process Ontology,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7–8 (2006): 197–208.

<sup>181</sup> As Andrew Ross explains, “[v]irtually all of the technological infrastructure for this sector is manufactured in the workshops of the world in East Asia, where harsh factory conditions give rise to high-intensity labour conflicts on a regular basis. Where the creative use, say, of a notebook computer involves a highly customized work experience, emblematic of the fluid, flexible, self-organized profile of post-Fordism, the conditions of its manufacture could not be more different.” Andrew Ross, “In Search of the Lost Paycheck” in Scholz, *Digital Labour*, 37.



lodestone. Emancipation is no longer of the human; it is from the human as exclusionary category.”<sup>182</sup> According to Brassier, posthumanism first re-naturalizes the human on the continuum of biological capacities with other living organisms. Then, in many threads of posthumanism, technology is identified as a meta-capacity that allows humans to redefine themselves: to act on and change their own capacities. Because many strands of posthumanism place a premium on creativity as a road to liberation, they often become entangled with techno-utopianism in one form or another, believing that technology offers new means to tap into creative potential. Brassier turns to Braidotti’s posthuman theory for examples of the many issues that crop up with these formulations of posthumanism, which are awash with the tropes of hybridity, entanglement and assemblage that are ubiquitous in posthumanist writing.

If critical posthumanism’s insistence on the creative and liberatory potential of the dispossessed seems familiar, it is because it aligns well with the way autonomist Marxism insists on the collective creativity of the working class as the revolutionary power that has the potential to topple capitalism, an idea especially important to Hardt and Negri. Posthumanism does not focus on class warfare, however. Braidotti claims that posthumanism resists just being another proponent of the acceleration of capitalism by creating “transversal subjects” based on Deleuze’s concept of a “missing people.”<sup>183</sup> As Brassier points out, Braidotti in particular, following Deleuze, calls the dispossessed of capitalism “the missing people,” and goes on to point out that “it is telling that the categories in terms of which she nominates the ‘missing’—i.e., indigenous, feminist, queer, otherwise abled, et al.—are identifications of the excluded already acknowledged by capitalist neoliberalism, rather than indices of the unrepresentable capable of destroying its logic of incorporation (i.e. subsumption under value). What is ‘missing’ for Braidotti is simply whatever is not yet included.”<sup>184</sup> Instead of the necessary focus on analyzing capitalism in order to abolish the warring social forms it creates in order to survive and

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<sup>182</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 2.

<sup>183</sup> Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework,” 41.

<sup>184</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 12.

thrive, posthumanism relies on this “creative affirmation,” but “because it is wholly immanent to the logic of capital, the counter-actualization of virtual potencies required by Braidotti’s hope is effectively the cultivation of empowerment within existing social relations.”<sup>185</sup> In other words, this form of posthumanism not only relies on the social categories created by capitalism, but it also reifies and affirms them, externalizing various social collectivities and thereby rendering them static and capable of exploitation and extraction by capitalism. This model of posthumanism will be referred to later as part of coerced posthumanism, which depends on the valorized labour of self-abstraction, masked as sociality. We shall also discuss how Marx’s concept of species-being is the latter’s necessary antithesis.

### 4.3. « Value Today: Productive and Unproductive Labour »

To understand the processes of coerced posthumanism under hypersubsumption, and the ways in which it exceeds the technological domination of the workplace under real subsumption, we need to examine Marx’s categories of “productive” and “unproductive” labour. According to Marx, labour under capitalism can either be productive or unproductive. In the age of immaterial labour and the social factory, understanding traditional distinctions between productive and unproductive labour is crucial, because they play a role in theoretical understandings of both labour and the social factory. Does immaterial labour obey the labour theory of value? Is it productive or unproductive labour? Is some or all of it not labour at all? According to Marx, productive labour is abstract labour-power that *directly* creates surplus value. In addition, it is *only* productive waged labour that produces capital. While productive labour is necessarily a prime object of study in *Capital*, unproductive labour is given far less treatment, because Marx sees it as ancillary (though necessary) to bourgeois capitalist production.

Unproductive labour is labour which is exchanged directly with revenue (wages, profit, rent or interest) or labour which does not produce value. This category of

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<sup>185</sup> Brassier, 11.

unproductive labour includes the labour of (re) producing the proletariat, supervisory activities and circulation activities.<sup>186</sup>

The labour theory of value, which underpins traditional Marxist accounts of the creation of capitalist value, states that the value of a commodity is determined by the socially necessary labour time it takes to produce it. The value being referred to, however, is the value that is realized in circulation, by sale in the market.

Circulation labour includes sales and purchasing, accounting, advertising, legal services, etc. According to Marx, circulation labour is unproductive of value because it merely records or facilitates transactions that are exchanges of equivalent values—the exchanges of commodities for money—which themselves produce no surplus value but only change equal values into other forms. Reproductive labour, or the work that assists the labourer in reproducing themselves, often domestic labour, is considered unproductive, though the labourer cannot reproduce themselves (and thus retain their unique status as commodity and labour-power) without this unproductive labour. The unproductive labour of reproduction thus produces labour-power itself. Supervisory labour entails management of the labour of production workers, and cannot be considered socially necessary labour as it is only necessary under capitalism because of class antagonisms between capitalists and workers over working conditions. These distinctions were made by Marx to refer to conditions found primarily under industrial capitalism and factory labour (not to mention the large quantities of supervisory labour and circulation labour that must have been at work in other parts of the globe, where imperialist tendencies made sure that primitive accumulation never ended).

Now we must ask how to characterize contemporary forms of labour in light of the creation of value and surplus value, and whether Marx's categories can be applied today. As was discussed earlier, Marx himself predicted the capitalist mobilization of the general intellect—general social knowledge becoming a direct force of production—facilitated through sophisticated technology. As the general intellect is formed under

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<sup>186</sup> David Harvey, "All Labour Produces Value for Capital and We All Struggle Against Value," *The Commoner*, no. 10 (2005): 137.

capitalism, it transforms the processes of social life itself, and social production—not merely economic activity—is transformed according to capitalist production. As we have seen, this happens after the real subsumption of capitalism, after technological advances are driven by, not merely co-opted for, the production of surplus value. The condition which I have been calling hypersubsumption, the stage of contemporary capitalist domination that brings together immaterial labour and the social factory vis-a-vis the development of network technology (in a parasitic relationship with extractive accumulation in certain parts of the globe) is the real world culmination of Marx’s prophetic writings.

I argue that “network value,” as theorized by Matteo Pasquinelli,<sup>187</sup> can be analyzed by examining Marx’s concepts of productive and unproductive labour and constant and variable capital, under a contemporary lens. In doing so, we will see that that network value is the product of posthuman labour, characterized by a particular type of coercion. I argue that the posthuman itself, rather than being a critical category or subject position, refers instead to a form of labour—namely, the labour that emerges under hypersubsumption and produces network value.

Pasquinelli uses the term “network value” to characterize the value generated through the gathering of collective knowledge and behavior via dataveillance: “If a commodity is described traditionally by use-value and exchange-value, network-value is a further layer attached to the previous ones to describe its ‘social’ relations. This term is ambiguous, as it might simply point to a ‘value of networks’ (as in Benkler’s much-celebrated ‘wealth of networks’). To be more precise, a new notion of network surplus-value should be advanced and articulated here. Indeed, PageRank produces what Deleuze and Guattari have described as a “machinic surplus-value,”<sup>188</sup> referring to the surplus-value accumulated through the cybernetic domain.”<sup>189</sup> The concept of network surplus

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<sup>187</sup> Pasquinelli, “Google’s PageRank Algorithm,” 8.

<sup>188</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1983): 232.

<sup>189</sup> Pasquinelli, “Google’s PageRank Algorithm,” 8.

value folds machinic surplus value (surplus value gathered from the cybernetic realm) into cognitive capitalism, which is the favored way of describing profit created through the general intellect, including not only dataveillance but also the expansion of creative intellectual labour facilitated by digital technologies and an intensification of cultural labour.

How should we characterize the activities performed online by billions every day — including shopping, gaming, social media, email and more? In order to do so, we need to examine the relationship between human labour and algorithmic AI, which facilitates many of these activities, the types of production native to these forms of activity and their relationship to capitalism, and finally, the relationship of these activities to class composition vis-à-vis access to the means of production. As I have noted before, forms of subsumption are fundamentally imbricated with technological development for the purposes of capital. Subsumption is what allows capitalism to actualize its goal of self-valorization through the creation of surplus value, for it is only with real subsumption that labour power itself comes fully under the capitalist mode of production. As Marx wrote: “...this inherent tendency of the capital relation does not become adequately realized—it does not become indispensable, and that also means technologically indispensable—until the specific capitalist mode of production and hence the real subsumption of labour under capital has developed.”<sup>190</sup> The complete subsumption of labour under capitalism means that all labour becomes abstract labour-power. As we have seen, there is an inherent contradiction between labour and capitalism—namely, that capitalism’s ultimate goal is to get rid of variable capital, i.e., labour. However, value cannot be made without labour, so capitalism must always try to subsume further kinds of work under its umbrella, all the while attempting to extend labour time as much as possible.

According Marx’s account, in order to make commodities that then go into circulation and realize surplus value for the capitalist, labourers must interact with the means of production—namely, machinery and raw materials. In *Capital: Vol. 1*, Marx

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<sup>190</sup> Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 1037.

distinguishes between two kinds of capital: variable and constant. Variable capital refers to the wages paid to labour-power, or the value invested in labour-power, or labour-power itself, while constant capital is the means of production, meaning machinery and raw materials used during the production process. Variable capital both creates new value and preserves the value of constant capital. Constant capital contributes to value in another way—the value of machinery and materials is preserved and transferred to new products only by its interaction with living labour: “While productive labour is changing the means of production into constituent elements of a new product, their value undergoes a metempsychosis. It deserts the consumed body, to occupy the newly created one.”<sup>191</sup> Because constant capital is itself a product of labour, it transfers its value to new products as its use value is expended; thus, it is not able to *create* new value as such. Constant capital is *embodied* in the means of production. I will come back to the significance of embodiment vis-a-vis constant capital later.

Labour preserves the value of constant capital in the labouring process. According to Marx, this ability to preserve value is another unique quality of living labour-power—along with the dual character of being both commodity and producer of commodities. The labour of repairing machines (as an example of the main form of constant capital we are concerned with here) is considered part of the original value of the machine, and depreciation of value due to wear and tear is a natural part of its use. Labour-power produces surplus value by creating exchange value over and above the amount it takes to reproduce itself (represented by, but not necessarily actually equal to, wages paid). Similarly, labour-power preserves the value in constant capital by using it (its use value is the purpose of its value) to create new products. All of this created value is given by labour-power to the capitalist, as Marx ruthlessly points out: “The property therefore which labour-power in action, living labour, possesses of preserving value, at the same time that it adds it, is a gift of Nature which costs the labourer nothing, but which is very advantageous to the capitalist inasmuch as it preserves the existing value of his capital.

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<sup>191</sup> Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2000), 509.

So long as trade is good, the capitalist is too much absorbed in money-grubbing to take notice of this gratuitous gift of labour.”<sup>192</sup>

To recap, Marx differentiates between productive and unproductive labour. The former refers to labour that directly produces value, while the latter—including circulatory labour, the reproduction of labour and the overseeing of labour (e.g., managerial duties)—supports this process but does not itself produce value. Labour-power produces value directly through its work producing commodities, which is achieved through labour using raw materials and machinery—a.k.a. the means of production—in the labour-process. Marx distinguishes between the investments capital makes into labour and into the means of production; while both are forms of capital, waged labour is variable capital while machinery and raw materials are constant capital.

At first glance it can appear that Marx contrasts constant and variable capital because, as the name suggests, constant capital lasts—of course raw materials are used up in the production process but machinery stands and continues to be useful through multiple shifts and even many generations of workers. But upon further inspection, it is made clear that like variable capital, machinery does not last forever; its life is just very long (machines rusting, etc.). Furthermore, routine machine maintenance should be seen as an analogue to the necessary reproduction of labour power. However, under Marx’s account the reproduction of labour is considered unproductive labour and does not create value as such, whereas the maintenance of constant capital is proactively considered in its value, and is thus part of what is “preserved” through labour. Traditionally, variable capital is waged labour, and wages are used by the labourer as part of their reproduction (to buy food, shelter, leisure, etc.). This is all a normal part of Marx’s account of labour-power as a special kind of commodity, and refers only to the abstract labour that the worker does in their capacity as a waged employee. But what about the unwaged labour done by most people in society today? What does that type of labour create, sustain or reproduce?

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<sup>192</sup> Marx, *Selected Writings*, 509.

#### 4.4. « Social Labour and Net-work »

According to Marx's scathing critique of the so-called "free labour market," a worker is "free" to sell their labour to a particular capitalist, or not. He makes explicit the consequences of not selling one's labour—not participating in "free exchange"—which is lack of wages, and therefore lack of subsistence for oneself and one's family. In other words, during the industrial revolution the choices were very simple: work or die. However, as drone and technology theorist Mark Andrejevic puts it: "More work needs to be done to define what might be meant by exploitation in unwaged labour contexts to bolster the critique of exploitation in the digital economy and to address the way in which it is so often dismissed (for failing to acknowledge the benefits and pleasures received by those engaged in various forms of free labour)."<sup>193</sup> In other words, the simple exchange between proletariat and capitalist is no longer adequate to describe the kind of complex interplays of today's globalized techno-capitalism with its material and immaterial instantiations.

Andrejevic's work also allows us to explicitly consider exploitation/coercion, surveillance, digital labour, network value and pleasure together, and is worth quoting at length:

The extraction of the value of information gathered about users relies on the same logic of resource enclosure and the consequent asymmetry of power relations that structure the "freely" agreed upon surrender of control over personal information... The goal of comprehensive surveillance is to discover those levers that allow marketers to channel consumer behavior according to commercial imperatives—to relegate the consumer to the role of feedback mechanism in an accelerating cycle of production and consumption... The capture of personal information turns our own activity against ourselves. Marx describes this as estrangement or alienation... It is the sign of a certain kind of material luxury to be able to be exploited online—to have the leisure time and resources to engage in the activities that are monitored and tracked.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Mark Andrejevic, "Estranged Free Labour," in *Digital Labour: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2012): 196.

<sup>194</sup> Andrejevic, 201-206.



While workplace surveillance initially began as a way to track productivity, with the advent of digital labour it has morphed into its own mode of production. The surveillance and capture of personal information, as Andrejevic puts it, is the interface between user generated data and market value; in other words, it is algorithmic surveillance and its subsequent sorting that turns mere data into valuable information to be acted upon. What is vital here is that the structure of the mining of freely-given personal information in exchange for or as a form of luxury follows the coercive logic of the free market, despite not taking place strictly at the marketplace.

This distinction between the space of “the marketplace” and the domestic sphere, the sphere of personal enjoyment or leisure time, is vital to exploitation and alienation. Just as classical Marxism and the political economy it critiqued did not count reproductive labour as value-producing labour (though Marx at least acknowledged it was part of the circuit of labour as unproductive labour), so does contemporary capitalism exploit the difficulty of describing the kinds of digital activity and personal data creation that are being surveilled and mined. One of the most useful techniques for claiming that this type of activity is not labour is achieved through a twisted appropriation of Marx’s critiques of capitalism; labour and leisure time are separated, and since labour is alienating, it is not pleasurable or willingly engaged in, except as a contract. Therefore, the production of network value, which is so imbricated with pleasure and personal identity, must not be work. After all, it is called “personal information” is so termed because a person directly produces it through their activity, which could be construed as the exact opposite of alienation. However, this distinction is entirely misleading, because as Panos Kompatsiaris writes: “The ‘pleasure in work’ (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010), or work as the site where one is most capable of realizing ideas and desires (Smith 2013, 37), coincides with creative modes of capital accumulation (Vishmidt 2013). Life becomes work and work becomes life, although neither in Marx’s sense nor in the sense of the early avant-gardes, who hoped for the dissolution of art into life...it is capitalism

that has colonized the very fabric of human desire and emotion.”<sup>195</sup> Andrejevic, though a proponent of the distinction between waged immaterial labour and other activities that engage with the network, agrees that “[t]he fact of exploitation need not prevent workers from taking a certain pleasure in their craft or in the success of a collaborative effort well done. Nor is it the case that accounts of exploitation necessarily denigrate the activities or the meanings they may have for those who participate in them rather than the social relations that underwrite expropriation and alienation. The point of a critique of exploitation is neither to disparage the pleasures of workers nor the value of the tasks being undertaken.”<sup>196</sup> In other words, just because something is enjoyable or pleasurable does not mean it is not work.

We have already seen how “work becomes life” within the social factory, culminating in the movement from real subsumption to hypersubsumption, or the full imbrication of capitalism with all forms of life in addition to all parts of the production-exchange-consumption cycle. We have also seen how that cycle has become disrupted, disjointed, and otherwise malleable in its order with the advent of control societies and their diffuse forms of power, as opposed to the institutional controls most prevalent under regimes of biopower.

We have also discussed how the nature of production and forms of productive labour change under hypersubsumption. Now we have to look at the effects on workers as well. While immaterial labour relates to the general intellect as a direct force of production, the emergence of network value also means valuation occurs outside of traditional labour time. The unwaged labour of creating network value seems to have a lot in common with both reproductive labour and unproductive labour, but does not neatly fit into either category. Unlike productive labour, which utilizes abstract labour power, is waged, and directly creates surplus value, the work that goes into “networking” does not directly create value. It is also not done in direct relation to other capitalist means of

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<sup>195</sup> Panos Kompatsiaris, “Art Struggles: Confronting Internships and Unpaid Labour in Contemporary Art,” *tripleC* 13, no. 2 (2015): 557.

<sup>196</sup> Mark Andrejevic, “Surveillance and Alienation,” 283.

production or labour—it does not oversee or administrate other labour, and does not have an identifiable locale in a workplace hierarchy. On the other hand, unlike reproductive labour, network labour does not strictly or necessarily reproduce the worker. Rather, the work that one does browsing social media, buying online goods, answering emails, and interacting with smart devices (to name a few things that create network value) seems to create a kind of *social* value for individuals that do these activities.

While the existence of this social value seems to neatly correspond with Hardt and Negri's social factory, I believe their "socialized" or "diffuse" worker concept is inadequate to characterize the kind of humanity that interacts with these contemporary modes of value and production. Hardt and Negri define the socialized worker as "characterised by a hybrid of material and immaterial labouring activities linked together in social and productive networks by highly developed labouring co-operation."<sup>197</sup> The socialized worker refers to the subject of waged immaterial labour, whose products and means/modes of production necessarily ripple out beyond the factory walls and create the invisible social factory.

Early attempts to qualify the type of work and exploitation of post-Fordist capitalism include Alvin Toffler's "prosumer," or producer-user-consumer, and its subsequent partner the "produsage," coined by Axel Bruns to describe the material conditions that accompany the prosumer. These concepts are important because they recognize immaterial labour's structural changes not only in work but in subjectivity. Hardt and Negri discuss the "socialized worker," who later morphs into a member of the "multitude" they reference in the title of their book, and whose struggle is not "limited to waged labour but must refer to human creative capacities in all their generality."<sup>198</sup> They do away with the definition of the proletariat as anybody who does work in exchange for a wage, which is too restrictive to describe the constant composition and decomposition of contemporary class struggles, as well as the ability of people to participate in more

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<sup>197</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labour of Dionysus: Critique of the State-Form* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1994), 274.

<sup>198</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 105.

than one struggle. However, “multitude” is still inadequate to describe the exchange(s) going on between users of telecoms and the owners of those systems. For one, users are not interacting with the owners themselves, like a capitalist and a worker meeting at the marketplace, nor is this quite like Marx’s description of commodity fetishism, wherein commodities meet each other in the marketplace, inanimate objects standing in place of human social relations, given unnatural life via reification. Rather, users are interacting with the means of production themselves, as the means and the products are one and the same on the users’ end (e.g., Instagram, where the platform itself is the both the means of taking, editing and distributing images, and the site at which images are viewed by others, thereby growing an individual’s Instagram profile), and the process of extraction and valuation takes a much less linear path than before. Crucially, the “multitude” also does not account for the primary method by which the value of immaterial labour is extracted, which is through the integration of diffuse surveillance.

Here we can return to Shosanna Zuboff’s work on surveillance capitalism. She writes: “It is inaccurate to think of Google’s users as its customers: there is no economic exchange, no price, and no profit. Nor do users function in the role of workers. When a capitalist hires workers and provides them with wages and means of production, the products that they produce belong to the capitalist to sell at a profit. Not so here. Users are not paid for their labour, nor do they operate the means of production.”<sup>199</sup> Using the Google search engine is just one example of the extraction of network value, but the premises apply more generally. Though they may have jobs that provide them with traditional waged labour, users—in this case shorthand for anybody who utilizes networked digital platforms—are not only not paid for the time they spend on platforms, but they also do not create products per se. Generally speaking, what users generate is data—particularly behavioral data—simply by being online, using apps, smart devices, social media and other platforms. Crucially important to remember is that this is also not just data about individuals, but also collective, cooperative data, which traces the social

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<sup>199</sup> Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 71.

relations between users. This data is what is captured, or mined, by algorithms and then processed into an exchangeable good.

Thinkers like Zuboff characterize this shift in the productive circuit as a both a change of focus from production to consumption and from mass consumption to individually tailored, or targeted, needs. She also explicitly connects this form of valuation with exploitation and alienation: “Under this new regime, the precise moment at which our needs are met is also the precise moment at which our lives are plundered for behavioral data, and all for the sake of others’ gain. The result is a perverse amalgam of empowerment inextricably layered with diminishment.”<sup>200</sup> Yet to think of users as consumers that have merely shifted the production cycle from production-consumption to consumption-predictive behavioral analytics-production misses the relationship between users and labour and the profound effects of network value on both.

In a separate article, Zuboff makes more explicit the relationship between what she calls surveillance capitalism, or the process that creates value from the extraction of user-generated big data, and its appeal as a tool of individuation and subjectivity (and therefore pleasure):

The extractive processes that make big data possible typically occur in the absence of dialogue or consent, despite the fact that they signal both facts and subjectivities of individual lives. These subjectivities travel a hidden path to aggregation and decontextualization, despite the fact that they are produced as intimate and immediate, tied to individual projects and contexts (Nissebaum, 2011). Indeed, it is the status of such data as signals of subjectivities that makes them most valuable for advertisers. For Google and other “big data” aggregators, however, the data are merely bits. Subjectivities are converted into objects that repurpose the subjective for commodification.<sup>201</sup>

In other words, users only interact with the surface functions of various digital instruments and platforms. Their experience is one of pleasure and social participation, albeit after they have agreed to very stringent user agreements, which give the user the choice to either consent to the terms of the agreements, or lose access to the platforms. It

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<sup>200</sup> Zuboff, 56.

<sup>201</sup> Zuboff, “Big Other,” 79.

is within these service agreements that “consent” is obtained to harvest the data users slough off in their engagement. Data-mining and refining occurs at a level other than participation because one necessarily needs access to the technological infrastructure— a.k.a. the means of production—in order to capture and sort through this data, making it actionable as value. This capture is possible because of the surveillant nature of these platforms, prompting many to offer solutions based on privacy and individual remuneration for one’s data. However, the call for solutions rooted in thinking of data as private property and calling for companies to pay individuals for it are based in liberal ideas of privacy, property and money that ultimately perpetuate the logics of abstraction and are therefore integral to capitalist violence. Unlike in the industrial factory, exploitation and abstraction are less easily felt by most users precisely because rather than giving something away (their labour, for example), they are in fact gaining a form of capitalist sociality:

Big Other is institutionalized in the automatic undetectable functions of a global infrastructure that is also regarded by most people as essential for basic social participation. The tools on offer by Google and other surveillance capitalist firms respond to the needs of beleaguered second modernity individuals—like the apple in the garden, once tasted they are impossible to live without. When Facebook crashed in some US cities for a few hours during the summer of 2014, many Americans called their local emergency services at 911 (LA Times, 2014). Google’s tools are not the objects of a value exchange. They do not establish constructive producer-consumer reciprocities. Instead they are the ‘hooks’ that lure users into extractive operations and turn ordinary life into the daily renewal of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century Faustian pact. This social dependency is at the heart of the surveillance project. Powerfully felt needs for effective life vie against the inclination to resist the surveillance project.<sup>202</sup>

In the above quotation, Zuboff characterizes the tools of technological infrastructure as “hooks” that lure users into their own exploitation. In the same breath, however, she acknowledges the form of social participation that has emerged under this infrastructure as a form of life essential to most people in today’s world. I agree that networked

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<sup>202</sup> Zuboff, 83.

infrastructures do not "establish constructive producer-consumer reciprocities," because reciprocity has turned into unilateral extraction of a new resource: data.

This returns us to the gaps in "the multitude;" while Hardt and Negri and theorists of prosumers and produsage are very successful in emphasizing the entanglement of labour and life that happens when creativity and intellect become forces of production, they still focus their analyses on productive and waged work. Hardt and Negri focus on struggle, but do not do justice to the vital other side of the coin at work in creating network value: pleasure. While all forms of capitalist market relations rely on coercion and exploitation, under contemporary capitalism there is a new element of pleasure/desire added to the coercion that was largely unnecessary before (see chapter two's discussion of Althusser and IRAs/SRAs). Tiziana Terranova, in "Free Labour: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," captures the coercive, pleasurable and unwaged elements of multiple facets of the creation of network value through her explanation of "free labour," which is "both voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited."<sup>203</sup> Both Terranova and Lazzarato, in his original formulation of immaterial labour, acknowledge that the concept extends past traditional waged work and has become a potentiality of the subjectivity of every postindustrial subject as a whole. For Lazzarato, the creation of affects and cultural products is a key part of immaterial labour, even when it is unwaged, which would seem to include the type of activities done by most people online.

There are some theorists who object to the classification of online leisure activities as labour. For example, Mark Andrejevic argues that precisely because this type of activity is not done under threat of force, it is voluntary, and thus cannot be exploitative—a key characteristic of labour under capitalism. However, as Terranova later notes, "while [labourers] may not be forcefully compelled to join these networks, the threat of social isolation and communicative seclusion may be compulsion enough to get them 'working.' This is in addition to the biopolitical influence of normalized action and behaviour that compels individuals into joining these networks because that is where their

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<sup>203</sup> Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labour: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 46.

peers are. Thus, while this labour is not compelled through the use of physical force, there are other powerful forms of compulsion that motivate the producer into action.”<sup>204</sup> Terranova’s route is to describe the type of activities being done to produce culture during “free time” as a form of free, or unwaged labour. She rightly emphasizes the finer distinctions that must be made between violent and non-violent, sometimes unconscious forms of coercion. To review, Terranova and Lazzarato consider cultural production to be an unwaged form of the immaterial labour discussed at length in earlier chapters, while Hardt and Negri consider the socialized worker, or member of the multitude, as they relate to the changes the establishment of the social factory (through real subsumption) has wrought in class composition and subjectivity.

What would happen if we considered the people using these tools and participating in new forms of “effective life” under the co-operating categories of unproductive labour and constant capital? Do we need to consider unwaged labour—specifically the type that is done through network technologies—as sustaining a form of constant capital? If so, does that make the person (not the generic worker) doing unwaged work in their so-called “free time” a type of machine? This returns us to the role of coercion, pleasure and categories of labour.

## 4.5. « Coerced Posthumanism »

In order to discover how network value and immaterial labour are related to coercive posthumanism and capitalist hypersubsumption, we need to look at the roles of pleasure,

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<sup>204</sup> Terranova, 97.



visibility and interpellation in these new forms of work.<sup>205</sup> In an article on social networks and MySpace (the early-2000s precursor to Facebook that has long since fallen out of fashion), Mark Cote and Jennifer Pybus attempt to categorize immaterial labour in the digital age, or what Terranova refers to as “free labour.” Their focus on social networking creates a simplified but effective picture of the desires, social systems and subjectivities involved in activities that generate network value. A site like MySpace made very clear the importance of creating a visible, narratable self-subject that can interact with and be acknowledged by others on the site. Cote and Pybus claim that “The ‘producibility’ of the subjects in relation to broadcast media can be contrasted with the ‘productivity’ of immaterial labour 2.0 in social networks like MySpace.”<sup>206</sup> Following the Frankfurt School, whose subjects were produced through capitalist ideology, the subjects of late capitalism are voraciously *self-productive*. This means that users of digital networks are not simply either consuming media, producing content that can be mined for value, or refining the technologies that make up the infrastructure of various platforms—though they do all of these things too; rather, as Jason Read notes in *The Micro-Politics of*

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<sup>205</sup> The requirement of capitalist society that the proletariat selling their labour on the free market is very similar to Locke’s concept of “tacit consent,” an integral part of law and order government based on the ownership of private property. In his “Second Treatise of Civil Government” he explains tacit consent thusly: “Every man, that hath any possessions, or enjoyment, of any part of the dominions of any government, doth thereby give his tacit consent, and is as far forth obliged to obedience to the laws of that government, during such enjoyment, as any one under it.” (John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (London: Printed for R. Butler, etc., 1821), published digitally by Bartleby.com in 2010, [www.bartleby.com/169/](http://www.bartleby.com/169/).) For Locke, tacit consent is given negatively through a *lack* of action—i.e., not explicitly refusing to be part of a political structure. If one is not happy being part of a government, one can simply leave. It is, however, extremely obvious how difficult and problematic this would be in the current geopolitical climate, where nearly every piece of land is owned by some government, not to mention the financial privilege necessary to move freely from country to country, and the racialized control of migration. The mention of Locke and the role of coercion in the process he describes provides an important analogy between the individual’s usage of network technology and globalized capitalism, and whether (and in what way) we consent to using these. Locke focuses on stability, protection and social access as reasons one would live in a governed society and submit to the subsequent obligations. He does not discuss the role of pleasure in coercion and society, nor the stakes of social participation on a superstructural level. When applying his thinking to our contemporary society, it is clear that while one is technically free to exit the social arena of citizenship or labour, the consequences for doing so are so dire that the choice not to participate cannot be called a choice in good faith.

<sup>206</sup> Mark Cote and Jennifer Pybus, “Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0: MySpace and Social Networks,” *ephemera: theory & politics in organization* 7, no. 1 (2007): 90.

*Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*, “[m]utation of the instrument does not simply alter what can be produced, or how, but it falls back on the process, transforming the producer himself or herself. The production of things is also always an *autopoiesis*, a production of the one producing—a production of subjectivity. As Marx writes with respect to the labourer, ‘through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature.’”<sup>207</sup>

As Hegel made clear, recognizing and being recognized are the fundamental characteristics of subjectivity; in other words, Marx’s insistence that subjectivity is fundamentally a social phenomenon follows on the heels of his intellectual ancestor, Hegel. While surveillance is unidirectional, and precludes mutual recognition, the omnidirectional nature of interactions on digital platforms necessitate recognition and therefore create subjectivities. In fact, without these platforms, people would not have access to a large swath of intersubjective relations. However, we also must remember that the surveillance being performed on users is fundamentally exploitative, and therefore the subjectivities being produced are necessarily impoverished or exploited as well. This is subjectivity under hypersubsumption: the creation of the subjective exclusively through capitalist technologies. Waged immaterial and material labour creates workers, but unwaged immaterial labour creates posthumans.

Workers creating their own subjectivities and bolstering market efficacy through consumption is the epitome of hypersubsumption. While under real subsumption, technological systems have fully become instruments of capitalist production and in turn produce other instruments of capitalist production without any constant intervention on the part of the capitalist, hypersubsumption takes this logic into the production of individuation by controlling temporality and thereby subsuming future potentialities and the horizon of social life. While previously it was appropriate to speak of “inside” and “outside” capitalism and then to declare that there was no outside, the spatial analogy has given way to a temporal one, with control networks acting on the virtual level (in the

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<sup>207</sup> Quoted in Jason Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present* (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2003), 115.

Deleuzian sense). By transforming living labour into constant capital, hypersubsumption attempts to achieve capitalism's dream of eliminating labour while increasing surplus value.

For Marx, to be human is both to work and to create one's self as social being through work—the ultimate expression of human species-being is work as expression of potentiality. Under hypersubsumption, work does not affirm the human as species-being, but rather affirms the human by continually creating and renewing itself via technological reality. It is this labour of creation and renewal through capitalist platforms that I would characterize as posthuman labour. In addition, rather than this being labour *done by* the posthuman merely as the appropriate expression of labour for the posthuman figure, posthumanism itself is defined by labour; there is no posthuman outside of the coerced, exploitative labour described here.

Under previous forms of capitalism, alienated workers laboured for others, without direct ownership of the means of production, while capitalism attempted to guide their subjectivities by indirectly controlling leisure activities, and eventually, under biopower, the moral and psychological aspects of life. With the advent of hypersubsumption, alienated workers no longer work on objects outside themselves that then become commodities that take on the social life proper. Instead, the sociality created through alienation during “leisure time” is taken as a marker of successful individuation and pleasure. The posthuman is therefore a labour-relation, and the possibilities for posthumanism depend on existence within capitalism, where posthumanism labour *is* full social and erotic participation.

The posthuman is a renewable source of “free labour,” which means that seizing the means of production under hypersubsumption would affect not just non-human material structures but subjective and libidinal investments as well. But we have already established that posthuman labour is not labour in the traditional sense, in that it does not operate according to the labour theory of value and does not produce commodities directly. So how do we characterize this form of labour?

Posthuman labour is split into two aspects that work in tandem: unproductive labour and constant capital. Rather than maintaining the worker for future labour, in this case unproductive labour is the reproductive work of self-management. This is the self-replicating labour of the worker creating themselves through the process of extraction: the extraction of data, particularly behavioral data, for surplus value, and the activities on various platforms that make this possible, which created a positive feedback loop that produces the datafied subject even as it extracts from it. The worker is not creating new value but labouring to maintain themselves so that a company like Google can extract the value from that metadata. Marx likens this parasitic relationship to vampirism: “Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.”<sup>208</sup> Here is Marx’s vampire of capital come to life—not simply sucking the blood of living labour but transforming living labour not into abstract, dead labour (commodities) but into a new army of the undead who can then only exist by feeding on life themselves.

The transformation from dead labour into vampirism is fitting, as unproductive labour does not itself directly create value. But there is something continually created and preserved that capitalism extracts in order to create value, and this can be described using Marx’s account of the way value is preserved by constant capital. Recall what Marx says about the connection between productive labour and machines (a form of constant capital): “While productive labour is changing the means of production into constituent elements of a new product, [constant capital’s] value undergoes a metempsychosis. It deserts the consumed body, to occupy the newly created one.”<sup>209</sup> This metempsychosis, or transmigration of the spirit into a new body upon the death of its old body, is used by Marx to describe the way value is preserved in constant capital. Both the value that goes into the initial creation of the machine (I will primarily use the machine iteration of constant capital, because although the same principle applies to the other iteration—raw materials—it is harder to see because raw materials are destroyed during their use) and

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<sup>208</sup> Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 1053.

<sup>209</sup> Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 1037.

the value of repair and maintenance is figured into the overall value of machines at inception. Their value is preserved by “migrating” to the living labour of the worker using them to create commodities with direct exchange value. Value moves from the body of constant capital to the body of the worker.

Network value, however, is not produced directly by a worker. Instead, it is the by-product, a kind of raw material, which is harvested and can only be made into value through technological intervention. The users who produce this raw material are not engaged in productive labour, yet they indirectly produce value simply through the creation and maintenance of their network species-being. Going on social media, creating “wishlists” on Amazon, using LinkedIn to network and search for jobs—all of these tailored platforms create and maintain hyper-individualized users whose only way of partaking of the vast pleasurable and useful offerings of digitized culture at large is through these platforms and their smart hardware counterparts. Participation is itself a form of creation, and of the reproduction, through refinement, of user personae. The user becomes constant capital, a machine who does not create value but whose value is preserved in its transmigration from the user body to the digital body, back and forth, over and over, while new value is created by technological interfaces such as AIs and algorithms. The user has become the vampire, feeding on its own life by feeding that life to extractive mechanisms. Even stranger still, if users have become constant capital, and hence, per classic Marxist theory, do not *create* new value but whose value is preserved and exploited through use by digital machines, then in a way the conventional value-labour relation is inverted entirely. By sucking not labour but life itself (in the form of information vis-à-vis data) from both waged and non-waged activities, algorithmic AI actually usurps the value-producing function Marx presented as exclusively human. Furthermore, under hypersubsumption, algorithmic AI and digital platforms have now become a requirement for the forms of life upon which they are parasitic. There is a double reversal: a) the human user becomes constant capital, and b) machinery becomes “living labour” as AI. Under surveillance capitalism, network value actually comes from

machinic labour that digital programs “do” to posthumans, whose labour has now become the work of never-ending self-reproduction into capitalist sociality.

To sum up, there are two key aspects of posthumanism as coerced labour, or what we can simply call coerced posthumanism (because posthumanism is itself this labour). The first is that it is unproductive and does not directly create value, but instead has become a form of reproductive labour where reproduction and maintenance are equivalent. At the same time what is maintained and reproduced is a new body, a new species-being possible only through interface with certain technologies. However, maintenance may not be the right word, because in this case the act is highly pleasurable, and has its own eroticism through access to singular forms of networked social life. Not only that, but willing assimilation into these new social forms is necessary for many aspects of a fulfilling and comfortable existence, as digital avatars and network connections are now required for many forms of employment, friendship and civic engagement.

The second aspect of coerced posthumanism is that the posthuman has become constant capital—a vampire who is “dead” in Marx’s sense of capital being dead, only able to make value through feeding on abstracted living labour—because it does not directly create value but instead feeds on its own self-reproduction in a kind of erotic autophagia. These feedings merely maintain and refresh the posthuman body as a repair to a machine, but exchange value is created only when the vampiric act *itself* is captured and siphoned off. It is not *life*-activity that hypersubsumed capitalism extracts and turns into profitable information, but the vampiric activity of constant capital maintaining and repairing itself. It is easy to confuse this for life-activity, because in a sense this form of being has become life. This species-being of vampires has a true sociality and its own sensorium, like Marx’s original species-being. The distinction is that this posthuman species-being made possible through capitalism is not truly social and not truly free, because it is only the by-product of coercion and alienation from the means of production. In this case, the human itself has become a means of production in the most

literal sense—that of being constant capital—and is glad to self-alienate for the pleasures of some form of species-being.

#### 4.6. « Species-being »

In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx lays out the relationship between labour (not the abstract labour-power found under capitalism) and human nature, which is what he calls *Gattungswesen* or species-being: “[T]he productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species, its species-character, is contained in the character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man’s species-character. Life itself appears only as a *means to life*.”<sup>210</sup> We would be right to be suspicious of anything claiming to be universal human nature, and there are plenty of authors who critique Marx for his so-called “humanism.” However, in 1844, the concept of *Gattungs*, or species, was very different from what we associate with the word “species” today. It should also be noted that *Wesen*, or being, can be seen as either a compound or an essence. For Marx, being is not a generality that unites many individuals but an ensemble of social relations. Marx resolves the tension between essence as foundation and essence as compound by saying it is human nature to be variable universality—human nature is itself plastic, able to both give and receive form. So, how did capitalism create the notion of human as a “species” with common attributes that have political/economic/social valances? By instantiating the human species as a category, human rights discourse became part of the creed of the ascendent bourgeois class.

However, the notion of species emerging through/with capitalism is also contradictory insofar as capitalism enunciates the unity of the human species but also at the same time imposes divisions within it. This is the situation Marx is addressing when he refers to the four-fold alienation of the proletariat under capitalism: alienation from one’s products, alienation from the means of production, alienation from society and finally alienation from one’s own species-being. Under capitalism, it is alienation itself

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<sup>210</sup> Karl Marx, “Estranged Labour,” in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

that is naturalized through the introduction of private property. Private property is the antithesis to labour, as the former is external to man, whereas the latter is internal to man's nature: "Private property, as the material, summary expression of alienated labour, embraces both relations—the relation of the worker to work and to the product of his labour and to the non-worker, and the relation of the non-worker to the worker and to the product of his labour."<sup>211</sup>

Additionally, Marx makes the connection between private property and government: "Alienated labour has resolved itself for us into two components which depend on one another, or which are but different expressions of one and the same relationship. Appropriation appears as estrangement, as alienation; and alienation appears as appropriation, estrangement as truly becoming a citizen."<sup>212</sup> Under capitalism, as material relations come to determine social relations, class antagonism begins. The sphere of private property is thus also the sphere of civil society, which necessarily fosters division between classes based on material relations. In other words, in order to be a citizen one must enter into the social sphere by means of becoming part of a class, which is done through an external relationship to one's labour-power. Therefore, citizenship itself is achieved through estrangement—and the moment of tacit consent is itself the consent to entering into a particular relationship to one's labour, namely as the labour-power of the proletariat. Of course, the bourgeois and oligarchical classes also enter into citizenship, but it is easy to see that this is also achieved through alienation—the only difference is the class positions each comes to occupy as a result of their material conditions.

If private property is the root of alienation (which in turn is the root of both citizenship and labour-power, which come about contemporaneously), then the abolition of private property (and the shift into communism) would not only have literal consequences for the means of production, but it would affect alienation and therefore species-being:

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<sup>211</sup> Marx, n.p.

<sup>212</sup> Marx, n.p.



The abolition [*Aufhebung*] of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, human. The eye has become a human eye, just as its object has become a social, human object—an object made by man for man. The senses have therefore become directly in their practice theoreticians. They relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an objective human relation to itself and to man, [In practice I can relate myself to a thing humanly only if the thing relates itself humanly to the human being. – Note by Marx] and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost its egotistical nature, and nature has lost its mere utility by use becoming human use. In the same way, the senses and enjoyment of other men have become my own appropriation. Besides these direct organs, therefore, social organs develop in the form of society; thus, for instance, activity in direct association with others, etc., has become an organ for expressing my own life, and a mode of appropriating human life.<sup>213</sup>

In other words, under capitalism, sensibility itself—pleasure, pain and all the nuances in between—are still importantly present, even vital to the workings of capitalism.

However, because of private property, they are “egotistical,” and therefore incapable of being truly “human” senses. Human in this case is not being used as a form of universalism but rather as an expression of the complexities of social life. Under capitalism, pleasures from living are no longer alive but calcify immediately under alienation and extraction. It seems to be the social nature of data-driven endeavors to provide the pleasure and acceptance that prevents these activities from being seen as work. Thus, these user-operated platforms perform the illusion of the non-fetishized interaction described by Marx in *Capital*, Vol. 1; that is, it appears that instead of commodities meeting on the marketplace in their producers’ stead, people meet in social interaction in a clever appropriation of species-being.

As we have seen, subjects harness their intellectual and creative capacities through technological interfaces to perform free immaterial labour that creates network value. These actions also result in a feedback loop of alterations made to subjectivity. If this sounds a lot like the labourer who “acts upon external nature and changes it, and in

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<sup>213</sup> Karl Marx, “Private Property and Communism,” in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

this way he simultaneously changes his own nature,”<sup>214</sup> that is because the process is nearly identical. But if Marx is describing the activity that defines human species-being, how does species-being connect with and differ from global coerced posthumanism? For an answer we can return to one of Brassier’s criticisms of critical posthumanism: “Because it is wholly immanent to the logic of capital, the counter-actualization of virtual potencies required by Braidotti’s hope is effectively the cultivation of empowerment within existing social relations.”<sup>215</sup> These virtual potencies, or the changes one makes to one’s nature, exist within the limiting sphere of capitalist value production. Because technological interfaces in particular are the vital means of production for creating the cornucopia of subjectivities, and because these technologies, as we have seen, are necessarily imbricated in capitalist self-valuation (through hypersubsumption), the subjectivities created are limited by capitalist goals. As Cote and Pybus put it: “the subjects that you become must be compatible with the needs of contemporary capitalist reproduction.”<sup>216</sup> We have seen that capitalism’s goal has always been to rid itself of the need for labour; at the same time, it is only through labour that surplus value is created. This antagonism is immanent to the structure of capitalism itself. Yet now, through the passage from formal, to real subsumption, and then to hypersubsumption, capitalism has achieved its dream in an unprecedented way: free labour. The harnessing of the general intellect into a primary force of production, and the shift of desire from the area of consumption to production itself—or rather the superposition of consumption and production—means that capitalism has harnessed the act of self-fashioning that defines Marx’s species-being. As Terranova notes, “[c]apital, after all, is the unnatural environment within which the collective intelligence materializes. The collective dimension of networked intelligence needs to be understood historically, as part of a specific momentum of capitalist development.”<sup>217</sup> The difference between species-being

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<sup>214</sup> Quoted in Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital*, 115.

<sup>215</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 11.

<sup>216</sup> Cote and Pybus, “Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0,” 99.

<sup>217</sup> Terranova, 44.

and coerced posthumanism is precisely that the myriad creative and intellectual capacities being generated arise fundamentally through and for capitalist value production, even if, for the individual, that is not their overt motivation or end. This is the root of the alienation and exploitation present in unwaged immaterial labour, and is therefore crucial to understanding the contemporary posthuman within capitalism—the coerced posthuman. The activities of self-fashioning done in the capitalist milieu cannot be genuinely social—they are not of the species—but rather are part of Camatte’s ontology of capitalism as self-valorizing value, which was discussed in the first chapter.

#### 4.7. « Conclusion: the Human Eye »

This chapter has proposed that capitalism has now reached an epoch in which it has actually generated a faux version of species-being—it has subsumed, rather than fetishized, the social itself. The kinds of beings that inhabit this capitalist social realm are posthumans, particularly those doing unwaged immaterial creative labour on digital platforms in what seems to be unmediated or advanced collectivity. They do not call it “social” media for nothing. Now we can return to Marx’s compelling account of what happens when human senses are liberated from capitalism and returned to species-being, and then compare this with capitalism’s pale imitation of the latter. Why are the senses—the literal senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, but also what Marx calls the practical or mental senses of love, will, etc.—so important? The senses are humans’ unmediated or objective access to the world. To return to a text I quoted in the previous chapter, Marx remarks that “man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with all his senses.”<sup>218</sup> Under species-being, free of the egotistical drive of private property, the senses not only provide access to the world, they literally “make sense” of it according to their various functions. To explain this, Marx gives the following example of music:

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<sup>218</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 46.

Just as only music awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear—is [no] object for it, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers, therefore can only exist for me insofar as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity because the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as my sense goes (has only a meaning for a sense corresponding to that object)—for this reason *the senses of the social man differ from those of the non-social man* [emphasis added].<sup>219</sup>

Recall that labour (not abstract labour-power) is what might be called the interface that makes things objective for man. This perhaps accounts for what Marx says next: “The forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.”<sup>220</sup> The humanness of human senses—human senses as affirmations of man’s essential powers—unfolds only when man’s nature is humanized; that is, when man labours for himself—and therefore *on* himself and *for* others—within society. Marx’s gloss on the five senses states that, “[o]nly through the objectively unfolded richness of man’s essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of man) either cultivated or brought into being.”<sup>221</sup>

It should be obvious that such an actualization of the richness of the human sensorium cannot be achieved by posthumans under hypersubsumed capitalism. What is important to note is that according to Marx the unfolding of the senses in their truly humanized form is a labour that has been occurring for as long as there has been history. Under species-being, nature becomes human nature and vice versa. The following chapter theorizes that contemporary art can open the possibility for a radical anti-capitalist politics, and it does so by opening paths to new sensoriums. We will define contemporary art as returning to “aesthetics” in the classical sense given by Immanuel Kant: aesthetics

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<sup>219</sup> Marx, 46.

<sup>220</sup> Marx, 46.

<sup>221</sup> Marx, 46.

are our sensible intuitions of the world.<sup>222</sup> Like Marx, Kant also connects the sensible to the subjective. Above, I mentioned that truly human senses only exist under species-being, free from capitalism. In the following chapter, I look at the possibilities for the creation of non-capitalist politics through contemporary art that opens new regimes of the sensible.

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<sup>222</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1987).

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## 5. « Chapter Four: Contemporary Art and Politics »

*I no longer love blue skies...In fact, I now prefer gray skies. The drones do not fly when the skies are gray.*<sup>223</sup>

Some of the earliest critiques of ubiquitous surveillance came from contemporary artists. This chapter explores artistic responses to surveillance, particularly in the form of drone art. I will begin by look at the relationship between art and politics as it developed from the end of the nineteenth century to today. I will then put forth a theory of contemporary art that is a synthesis of the arguments of art theorist Peter Osborne and philosopher Jacques Rancière. I agree, following Osborne, that the type of art that truly belongs to the category of “contemporary art” is postconceptual art.<sup>224</sup>

Below I will explain a historical progression in art history that led to Osborne’s formulation, starting with Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgment*; the former refers to the transcendental aesthetic, while the latter discusses the aesthetic idea. Osborne notes how aesthetics originally referred merely to what was sensible, and did not refer to created artworks at all. It was only with the advent of Romanticism that art began to be “independent,” with its own values, conventions and “thoughts.” In this section I also refer to Kant’s *sensus communis*, a term from the *Critique of Judgement* that implies that this common sense, which is the condition for the possibility of a universal sensibility about art (which is seen by Kant as subjective), is fundamentally political. Not only is it political, in that it has to do with thinking empathetically as a society, but it has a much in common with Marx’s concept of species-being, which was important to the previous chapter and is also vital to the discussion of art and politics here. After that I will

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<sup>223</sup> A quote from Zubair Rehman, 13-year-old grandson of a victim of a 2012 U.S. drone strike in Pakistan, from artist Tomas van Houtryve’s *Blue Sky Days*, 2013-2014, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://tomasvh.com/works/blue-sky-days/>.

<sup>224</sup> From now on, unless otherwise stated, whenever I use the phrase “contemporary art”, it refers specifically to Osborne’s use of the term, not to the colloquial sense of “any art made in the last few years.”

explain Rancière's concept of "regimes," particularly the aesthetic regime of which we are currently a part, as well as the vitally important process of "dissensus." Like Osborne, Rancière articulates a theory of art history that is markedly different from the popular narrative of modern, postmodern and contemporary art epochs. He theorizes the return of contemporary art to the true meaning of aesthetics as relating to the senses, and claims that contemporary art is dissensual—it opens the possibility of new sensoriums, previously unnoticed by society, that make way for novel political actions. Both thinkers offer distinct, but important, takes on the relationship between art and politics, art and history, aesthetics and the senses. I ultimately synthesize the two thinkers' views on contemporary art by weaving Rancière's aesthetic regime of art together with Osborne's postconceptual art (which, as we will see, emphasizes the contemporaneity of art as responding both materially and conceptually to globalized capitalism). The combination of the two theorists' work allows a conceptualization of art adequate to theories of hypersubsumption. For this reason, contemporary art can respond directly to hypersubsumed capitalism, experimenting with the distribution of the sensible under capitalist material conditions of production. In particular, I argue that photography and its digital successors are the primary media of contemporary art. From there it is easy to connect art to surveillance capitalism, which will bring us into the next and final chapter, which looks specifically at surveillance art in relation to the violent regimes of vision discussed in chapter two.

## 5.1. « Art and Politics »

It is not always immediately obvious how the realms of art and politics are related. The category of "art" itself is not a static thing—its goals, techniques, and cultural position vary throughout history. This chapter focuses specifically on contemporary art,

understood as a mode of postconceptual art<sup>225</sup> created after the 1960s (or in some cases the 1970s) that emerges contemporaneously with post-Fordist capitalism. According to Marxist orthodoxy, art is a mode of cultural production that relates to the political, and is rarely an obviously capitalist or anti-capitalist (communist) object, but rather something complex and ambivalent; for example, rationalist political theorist and Marxist literary critic Georg Lukács acknowledges that the social contradictions inherent in capitalism can be identified through the sobering lens of bourgeois realist literature of authors such as Balzac and Tolstoy (as opposed to the proletariat being the sole group capable of seeing through capitalist fetishism), and the complex interplay between art, capitalism and commodification are furtive sites of debate. Most notably, in the 1930s an argument raged in the Frankfurt School between Lukács, Bloch, Adorno and Brecht about the ideological status of realist versus modernist literature, the historical development of each form, and which of these types of literature was best for producing anti-capitalist sentiments and class consciousness. The Frankfurt School was vital in the positioning of art as political.

This chapter is interested in the relationship between art and the political. It looks at the ways developments in capitalism have changed the modes of engagement available to art in its political valences, in order to discover the anti-capitalist potentialities of different kinds of artworks. To this end, I turn to Osborne and Rancière to explicate the situation of art today, as well as the relationship between art and politics, in order to show why looking at contemporary visual art can be useful and relevant to a discussion of hypersubsumption and its avatar, surveillance. I will argue, following Osborne, that not all artworks produced now should be called “contemporary art,” though undoubtedly they fall technically and historically under that name, and not all artworks achieve the political function of art overall. The different artworks that will be discussed in the next chapter

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<sup>225</sup> According to Peter Osborne, “Postconceptual art is a critical category that is constituted at the level of the historical ontology of the artwork; it is not a traditional art-historical or art-critical concept at the level of medium, form or style. Rather, as the critical register of the historical destruction of the ontological significance of such categories, it provides new interpretative conditions for analyses of individual works,” from *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (New York: Verso, 2013), 48. I will return to this definition at length later in the chapter.



are indicative of various attempts to engage with the current political situation. The question is which of these are most effective at engaging with the political dimension and why do some fall short or even, in some cases, suffer the fate of being actively anti-revolutionary, actually perpetuating the violent structures they purport to disrupt.

## 5.2. « Contemporary Art »

Peter Osborne is well known for studying contemporary art, and for focusing on the ontology of the art object, cultural production and the influences of modernity on visual art. In his books *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* and *The Postconceptual Condition* Osborne develops his particular thesis that contemporary art is postconceptual art—a claim that is designed to transcend style and period and refer to the ontology of the artwork itself. I will explain this claim, as well as its consequences for art theory, in detail later in this chapter. We can follow Osborne in distinguishing between aesthetics and art, tracing the historical moment when the former collapsed into the latter and thus into art works or objects for thought. The term “aesthetic” was brought to the fore in Western philosophy by Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. In this text, he refers to the “transcendental aesthetic,” which is the condition for perception, or what he calls pure forms of intuition, or space and time, which are *a priori* conditions for the operation of all human faculties—time being the inner intuition and space being the outer. Here, the definition of aesthetics is faithful to its origin in the ancient Greek term *aisthesis*, referring to sensibility or what appears to the sensible/senses. In Kant’s second critique, *The Critique of Judgment*, “aesthetics” is used to refer to aesthetic judgments, which are judgments of taste. In this second sense the aesthetic appears in a manner more intelligible to our contemporary use of it, with designations like “beautiful,” “fine,” etc. Kant is concerned with how we form *a priori* judgments of taste, since judgements of taste seem to only come from experience; he concludes that aesthetic judgments must refer back to some universal sense, or what he calls the *sensus communis*. Kant refers to aesthetic judgments as “subjective universals” because while aesthetic judgments do not

refer to *a priori* categories of the understanding (which Kant discussed in the first critique as the conditions for universality), they are nonetheless universal, as they require a communal agreement as their condition for possibility.

Annelies Degryse argues that Kant's communal or shared sense is actually the foundation for seeing humans as political beings.<sup>226</sup> The *sensus communis* is an "extra sense" or an extra mental capacity outside the ones outlined in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Moreover, this extra sense, which is *only* activated in a social milieu, makes us capable of thinking from others' perspectives. This is different from the solitary person of Kant's first critique, who does not need anybody else in order to reason—in other words, a philosopher. The *sensus communis*, however, implies not a philosopher but a community (it is a communal or shared sensibility), which makes it political. Because of this, *sensus communis* could be seen as the condition for Marx's species-being, if species-being is a shared condition among humans that opens them to possibilities and potentialities as a species.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, the importance of beauty is its ability to point to universality, as well as its role in harmonizing the different faculties (reason, imagination, and so on). Works of art are not conceptual and certainly not political in the traditional sense. They are important because they point the viewer inwards, through the creation of feelings, emotions or affects. The "sublime," which we might in contemporary times relate to the sensation of being moved by a work of art, is reserved not for man-made creations but for experiences in nature and with mathematics. These overwhelm other faculties, leading to a retreat to one's internal consciousness, which is able to console the overwrought senses through Reason. Kant's viewer ultimately interacts with outside stimuli as a way of marveling at their own capacities. Kant also introduces the "aesthetic idea" to describe an intuition without a concept,<sup>227</sup> or an intuition (something that begins with the sensible) that does not fall under categories of the understanding. As Kant makes

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<sup>226</sup> Annelies Degryse, "Sensus communis as a foundation for men as political beings: Arendt's reading of Kant's Critique of Judgment," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37(3), (2011): 345-358.

<sup>227</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 218.

very clear, ethical acts cannot be aesthetic, because aesthetics are sensible and ethics can never be deduced from the sensible. Counter to many of our twenty-first-century sensibilities, aesthetics, for Kant, are inherently *not* conceptual, and have no bearing on ethical questions.

It is only with the advent of German Romanticism that art, in the way we know it today, comes into its own through the superposition of the subject onto the work of art. According to Osborne “this is the philosophical ground of the ‘autonomy of art’ claim—autonomy not of a type of judgement (Kant), nor merely at the level of appearance, the illusion of self-determination (Schiller), but of a certain kind of production of meaning in the object, an autopoiesis, distinct from both *techne* and *mimesis* (Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel). This is not an ‘aesthetic regime of art’ but a supra-aesthetic artistic regime of truth.”<sup>228</sup> Art becomes capable of generating its own truths. But as Osborne points out, this power of art is still connected to the original function of *aisthesis*. For Osborne (as well as for Rancière) art is related to the sensible. Because Osborne’s notion of contemporary or postconceptual art fits within the schema of aesthetics and politics that Rancière sets out, this chapter will discuss Rancière’s concepts first and then relate it to Osborne’s description of the situation. These will serve as prologues to the analyses of specific artworks, but they are also necessary in relating sensibility, aesthetics and politics to earlier discussions of hypersubsumption, visuality and surveillance.

### 5.3. « Ideological and Sensible Regimes »

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière lays out his theory, in which he claims aesthetics can be political (a possibility not open to all aesthetics, but only certain aesthetic

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<sup>228</sup> Kant, 44.

regimes).<sup>229</sup> He explains that political art does not refer to a political program, but rather identifies the role that art and its spectators play in the politicization of aesthetics. According to Rancière, “[a]esthetics refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships (which presupposes a certain idea of thought’s effectivity).”<sup>230</sup> Rancière thus holds the Kantian distinction between aesthetics and art, only to bring art under the realm of aesthetics as a sensible object. There exists for Rancière what he calls the “distribution of the sensible,” which is a way of bringing certain discourses and modes of being either to the fore or banishing them back. The prevailing distribution of the sensible is the dominant social order of the day and politics only happens in the interstices of this distribution as its agitation or reordering, or what he calls “dissensus.” Here it is worth quoting Rancière at length:

The distribution of the sensible [is] the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this

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<sup>229</sup> An aesthetic regime is a periodizing concept instituted by Rancière. Three regimes form a narrative of the history of visual art as it related to certain discernible social and political movements: the ethical, the representational and the aesthetic. The ethical regime refers to a utilitarian function of art stemming from Platonic edicts that art is a craft which mimics reality, and thus must be severely limited due to its effects on society. This regime likens art to a craftsman’s skill to be practiced under certain conditions to elicit certain responses. We can see how even this early regime recognizes the political potential of art. The representational regime grants art independent powers above mimesis. This regime corresponds to the rise of bourgeois liberalism and individualism, and distances art from “mere labour.” Finally, the vital and novel “aesthetic regime,” which begins at the start of the nineteenth century, is Rancière’s answer to artistic modernism; according to him, modernism strips art of its political potency by fetishizing novelty, discarding form and breaking with past forms of art. In other words, modern art attempts to separate art from its history and context. The aesthetic regime, in contrast, literally brings art back to its roots through a return of the aesthetic or sensible aspects of art—the idea that art can affect what is seen and thought.

<sup>230</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), 10.

distribution....The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. Having a particular 'occupation' thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not...It is on the basis of this primary aesthetics that it is possible to raise the question of 'aesthetic practices' as I understand them, that is forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' or 'make' from the standpoint of what is common to the community. Artistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.<sup>231</sup>

We can see how Rancière expands Kant's idea of the *sensus communis* from solely referring to judgments of taste to being the crux of the entire social sphere. The way aesthetic regimes organize the sensible thus defines what is available to the common social body. It is useful to think of this in relation to Althusser's concept of ideology—or "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"<sup>232</sup>—though of course Rancière's use of aesthetics has an ontological inflection. Like ideology, however, the aesthetic regime is timeless and ahistorical, though *particular* distributions of the sensible are historically determined and determining. Art works or artistic practices reveal the current aesthetic regime by intervening in the distribution of the sensible through their very nature as sensible or aesthetic works. Politics utilizes a field of aesthetic possibilities and thus burgeoning political movements must find modes of making art that are suitable to reorganizing the sensible into new forms. Art is at the service of politics, though it is not itself political. Rancière takes poetry as an example of the way that art accomplishes these new forms:

The words of the poet are first used as neutral tools to frame a certain sensorium. They describe us a movement of the arms oriented towards a certain aim: reaching a place which could be visualised on a space. But they superimpose to that sensorium another sensorium organized around that which is specific to their own power, sound and absence. They stage a conflict between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds. This is what dissensus means...The artistic 'proposition' conflates two regimes of sense—a regime of conjunction and a regime of

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<sup>231</sup> Rancière, 12-13.

<sup>232</sup> Althusser, *On Ideology*, 36.

disjunction. Now the community built by that dissensus stands itself in a twofold relationship with another community, a community between human beings.<sup>233</sup>

Works of art and the artistic communities they come from simultaneously disturb the existing distributions of the sensible and predict or begin the construction of new ones.

Unlike popular notions which frame art as polemic or programmatic, spurring the public to a particular action by revealing hidden objects or events, or exposing the way communities and social bodies are “really” constituted, Rancière’s concept of art is about a reorganization of social relationships through new divisions of the sensible. That means that certain populations or issues that were previously invisible under partitions of the sensible found in the dominant aesthetic regime now come to the fore in what is inevitably a conflicting relationship to existing hegemonic regimes. You cannot reshape relations within perturbing and ultimately replacing one regime with another. Not all artworks are dissensual, but those that are can incite revolutions. It should be noted that to be dissensual is not that same as being radical. Even the most radical artworks do not necessarily bring about a change in politics. As Rancière explains: “Film, Video art, photography, installation, etc. rework the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects. As such they may open new passages toward new forms of political subjectivization. But none of them can avoid the aesthetic cut that separates the outcomes from the intentions and forbids any straight way toward an ‘other side’ of the words and the images.”<sup>234</sup> Attempts to make art that is directly programmatic run inevitably into art’s contingent nature as an object of spectacle, subject to reception and interpretation, as well as the fundamental difference between art and life: the man in the film remains, at the end of the day, a man in a film—a representation of wretchedness, perhaps, but a representation nonetheless. Rancière insists that “[t]here is no straight way from looking at a spectacle to understanding the state of the world, no straight way from intellectual awareness to political action. What occurs is much more the shift from a given sensory

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<sup>233</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art1,” *ART&RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, no. 1 (2008): 4-5.

<sup>234</sup> Rancière, 14.

world to another sensory world which defines other capacities and incapacities, other forms of tolerance and intolerance.”<sup>235</sup> Art can open up the possibility of new modes of community but does not guarantee them. What we are interested in here is not so much exploring ideas of community, relationality, or even what is “real” versus what is “mere representation.” Rather, it is important to see Rancière’s comments in light of contemporary Marxism’s rejection of traditional ideas of class consciousness, which rely heavily on revealing the “reality” of ideology and lifting the veil on the miserable conditions of the working class. Simply showing people the truly predatory nature of capitalism and the way they are exploited by it does not mean they will rise up against the system, or even that they will reject it. While it is not the goal of this project to speculate as to why that is, I here build on Rancière’s implication that artistic projects which aim to shock (or berate an audience into taking action) are missing the point, as that is not the political function of art. If it were, we would be in a situation akin to that of Ancient Greece, where the representation of evil in tragic plays was a direct reflection of society and had a clearly causal impact on the polity. Such a case occurs when *aisthesis* (sensibility), *mimesis* (representation) and *poiesis* (action) are in a one-to-one correlation with each other. But the situation of contemporary art is instead to create new conditions which in turn create new sensoriums rife with possibilities that did not exist before.

#### 5.4. « Contemporary, Postconceptual »

Peter Osborne also underscores the importance of distinguishing art from aesthetics in the classical sense, particularly when discussing contemporary art. He insists upon the conceptual nature of contemporary art as opposed to the merely aesthetic quality of art in other periods, and sees this as change in art’s ontology. He argues that philosophy has never been adequate for understanding art because it always approached it from a Kantian perspective as a separate domain of aesthetic experience (though this is also contrary to Kant, for whom art was not pure aesthetics). It is a mistake to equate/

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<sup>235</sup> Rancière, 12.

ontologize aesthetic experience with the self-affectation of the understanding/ imagination/subject, a belief which comes from the myth that aesthetic autonomy (of pure aesthetic judgments of taste) is the basis for the autonomy of art. Osborne reads early German Romanticism alongside conceptual art, putting them in a constellation such that conceptual art is the afterlife of a strand of Romanticism, and Romanticism is the anticipation of conceptual art. He alleges that in Romanticism, the transcendental has been ontologized through the work of art. The autonomy of the transcendental experience of a work of art is read as enchantment. It relocates the political potential of art in its autonomy; art's *disengagement* from the conceptual is seen as its political potential. This presupposes that art somehow escapes labour/sociality by being "natural."

Because Osborne's critique relies on a distinction between affects and concepts, at first blush it seems that his ideas about art are incompatible with Rancière's, who clearly eschews art as generative of concepts in favor of its relationship to the aesthetic in the true sense (i.e., what is accessible to the senses). However, we shall see that Osborne's positive definition of contemporary art as postconceptual art actually fits within the greater relationship between aesthetics and politics that Rancière constructs, and Osborne's theories in turn augment Rancière's ontologized aesthetics through dialectical materialism, making a theory of art adequate to the contemporary situation as well as relating art clearly to the stakes of post-Fordist capitalism.

According to Osborne, contemporary art is postconceptual art. What makes art contemporary is not simply that it is created in the present; rather, such art has a specific role as a carrier of current socio-historical realities and as such it is materially linked to those realities. Its contemporaneity is a symptom of its particular relationship to temporality and spatiality within both the relationship of the artwork to the world and its relationship to itself and other artistic periods. Simply put, contemporary art is the art of the contemporary:

It is the convergence and mutual conditioning of historical transformations in the ontology of the artwork and the social relations of art space—a convergence and mutual conditioning that has its roots in more general economic and communicational processes—that makes contemporary art possible, in the



emphatic sense of an art of contemporaneity. These convergent and mutually conditioning transformations take the common form of processes of ‘de-bordering’: on one hand, the debordering of the arts as mediums—the emergence of genuinely transcategorical practices opening up the conceptual space of a ‘generic’ art—and on the other, the de-bordering of the previously national social spaces of art... Contemporary art is ‘post’-conceptual to the extent that it registers the historical experience of conceptual art, as a self-conscious movement, as the experience of the impossibility/fallacy of the absolutization of anti-aesthetic, in conjunction with a recognition of an ineliminably conceptual aspect to all art. In this respect, art is postconceptual to the extent to which it reflectively incorporates the truth (which itself incorporates the untruth) of ‘conceptual art’: namely, art is necessarily both aesthetic and conceptual.<sup>236</sup>

Osborne’s dialectical understanding of contemporary art means that such art has passed through the merely conceptual and incorporated the conceptuality of art within itself. According to Osborne, the other feature of contemporary art is that it has returned to a concern with the medium while not being medium-specific. It is the self-consciousness of art that it is beyond medium-specificity. This self-consciousness allows art to be aware of mediums and put them to use while transcending their periodization. Moving beyond the historical significance of the medium as being the ontological determiner of art is itself a historical movement constituted entirely by the present or the contemporary. Contemporary or postconceptual art is concerned with media but also incorporates an important feature of conceptual art: “In demonstrating the radical insufficiency, or minimal conditionality, of the aesthetic dimension of the artwork to its status as art, conceptual art was able to bring once again to light, in a more decisive way, the necessary conceptuality of the work which had been buried by the aesthetic ideology of formalist modernism—a conceptuality which was always historically central to the allegorical function of art.”<sup>237</sup> Contemporary art is the only kind of art able to return to the materiality *and* the conceptuality of art without overdetermining the artwork by either of the two. It can only do this precisely because of its situation in the historical present, following after modern art and the art of the *avant-garde*. It is vital that contemporary art

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<sup>236</sup> Peter Osborne, “Contemporary art is post-conceptual art,” 10-11.

<sup>237</sup> Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 48.

be postconceptual, because conceptual art, following modernism, eschewed materiality, dematerializing the art-object.

Aesthetics theorist Sianne Ngai points to a similar function of contemporary art, though Ngai refers to the latter as conceptual, rather than postconceptual. In her own dialectic movement, Ngai passes through Kantian aesthetics and Romanticism to sublated Neo-Kantian conceptual art that harnesses aesthetics with a new attentiveness to the effect of capitalist production on contemporary sensibilities. In *Our Aesthetic Categories*, Ngai looks specifically at the “interesting” as a kind of modern version of the Kantian sublime. Her work asks what kind of analogue can be made between the two and how this is affected by the ubiquity of capitalism. According to her, interest is “repeatedly staging [the] clash between conceptual knowledge and sensory perception...merely interesting conceptual art helps us see that the aesthetic judgment ‘interesting,’ which places us in an affective relationship to the fact of our not knowing something, encodes an analogous clash between knowledge and feeling.”<sup>238</sup> In this showdown between knowledge and feeling, or concept and affect, aesthetics has already moved beyond the merely sensible and is invested in the relationship between thought and the sensible.

Ngai uses this relationship to characterize representation, which is the relation of a concept to its object. Art objects under contemporary capitalism are thus representational—they are objects with attached concepts, or in other words, interesting objects. Interest is merely the fact that an object of interest calls a person back to it. Under Ngai’s “minor” aesthetic categories, the interesting thing about conceptual art is the difference between a concept and its artistic perception/representation; specifically, the interest lies in figuring the difference out. Once the interesting characteristic about an object is understood, it is easily reproducible. Thus these “minor” categories actually represent the merging of information and objects/commodities, art and production. Ngai’s analysis is useful to us as a way to attend to the poverty of many objects under the banner of “contemporary art.” Whereas Kant alluded to the idea that contemporary art

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<sup>238</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 165.

overcomes the incompatibility of ethics and aesthetics, Ngai shows us that for art to be contemporary, it has to do more than make us think. But what?

In order to properly characterize contemporary art, we must attend first to its contemporaneity. According to Osborne:

The concept of the contemporary thus projects into presence a temporal unity that is in principle futural or horizontal and hence speculative. Finally, third, empirically, the relational totality of the currently coeval times of human existence remains, fundamentally socially disjunctive. There is thus no actual shared subject-position of, or within, our present from the standpoint of which its relational totality could be constructed as a whole, in however temporally fragmented or dispersed or incomplete a form. Nonetheless, the idea of the contemporary functions as if there is. That is, it functions as if the speculative horizon of the unity of human history had been reached. In this respect, the contemporary is a utopian idea, with both negative and positive aspects.<sup>239</sup>

The temporality of the contemporary is the transcendental condition of unity within the spatio-historical situation of the current moment and is thus characterized by the socio-historical. Moreover, because of globalized capitalism, what characterizes our present most of all, according to Osborne, is transnationality, which is the “socio-spatial form of the current temporal unity of historical experience.”<sup>240</sup> Osborne’s theory allows for the intertwining of the relationship between art and the present as a historical material reality. In fact, it insists that this is inextricable from the ontology of art. Therefore, the ontologies of particular periods of art are historically determined, and each period surpasses the last, allowing it to retroactively analyze the movements that came before it.

Osborne believes history has been overtaken by what he calls the “memory model,” which is reactive and retrospective, and thus robs history of its critical potential and orientation towards the future. He argues that a critique of the present is not possible in the memory model, because remembrance is reduced to memory, recollection and testimony. Memory is cut off from the present through a distancing of that memory; testimony becomes a way of keeping history at bay or keeping it on the personal level.

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<sup>239</sup> Osborne, “Contemporary art is post-conceptual art,” 4.

<sup>240</sup> Osborne, 7.

This model keeps art at the affective level. Our particular moment must account for the inescapable effects of capitalism on the social, and so contemporary art must reflect the truths of the apotheosis of the present. That means that Osborne's contemporary art must come from a conceptual understanding and characterization of contemporary capitalism—thus transnationality emerges for him as its harbinger.

However, this project has attempted to show that contemporary capitalism is characterized by a type of subsumption known as hypersubsumption, which includes within itself as a condition the globalized, or transnational, nature of today's capitalism. As we saw before, hypersubsumption focuses on the relationship between valuation and automation through technological developments and their relationship to the social, labor and the creation of value. Osborne's work is useful because it folds art within a Marxist historical materialism in which art lays bare the truth of the contemporary precisely because it is ontologically determined by it. This means that not all art created in the present counts as contemporary art. The contemporary is a concept that constitutes a particular relationship between space and time: "The coming together of different times that constitute the contemporary, and the relations between the social spaces in which these times are embedded and articulated, are the two main axes along which the historical meaning of art is to be plotted."<sup>241</sup>

This can be situated as an extension of or elaboration on Frederic Jameson's notion of postmodernity as the flattening of time into space through post-Fordist capitalism.<sup>242</sup> Jameson also looks at art—particularly architecture, painting and literature—as the bearer of the historical situation he labels postmodernity. While Jameson looks at specific examples of works within various media as archetypal products of postmodernity, shaped by and shaping the aesthetic and social movement, Osborne goes on to discuss what kind of art and which medium (and its derivatives) is the best bearer of

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<sup>241</sup> Osborne, 8.

<sup>242</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press: 1991).

contemporaneity, meaning that the medium provides a horizon of conceptual unity to the socio-historical landscape.

According to Osborne, this medium is photography and its direct role in developing the digital into the ubiquitous medium in which we are bathed today. He remarks on the true relationship between digital images and capitalism, eschewing the popular trope of photography as “realism”:

Via the multiplicity of visualizations, digitalization draws attention to the essentially de-realized character of the image. It is this de-realized image—supported in each instance by specific material processes—that strangely ‘corresponds’ to the ontological status of the value-form. . . . De- (and therefore potentially re-) realized images can be infinitely exchanged. This is the social meaning of the ontology of the digital image, of which photography is now but one—albeit crucial—kind. In the infinite field of visualizations of the digital image, the infinity of exchange made possible by the abstraction of exchange value from use value finds its equivalent visual form.<sup>243</sup>

The importance of digital imagery as the defining medium of capitalism’s contemporary turn means that, in the parlance of Rancière (though he does not designate particular media within the current moment), the photographic image is most suited to creating works of art that foster dissensus, and therefore carry the potential for a true politics. Where the two theorists intersect is in ideas about art mimicking life; for Rancière, there was a historical moment where art did imitate life—he refers to this as the ethical regime of art, exemplified by Plato’s idea of art, particularly poetry, in Plato’s *Republic*. Here, art is a craft that imitates life, and as such is both powerful and deceptive, because it has enormous political sway with the masses, and thus must be tightly controlled. Art in this regime is mimetic, and attempts to create a direct concordance between the sensible and the actionable—between art and politics. This means art in this regime is also highly polemical: “Art is presumed to be effective politically because it displays the marks of domination, or parodies mainstream icons, or even because it leaves the spaces reserved for it and becomes a social practice. . . . The logic of mimesis consists in conferring on the artwork the power of the effects that it is supposed to elicit on the behavior of

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<sup>243</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 131.

spectators.”<sup>244</sup> In other words, nothing is lost in translation between an artist’s intention and the artwork’s effect on spectators, because the artist is mimicking, to the best of their ability, reality. This includes not only re-creating objects with the greatest verisimilitude but also describing the actions of heroes, political figures, etc. Audiences see ontological truth reflected back at them in the work of art, and works of the greatest veracity have the greatest moral and political worth.

For Osborne, the ontology of digital imagery, the digitized descendant of film photography, has what he referred to in the above quote as social meaning.<sup>245</sup> Digital imagery in particular is a sort of artistic reflection of the capitalist value form: digital images are infinitely reproducible and exchangeable (thanks to the internet). This means they are actually further and further abstracted from that which they were the images of—what characterizes the digital image ontologically is its abstract exchangeability, which echoes capital’s all-important abstraction, exchange value. Here we can see that both Osborne and Rancière believe that art (or what the latter calls artistic regimes) take place within the broader context of society, and are intimately linked to elements of the social reality in which they take place. Art is indicative and reflective of not only the values of its society, but also of what makes up that society in general and how it comes to value certain things. For Rancière, this is generally true of all artistic regimes, and he explains how the ethical regime gave way to the representative and then to the aesthetic or expressive (which is where we are now). The ethical regime reflected the Greek aristocracy imposing their values and views on the polity—an inherently anti-democratic situation. Similarly, Osborne’s definition of contemporary art insists on artwork that is not only made within the contemporary social milieu but embodies that milieu best. Osborne’s analysis of the digital image largely reflects Rancière’s ethical regime of art: digital images are best at mimicking ontological truth, meaning the truth of capitalist domination. Rancière even makes a similar claim in his caustic lament on cinema, which

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<sup>244</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steve Corcoran, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 171.

<sup>245</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 131.

he refers to in the prologue of his book *Film Fables* as a “thwarted fable,”<sup>246</sup> because it still remains caught in the trappings of ethical and representational regimes.

Of course, photography, and its digital incarnations, cannot be said to be purely liberatory or progressive, mimetic or expressive. The incredible digital artist Hito Steyerl examines the complexities of the digital in her seminal essay “In Defense of the Poor Image.” Steyerl discusses what she calls “poor images,” or images in film and media that have lost their resolution and are less than discernible from having many artifacts or from being copied and shared over and over: “Focus is identified as a class position, a position of ease and privilege, while being out of focus lowers one’s value as an image.”<sup>247</sup> Steyerl claims that neoliberal policies purposefully made experimental projects prohibitively expensive or too marginal for popular media, which restructured the aesthetics of image-based media to put it more in line with commodification and capitalist goals of consumption, and thus relegated experimental media, or media that did not fit a certain pristine aesthetic, to the darkness of the archive. Clarity, verisimilitude or what Steyerl refers to as “high resolution” in images is inherently conservative, as it idolizes male genius, high/low culture distinctions, authenticity, and of course is only available to those with the economic means to procure the best equipment.

The desire for clearer images is not a new goal by any means. In fact, it follows naturally from the image as embedded in the history of martial visual endeavors: reconnaissance photography, mapmaking and drone targeting are all fields where the ultimate clarity of the image is the goal. In a move similar to Rancière’s deployment of the concept of dissensus, Steyerl argues that the material conditions of images are a reflection of the social nexus that created them: “Their situation reveals much more than the content or appearance of the images themselves: it also reveals the conditions of their marginalization, the constellation of social forces leading to their online circulation as poor images.”<sup>248</sup> However, Steyerl’s focus on the circulation of poor *images* (popular

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<sup>246</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Oxford, 2006).

<sup>247</sup> Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” *e-flux* 10 (2009), 1.

<sup>248</sup> Steyerl, 3.

images, as she later calls them), rather than artworks (which are rarified if only by falling under the category of art), in contemporary media—particularly online—means that she grapples with the dilemma that other authors and artists I have mentioned also find themselves in. Platforms both enable creative participation but are also sites of extreme commodification, exploitation and inadvertent production by users of content for huge corporations. Steyerl is aware of this ambivalence, but unlike Osborne chooses to characterize digital images as dematerialized. She then analyzes this condition as a function of conceptual art.<sup>249</sup> This is where Steyerl and Osborne critically diverge: for Osborne, contemporary art is postconceptual, meaning there is a return to materiality without medium-specificity, which is a tactic that works against the progression into dematerialization and semioticization, or as I would call it, the state of pure abstraction that exists within hypersubsumption. Now we have come to yet another feature of hypersubsumption: all sides of the exchange circuit have fallen into total abstraction. Real abstraction means abstract categories function concretely, ruling society where social relationships used to. Rather than masking social interactions, real abstraction means that abstract forces themselves act on the world.

Osborne and Rancière both point to the photographic and its descendants—film and digital media—as harbingers of politically potent art, which could bring about a new aesthetic regime. It is fruitful to compare Osborne’s modes of relating to history and materiality, as well as Rancière’s notion of disparate sensoriums, with Walter Benjamin’s famous treatise on photography and modernity, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* as well as his essay collection, *Illuminations*. In *The Work of Art*, Benjamin ponders the situation of modernity, with the rising ubiquity of technology, and the role that the seemingly endless production and reproduction of cultural objects, particularly visual objects, has on the socio-political sphere. He is interested in questions of pre-modernity and the shifts in ideology that came about as a

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<sup>249</sup> Steyerl is correct in the claim that “the dematerialized art object turns out to be perfectly adapted to the semioticization of capital, and thus to the conceptual turn of capitalism” (Steyerl, “Poor Image,” 5). Indeed, there are dematerialized art objects deployed by artists today, some of which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, I argue that these art objects are not actually contemporary art—they are just art that is being made in the present.



result of the introduction of specific technologies, such as the camera. With the advent of better and faster photographic techniques, photography begins to rely on its reproducibility and thus its commerciality. This change in the mode of production is accompanied by a change in the social disposition, and inaugurates what Benjamin calls the “optical unconscious,” or the condition of “unconsciously penetrated space.”<sup>250</sup> This new mode of looking or gazing is a type of possession built on penetration, which destroys the distance created by the “aura” in an attempt to bring an object into ourselves. The viewer wants to penetrate the world, but she is also penetrated by it. Benjamin compares the cameraman with the surgeon, who, closing the distance between patient and doctor bit by bit, penetrates into the patient’s body and roots around in her organs—reality is permeated with the mechanical.

Benjamin introduces the concept of the “aura,” or the singularity of a photo that attests to its reality. Benjamin claims that the ritualistic value of the work of art has its last gasp in portrait photography, which generates a genuine aura through its connection to the human face and gaze. This early auratic quality of photography is similar to Roland Barthes’ formulation of the punctum,<sup>251</sup> or the prick of the photo that connects the viewer through time to the existential reality of the presence in the photo. Aura, as singular appearance of distance, through its commodification in photography and film incites the drive to destroy it, and this destruction is the bringing of the Other wholly into the self. Benjamin refers to the “decay” of the aura, indicative of its connection to life, vitality, and a material that is not merely destroyed, but like a body, dies away. What is left behind is mere phantasmagoria: “To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose ‘sense of the universal equality of things’ has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.”<sup>252</sup> This

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<sup>250</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 236.

<sup>251</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 27.

<sup>252</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 222.

principle of life originates, as Benjamin claims, in the art object's embeddedness in the fabric of history, which is itself alive.

The aura is the intimate connection between ritual and history, or art and the social world. To commodify the object, via reproduction, produces a dead reified thing in which all social relations are obscured as it becomes an object of “intrinsic” value. In *Work of Art* Benjamin discusses the need to destroy the modern photographic aura, as it has now become the commodity fetish. Benjamin’s modern aura seems in line with Osborne’s notion of the contemporaneity of contemporary art—it describes art that would have addressed the socio-historical conditions of his time.

The aura both captures and is captured by Fordist capitalism, which was punctuated by advances in visual technology, as well as the mass introduction of automation into work. Benjamin was also concerned with the way the production of artworks, or the process by which they are created, impacted their effects on ideology. In *Illuminations*, he claims that “process reproduction can bring out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye... can capture images which escape natural vision. Technical production can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.”<sup>253</sup> Like Rancière, Benjamin acknowledges that the very modes of perception change through history.

Bringing together Osborne and Rancière, we can say that the potential for dissensus is what defines the contemporaneity of contemporary art, as dissensus is what paves the way for a response to the dominant modes of sensation of the time. Responding to a socio-historical situation, dissensual art is spatial, creating a fissure in hegemonic modes of sensibility, opening space for new regimes of sense. It is no coincidence that the emphasis on the visual mechanized image (photography and digital image media) by contemporary artists and scholars aligns with the theoretical importance placed on visuality, its relationship to capitalism, and its current martial, omni-occipital inflection by the thinkers discussed in the previous chapter.

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<sup>253</sup> Benjamin, 220.

In the essay “Go Away Closer: Photography, Intermediality, Unevenness,” in *Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction*, Kajri Jain discusses the relationship between capitalism and postcolonial spaces, through a treatment of photography as it exists in specific cultural spaces, such as the Indian bazaar. Unlike Osborne, Jain claims that contemporary Western photography is trapped in the paradigms of modernity, with its medium-specificity (though Osborne would agree with that characterization of modernity). The issue with this is that “a medium-specific view, we might say, treats photography and other media as akin to raw materials in industrial mass-manufacture, each with its own identifiable, exploitable properties. This view is embedded in a modernist conception of capitalism; what’s more, it replicates capitalism’s approach to the world.”<sup>254</sup> Jain claims that photography is not caught up in the historical time of transformation, shifts and ruptures, as dictated by Western notions of capitalism; rather, the relationship between photography and various sensory milieus is uneven and they cannot be easily distinguished from each other.

However, as with the chaotic space of the bazaar, it does not mean that there is no internal order at work. Jain also stresses the importance of challenging the Eurocentric view that senses are separate from each other or ordered with any kind of primacy given to one over another. He refers to this as aesthetic-moral ordering, which in turn impoverishes the way media like photography are capable of interacting with varying spaces, and reminds us that the presumed realist or documentary function of photography is not universal but a product of Western naturalism. To consider the indexical function of a photograph based merely on its material reproduction of a thing is to reduce the capaciousness of its temporal and spatial possibilities, as they are related fundamentally to the socio-historical formations that are being photographed. Jain would object to this chapter’s focus on the visual, because he claims that an image works on levels beyond simply the visual and its accompanying sensorium is not reducible to the visual. For example, he posits ‘livingness,’ rather than realism, as occurring in photographs of

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<sup>254</sup> Kajri Jain, “Go Away Closer: Photography, Intermediality, Unevenness,” in *Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction*, eds. Kevin Coleman and Daniel James (New York: Verso, 2021), 91.

religious icons sold at the bazaar. Perhaps, to use Benjamin or art theorist Boris Groys' vernacular,<sup>255</sup> the photographic image has the future potential to inhabit an aura. Rather than preserving the museum as a privileged space, where singularity and sovereignty (of the audience) holds court, Jain looks at the reproduced image as egalitarian in that it provided a way for so-called 'untouchables' (from Hindu caste systems) to engage with religion through purchasable icons: "This democratization of the iconic image through mass reproduction meant that the desires it embodied also lent themselves to identitarian political mobilizations."<sup>256</sup> However, this is not to say that mechanical reproduction and identitarian politics are always good, of course. It cuts both ways, as this is also an easy way to produce dangerous nationalisms. While Jain seems to follow Rancière's insistence on art creating new sensoriums, he presents a postcolonial challenge to the primacy of visualness. I would argue that I choose this primacy, like Osborne, precisely because the ocular *is* the hegemonic mode of contemporary capitalism and therefore what must be studied.

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<sup>255</sup> In Boris Groys' essay "Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk," (*e-flux* 15 (2013), n.p.), Groys claims that for a long time the function of art and art institutions was to resist the flow of time and material destruction through preservation, either of artworks or of ideas, events, bygone eras, etc. Contemporary art attempts to "bring art into the flow of time," meaning to bring art into the present as precarious and durational. But does this also mean art must look to the future? Unlike Osborne, Groys' futurity of the art object seems to refer only to the decay of its materiality and the passing of its historical moment. Thus this cannot live up to our definition of contemporary. Groys is concerned with the effects of the internet on the way art is created and interpreted—he positions the internet as the inheritor of the media-cataclysm that photography and cinema caused when they were invented. Groys claims that the difference between curated museum shows and a film, concert or play, is that the curated show 1. captures the artistic event within the space-time of the museum and 2. allows for audience participation in the event. This conception is distinct from Rancière's dissensus, as Groys presumes art actually creates a new sensorium that the audience temporarily inhabits and reflects upon, whereas under Rancière's schema, only the condition for the possibility of new sensoriums are created. This distinction is vital because the former assumes that "the audience" is homogenous in that they have equal access to the art event, simply because they participate in the space-time of the museum. Dissensus, however, is predicated precisely on the notion of difference. Groys concludes, in a farcical nod to Benjamin, that the internet produces "auras without products." But documentation gives a sense of false security, because it is often equated with truth. As the discussion of Trevor Paglen's art work will demonstrate, the transparency of the production process does not necessarily result in the truth of the artwork, therefore it is not useful to rely on the discourse of obscuring/bringing to light that Groys uses; rather we will focus on the production itself and not the history or documentation of that production.

<sup>256</sup> Jain, "Go Away Closer," 100.

Though neither Osborne or Rancière focus specifically on the important critiques and fissures in capitalism exposed by authors like Kajri Jain— or instance the non-smoothness in the fabric of capitalism itself as it globalizes—they, like the many other theorists and thinkers discussed in this chapter, still focus on the relationship of art to capitalism, touching specifically on photography and the digital image as a medium-specific technological rupture in art, and look to the effects that visibility has on different sensoriums (whether to enrich or impoverish them), as well as the value that new sensoriums have for anti-capitalist struggles.

The next chapter looks at specific works of art made by artists working today, scrutinizing them under the schema of contemporary art that we arrived at by combining aspects of Rancière and Osborne's theories. As I explained in the introduction, I will be examining examples of "artveillance," to use Brighenti's term for artistic responses to surveillance. I divide the contemporary works of artveillance into three types: counter-surveillance, camouflage and counter-production. The three are linked by the use of the very techniques and technologies of surveillance that they attempt to disrupt or critique. The following chapter questions which tactics of anti-surveillance, anti-capitalist artworks are most effective under conditions of hypersubsumption and its effects on technological production, culture and subjectivity. To avoid confusion, I focus on contemporary objects that are universally recognized and positioned as artworks, understood as such by both their creators and audiences, both academic and lay. I interrogate the various ways artveillance understands itself in relationship to capitalism vis-à-vis the techniques used in its production as a technological object, the impact artveillance seeks to have (if any) as a counter-politics, and how effective its various strategies are.

## 6 « Chapter Five: Analyzing Artveillance »

### 6.1 « Introduction »

Many artists are responding to contemporary social conditions under capitalist hypersubsumption with anti-surveillant art, particularly to drones, but also to surveillance and militarization. I will here evaluate the works' strategies in relation to the standards of contemporary art set forth in the previous chapter, reading them as art against hypersubsumption, and showing the importance of art as an anti-capitalist political strategy. I will also discuss the dangers of art that makes use of surveillance technology failing to be contemporary.

Counter-surveillance, the first category of artwork that I will examine here, includes sousveillance or “watching from beneath,” and describes works that either attempt to redirect the surveillant gaze back toward its hegemonic source, or reveal the gaze to the unknowing audience—often at the expense of subjecting the audience to surveillance as a means to an end. Camouflage, as the name suggests, is concerned with hiding from surveillance. I look at various works at ranging from elaborate face makeup to bizarre masks that obscure the entire head. Camouflage is the category that relates most closely to the military; as I also allude to later, the U.S. Navy directly employed artists to come up with painting techniques for camouflaging their fleets on the seas.<sup>257</sup> Counter-production is perhaps the most difficult to define category, because the name does not intuitively suggest a specific action or intervention. I largely use counter-production to refer to the anti-drone and military surveillance photography of experimental geographer Trevor Paglen. As we will see, his works are what I consider closest to the dialectical sublation of material and concept that Osborne refers to as postconceptual art.

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<sup>257</sup> Javier Pes, “Dazzle Camouflage Helped Allied Warships win WWI. Now, Artists are Paying Tribute to the Cubist-inspired Designs,” *artnet*, April 24, 2018.

## 6.2 « Counter-surveillance »

Researcher Kirsty Robertson writes: “The prevailing artistic response to surveillance has been what Steve Mann calls *sousveillance*, the ‘shooting back,’ or turning of surveillance against itself, in projects that in their aiming of cameras at cameras, seek to draw attention to the ability of an ephemeral controlling power to see, invade, record, and make use of footage for political ends (Mann, 2002).”<sup>258</sup> *Sousveillance*, literally meaning “looking from below,” is deliberately opposed to surveillance, the God-like gaze from above that emanates from those with dominant economic and political power. Robertson goes on to pinpoint the central question of importance with regards to *sousveillance* as an artistic and political strategy: “It would seem that the work of Steve Mann, Bill Brown, and the Surveillance Camera Players, Denis Beaubois, and others is involved in recapturing the gaze and, as often as not, of resituating it in a series of prosthetic eyes—cameras, glasses, and lenses that attempt to return the gaze to a re-empowered viewer. Given the relative privilege of those able to engage in projects that take on surveillance I wonder at the focus on the gaze—do such projects contest the power of surveillance or simply replicate it?”<sup>259</sup> Robertson’s response is to focus on non-visual surveillance and its relationship to the surveilled body as potential site of fruitful resistance. I however want to “stay with the trouble”<sup>260</sup> put forth in her question, using the query as a framework for examining countersurveillance art and its efficacy as dissensual, contemporary and counter-hegemonic.

What characterizes counter-surveillance art and how does it differ from other works that attempt to undermine ubiquitous surveillance? When first considered, counter-surveillance art falls neatly in line with Rancière’s concept of new aesthetic regimes that perturb the prevailing order of the seen and unseen, because the primary *modus operandi*

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<sup>258</sup> Kirsty Robertson, “Try to Walk With the Sound of My Footsteps: The Surveillant Body in Contemporary Art,” *The Communication Review* 11, no. 1 (2008): 25.

<sup>259</sup> Robertson, 25.

<sup>260</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

of this type of art is based on the play of concealing and revealing, ostensibly empowering the “watched” class by enabling them to look back at those in power, seeking to control the gaze, rather than subverting it. Often this tactic resembles a certain strain of scientific Marxism which, following a certain dedication to the commodity fetish section in *Capital*, seeks to develop “class consciousness” through a bullish unveiling of the workings of power and the poor conditions of the lower classes. It rests on a confidence that by demonstrating that the wool has been pulled over the eyes of an entire class, or country, or population, that group will attain class consciousness and rise up against conditions of oppression and inequality. In keeping with this idea, some current artistic circles utilize the very objects/strategies they attempt to critique—dataveillance, predicative marketing, military and consumer drones—as a *détournement* that attempts to hijack, hack and repurpose in order to illuminate a set of truths about the world.

Among those artists working with countersurveillance, James Bridle, pioneer of the New Aesthetic, is one of the most famous, prolific and accessible. Most famous for their *Dronestagram*, According to Bridle’s website,<sup>261</sup> *Dronestagram* was a series of filtered photographs of the landscapes of U.S. drone strikes as close to their true locations as was possible. These images were obtained from Google Maps Satellite after Bridle researched drone strikes using Wikipedia, media reports and reports from local governments. These images were then filtered by the popular photo sharing site Instagram (owned by Facebook), and syndicated on Tumblr and Twitter. Each post is accompanied by a short description of the drone strike it refers to.

The result is a series of God’s eye images of often barren, neutral-colored landscapes that populate a feed and enable the account’s followers to scroll through a seemingly endless barrage of similar images. None of the images actually depict the carnage or ensuing wreckage that is the aftermath a drone strike. Instagram’s platform allows one to open an image and simply click on a set of forward and back arrows that

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<sup>261</sup> James Bridle, *Dronestagram: Drone’s Eye View*, <http://booktwo.org/notebook/dronestagram-drones-eye-view/> (accessed December 15, 2019).



flank each image. If one goes through the images quickly, they almost look like a single picture. Each photo, meanwhile, has hundreds of “likes” and the account boasts almost 22,000 followers. Bridle describes the goals of their projects as follows:

The drone, for me, stands in part for the network itself: an invisible, inherently connected technology allowing sight and action at a distance. Us and the digital, acting together, a medium and an exchange. But the non-human components of the network are not moral actors, and the same technology that permits civilian technological wonder, the wide-eyed futurism of the New Aesthetic and the unevenly distributed joy of living now, also produces an obscurantist ‘security’ culture, ubiquitous surveillance, and robotic killing machines. This is a result of the network’s inherent illegibility, its tendency towards seamlessness and invisibility, from code to ‘the cloud’. Those who cannot perceive the network cannot act effectively within it, and are powerless. The job, then, is to make such things visible.<sup>262</sup>

According to Bridle, “Many [drone strikes] are in outlying areas and the information on exact locations is scarce; where a precise location is not given, the view should be within a few kilometers in most cases. Instagram does not allow you to select a location on a map, only a place name, so unfortunately the images are geotagged to my current location. Nevertheless: the landscapes and the places and their names are real.”<sup>263</sup> Bridle, as a white Westerner, becomes the referent for all the atrocities he aggregates on social media as artworks. The proximity of the artist to the artworks transforms them not from intractable and disturbing events to illuminated ones, but from inaccessible to “interesting” objects of contemplation.

The stupefying effect of scrolling and the disconnect between the captions and the images exacerbate the gulf between signifier and signified and threaten to make the images a meaningless stream of distraction. It is no accident that the God’s-eye view of Google Maps Satellite mimics that of the drone; the satellite is like the shadow of the drone, arriving just after it to document its wake. It is difficult therefore not to see the satellite feed as yet another imperial eye, ironically—or perhaps circularly—being turned

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<sup>262</sup> James Bridle, *Under the Shadow of the Drone*, <http://booktwo.org/notebook/drone-shadows/>, accessed December 20, 2019.

<sup>263</sup> Bridle, *Dronestagram*.

on the Middle East by a British citizen, who points to tragedy from a distance much like the drone operator who is criticized by civilians, victims and peers alike for killing from a distance. What is the impact of this distance and the uses of the technologies and platforms Bridle puts to work in service of “making such things visible?” They are trying to bring to light the atrocities committed by the U.S. through drones, yet is uncritically using technology that replicates this gaze almost in its entirety, arguably eliminating only the kill shot. But as we saw last chapter, drones represent not only repressive violence but the martial gaze, which is an attitude or stance within a constellation of technological objects. The drone, after all, initially was only for reconnaissance, like its predecessor, the recon airplane. Similarly, Google Satellite performs its own kind of reconnaissance, and Bridle becomes an unwitting soldier, spying on tragic violence without bringing it into focus. I am not suggesting that Bridle’s project would be better served by showing images of war torn buildings and bodies; rather, I am pointing out that the use of Google Satellite, a technology embroiled in the imperial mapping of the world as a geo-cartographic goal in the service of global capitalist domination, points to Bridle’s asymmetric power as a First World artistic voyeur.

*Dronestagram* is not strictly documentary in style. It arrives after the event, trailing in its wake, attempting to pin down what exactly happened and where. This is because the events in question are often clandestine or difficult to access. Once they are finally reported on, the event itself and evidence of its aftermath are no longer visible. This creates a dichotomy between *Dronestagram*’s captions—short, clinical descriptions of drone strikes—and the images themselves. Both are somewhat sanitized, the latter being devoid of the wreckage one would expect to find after a strike. Though they are meant to show the detachment in official government reports, the descriptions, with their cold tone, actually tend to reinforce the absence of the drone strike in the photos, enhancing their surreal nature and further aestheticizing the events. Through aestheticization, *Dronestagram* makes the drone war seem further from home and the U.S. citizen; its aesthetic dimension in the form of the Instagram feed facilitates the easy commodification of the GWOT through its quick consumption on social media. Whereas

before, drone strikes seemed distant and secretive, Bridle's work attempts to bring the routinization and profusion of strikes to the public's attention by harnessing the banality of Instagram's platform to satirize the ordinariness of violence and the American people's ability to scroll through war as they scroll through advertisements. But the work could just as well have the opposite effect, helping to further distance viewers from the actuality of drone strikes.

Bridle is the main architect of the New Aesthetic, which sets the agenda for their work. The New Aesthetic was defined at a panel during popular music festival South by Southwest, and refined by Bridle in a Tumblr manifesto:

Just as my drone works are not about the objects themselves, but about the systems—technological, spatial, legal and political—which permit, shape and produce them, and about the wider implications of seeing and not seeing such technological, systematic, operations; so the New Aesthetic is concerned with everything that is not visible in these images and quotes, but that is inseparable from them, and without which they would not exist...the New Aesthetic project is undertaken within its own medium: it is an attempt to “write” critically about the network in the vernacular of the network itself: in a tumblr, in blog posts, in YouTube videos of lectures, tweeted reports and messages, reblogs, likes, and comments...the New Aesthetic reproduces the structure and disposition of the network itself, as a form of critique.<sup>264</sup>

Bridle goes on to declare that those who do not understand technology are doomed to have politics “done to them.” Though the New Aesthetic claims to utilize network technologies in order to critique them, the connection between technology and politics oftentimes results in a conflation of the two. A mere deployment of technology by an artist or activist is not in itself a critique, nor is it an inherently political action. As we have seen with Rancière, and to a lesser extent, Osborne, there is no such thing as an *inherently* political action.

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<sup>264</sup> James Bridle *The New Aesthetics and Its Politics*, <http://www.pilproject.net/docs/the-new-aesthetic-and-its-politics.pdf/>, accessed January 2, 2019.

Bridle is also the artist behind the projects *Drone Shadow*<sup>265</sup> and *Watching the Watchers*.<sup>266</sup> Both rely on the conspiratorial idea that power operates in the shadows and is fundamentally invisible; the job of the artist is to make power and its networks visible. Under this schema, visibility is equated with knowledge, which is then equated with political efficacy/engagement.<sup>267</sup> Bridle states it plainly in his explanation of *Watching the Watchers*: “Watching the Watchers is an ongoing series of images taken from publicly-available digital satellite maps, of unmanned aircraft around the world, at

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<sup>265</sup> *Drone Shadow* is a project that consists of creating life-sized, white outlines of drones reminiscent of crime scene outlines. These “shadows” lurk not in the war-torn “over there” but in the very countries deploying them.

<sup>266</sup> *Watching the Watchers* is a growing collection of images of military unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) as captured in publicly available satellite imagery. Initialized in 2013, the collection had grown to 78 images as of April 2017.

<sup>267</sup> Of course, Bridle is not the only one who insists on the play of concealing and revealing as a primary goal. Another prominent artist who uses the tools of violence in an attempt to rehab them is Tomas van Houtryve, most famous for his work *Blue Sky Days*. Van Houtryve travels around the U.S.—a country which unilaterally dispenses deadly drones to other countries while itself remaining unscathed—with a camera attached to a small hobby drone. Mimicking the style of military drone photography (the images are actually very similar to Bridle’s *Dronestagram*), van Houtryve photographs locals that would in other circumstances be targets for drone strikes—large gatherings of people, parties, etc. A group of white Americans doing yoga in the park, for example, may look from a distance like a group of worshippers engaged in prayer. This ambiguity is at the center of van Houtryve’s work, and is its strongest aspect. Curator Neils Van Tomme describes the work as follows: “*Blue Sky Days* problematizes the effect of the vertical perspective and the necropolitical logic to which it invites. In contemporary warfare, the digital drone image is no longer treated as a passive representation, but as an active entity, being part of a process. *Blue Sky Days* as a series of static photographic images emphasizes ambiguity and undecidability, which contrasts the visuality of certainty employed by synthetic vision systems. Van Houtryve uses a strategy of anthropomorphism, a strategy that raises awareness for the fact that agency is distributed by human and nonhuman forces. His series humanizes the other, encourages empathy for the people living under the drone, which contrast the current of anthropophobia in synthetic imagery.” (Niels Van Tomme, *Visibility Machines*, exh. cat (Baltimore, Maryland: Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture, 2014). *Blue Sky Days* attempts to contrast the ambiguity of reality with the sterile algorithmic decision-making of drones in a potentially dissensual series that works to create a rift between the commonly accepted sensorium of drone logic and the situation “on the ground.” However, because this project still relies on the drone to take photographs, it also reproduces the unseen, unsolicited surveillant eye that takes one’s image without permission. This is not an issue of privacy (at least not most importantly); rather, it is about the fact that van Houtryve’s project could not exist without reproducing this logic. In order to “reveal” the shared vulnerability of everybody under the network and elicit the empathy Neils describes, *Blue Sky Days* must turn a predatory eye on the subjects of its photographs, making its viewers complicit in their own exploitation and forcing empathy for *themselves* (which is not strictly empathy) as they realize their exploitation. Though the project is ostensibly about humanizing and complicating the machinic gaze as well as its targets, it cannot accomplish this except through the martial gaze.

training bases in the US desert and secret installations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere. These military technologies, designed to operate without being seen—visually, politically, or morally—are nevertheless accessible to the gaze of contemporary, civilian networks. By rendering them visible, we render their operation and politics legible, and thus open to intervention.”<sup>268</sup> But simply *seeing* the network (which arguably may not even be achieved here) does not mean that those “on the ground” have any more control over its systems of production or its technological agents (e.g., the military drone).

The problem with *sousveillance*, as Robertson explains, is that it quickly becomes *co-veillance*, where the “co” refers not to the watched watching the watchers but to a complicity of a certain class possessing real economic, technological and social power watching those excluded from society. As we saw with *Dronestagram*, one way this is accomplished is via the uncritical “reappropriation” of capitalist technologies for so-called artistic or revolutionary purposes. But simply re-aiming the martial gaze does not defang it, nor distance it from its origins in military networks of control. The entire visible/invisible dialogue stops at the step of revealing. This differs from the creation of dissensus, which is not political in itself but is the beginning of politics; it structurally shifts the aesthetic regime, opening new possibilities, but it is not those possibilities in itself. An artistic practice that relies on games of ideological peek-a-boo may not be effective at disrupting systems of violence. On the contrary, such works often perpetuate the asymmetries of power that capitalism relies upon. In other words, the ontological underpinnings of these artworks are not enough to overcome their own condition of hypersubsumption, and instead become part of its genealogy of exploitation and violence.

*Sousveillance* also does not account for the fact that as Robertson argues, “surveillance has always been more than a visual technology, nor for the fact that the bulk of surveillance increasingly takes place out of sight, moving into the worlds of data and

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<sup>268</sup> James Bridle, “Watching the Watchers,” Multiple mounted colour prints, 2014, Open Data Institute. <http://culture.theodi.org/watching-the-watchers/>.

biometrics.”<sup>269</sup> She further explains: “What I find problematic is the uncritical acceptance of the gaze as something that needs to be reclaimed and controlled. This acceptance is often coupled with a general denial, on the part of many, though not all, artists, of the ambiguous comfort offered by surveillance—the feeling of safety (no matter how off-base) that comes through the sense that someone is watching in the dark tunnels and unlit streets of the city.”<sup>270</sup> This feeling of comfort or pleasure is what I alluded to in previous chapters as the necessity of participation in the digital sphere to gain access to social capital, often at the expense of marginalized populations. Recall that under the banopticon model, what are seen as the pleasures of today’s capitalism are only possible through the exclusion of certain populations via sophisticated surveillance methods. In today’s transnational (to use Osborne’s term) world, where geopolitical and geographical boundaries often mean very little and state sovereignty has yet to come to terms with (let alone legislate) the complex web of private corporations that reach across, through and between lawful boundaries, surveillance creates social boundaries through systems of control. These are in turn strengthened through governmental controls on citizenship and access to the commons. The comfort that “someone is watching in the dark tunnels” extends only to those in the lighted glow of the majority, and the populations Robertson mentions suffer for it necessarily—they are often seen as the shadowy horrors *in* the dark tunnels. As art critic Bruce Sterling—a man with often times less than sterling political commitments—says, “[t]he British cops have boatloads of surveillance cams, heaps of ‘em. Better cams all the time. That cop network isn’t going to magically become an art connoisseur. The aesthetics of surveillance cams are not value-free. Because aesthetics are not value-free.”<sup>271</sup> Sterling was one of the first thinkers to systematically review the New Aesthetic movement and offer a substantial critique of it. While the New Aesthetic may seem like somewhat of a straw-man here, according to its own intense assertions it

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<sup>269</sup> Robertson, “Try to Walk,” 27.

<sup>270</sup> Robertson, 29.

<sup>271</sup> Bruce Sterling, “An Essay on the New Aesthetic,” *Wired*, April 2, 2012. <https://www.wired.com/2012/04/an-essay-on-the-new-aesthetic/>.

represents a particular strand of contemporary thought and series of metaphysical commitments that weaves from object-oriented ontology to actor-network theory to the Cthulucene. Even if the movement itself does not have an articulate theoretical commitment, its lack thereof is itself a commitment to spectacular bricolage. In Osborne's parlance, the New Aesthetic returns to a concern with the medium of the art object while hiding an incoherent conceptual commitment in a series of glitches.

### 6.3 « Camouflage: Hide, Dazzle, Obscure »

Within its desire to reveal the hidden, Bridle's work also incorporates the necessary antithesis: hiding from sight, or camouflage. It is easy to see why camouflage art has risen to prominence as global surveillance has increased. An earlier chapter used Bousquet to trace the parallel development of aerial reconnaissance and the varied techniques of military camouflage that arose to combat it. These techniques included blending in with the environment, using barriers to hide from sight, and dazzle camouflage, which relies on visual tricks to make the contours of an object more difficult to discern in its environment. As Hanna Rose Shell defines it, camouflage "cannot be reprinted or packaged. It is a way of seeing, being, moving, and working in the world. It is a form of cultivated subjectivity. As such, it is an individuated form of self-awareness that is also part of a network of institutional practices. Camouflage unfolds across time and space, across disciplinary and discursive boundaries, as an adaptive logic of escape from photographic representation."<sup>272</sup> It is a form of effacement, an erasure of being, with all of its photologocentric connotations. Shell points out that the artist Pablo Picasso, upon seeing a tank painted in all kinds of blocky shapes and colors, remarked that camouflage *was* cubism.<sup>273</sup> It is interesting to note the claim that, because it must be explicitly cultivated as a form of being-in-the-world, camouflage cannot be pre-packaged—or implicitly, commodified and sold. Shell of course cannot mean this literally, since

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<sup>272</sup> Hanna Rose Shell, *Hide and Seek: Camouflage, Photography, and the Media of Reconnaissance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>273</sup> Shell, 19.

the military's use of camouflage was bought and then prefabricated through the labour of scientists and artists. Shell proposes three ways of categorizing the material development of camouflage in history, culminating with what she calls "dynamic" camouflage, which seeks to hide from the near-instantaneous mobile surveillance devices of today.

This section will discuss the works of two artists who both respond to state surveillance by producing artifacts that hide or obscure their bearers. One artist uncovers the blind spots in the infrastructure of digital surveillance and reacts with works that exploit these blind spots, while the other attempts to turn the "working" aspects of surveillance against it in a way that exposes the problematic aspects of so-called "objective" machinic vision while simultaneously hiding from it. Artist Adam Harvey is most famous for *Stealth Wear* and *CV Dazzle*, both of which seek to use self-applied external techniques of clothing and/or make-up and hair to confuse or hide from optical surveillance. *Stealth Wear*, which was inspired by *CV Dazzle*, cloaks its wearers in oversized silver garments ranging from just covering the chest to as long as the waist. Each item of clothing also includes a hood-like portion which covers the head. Ostensibly inspired by "traditional Islamic dress" (according to Harvey's website), each outfit is made from silver-coated fabric designed specifically to reflect heat in order to avoid the thermal surveillance common in aerial drones. The clothing is what he calls "privacy wear," meant to be a subversion of the militarized eye. However, this project is also a fashion line, and Harvey's site advertises the *Dazzle* hoodie, burqa and hijab using pictures of athletic, attractive models posing provocatively, with their images duplicated under heat vision in order to demonstrate how they become "invisible." The hoodie is modeled by a man of unknown ethnicity (seen only in profile—his face is not visible at all) covered in intricate tattoos and a white woman sporting heavy black eyeliner, which is also on the eyes of the ostensibly Muslim woman modeling both the burqa and the hijab. The garments that cover more of the body still manage to reflect a Western vision of sexuality, while at the same time painting the East as "exotic" and feminized. Of the wearers of the hoodie, which displays their shapely torsos and muscled abs, only the woman's face is visible, and her eyeliner, mirrored by the Muslim woman's, harkens back



to the traditional kohl liner used in Middle Eastern, African, and Indian cultures (the latter in particular uses kohl to drive away the evil eye).

Though the idea is to use traditional Muslim dress to hide from the very predatory technologies that hunt for individuals wearing those items, the photographs could just as easily be stills from a high fashion runway presenting political “privacy” wear—which is clearly Harvey’s intent. For a time, Stealth Wear could be purchased at the Privacy Gift Shop, a site operated by Harvey, starting at \$300 and climbing to almost \$600 for the hoodie, while the burqa retailed at \$2200 (all prices in USD). Privacy Gift Shop is currently on hiatus, and Stealth Wear is sold out, which begs the question: who is buying this clothing? Harvey’s site advises that homemade alternatives could use mylar, which would be much hotter and less effective than his fabric, which has silver woven into it for maximum flexibility and heat diffusion. It is no wonder this project came on the heels of the successful *CV Dazzle*—such a project is not affordable for every artist, particularly with such a stylish and aestheticized execution. Additionally, though inspired by Islamic religious garb, the average citizen in Pakistan or Yemen, for example (the most common targets for U.S. drone strikes), is clearly *not* the target *consumer* for Stealth Wear, with its sleekly swathed models and enormous price tags. By exploiting traditional clothing of a war-torn region to create a high concept, costly fashion line in the U.S., Harvey’s project inadvertently lays bare the relationship between Western consumption and the destruction of bodies “over there.” In other words, Harvey’s project achieves camouflage from drones for the people who are already safe from their martial gaze, specifically by extracting the practices of bodies most vulnerable to such attacks, subjecting the latter to a double predation—the everyday buzzing of military drones and the opportunistic gaze of the artist’s “inspiration.”

The earlier project, *CV Dazzle*, which takes its name and technique from the dazzle camouflage of WWII, uses the strategic application of makeup and faux hair in vivid colors and patterns to confuse facial recognition algorithms. Since these algorithms are trained to recognize certain patterns of light and dark in order to distinguish features like noses, cheekbones, etc., the makeup works by changing facial symmetry via a new

configuration of light and dark. The play of light and dark is reminiscent of Baroque painting, which famously used formal techniques of tenebrism, or “dramatic illumination,” and chiaroscuro—strong contrasts between light and dark—to dramatize the moral and ethical content of paintings. It could be said that facial recognition algorithms operate in a similar fashion, deciding the “goodness” of a person (social sorting) based on the play of light and dark on their countenance; Harvey’s camouflage is its own Baroque drama, using bright swathes of blue, blocky whites and blacks, and neon shocks of hair to make its actors appear to the human eye like edgy, bizarre works of living art. In Harvey’s world, Baroque battles Baroque, and the result is certainly aesthetically spectacular.

*CV Dazzle* was covered by *The Atlantic* (among other publications), which featured the gently made-up face of a blue-eyed man, blonde hair falling pleasingly into his eyes in a haphazard, relaxed manner, making him appear like a fashionable surfer artiste.<sup>274</sup> *The Atlantic* refers to Adam Harvey as an “artist, designer, and entrepreneur,” and goes on to describe the project as follows: “*CV dazzle* is ostentatious and kind of rad-looking, in a joyful, dystopic way. The first time I saw it, three years ago, I found it charismatic and captivating. Here was a technology that confounded computers with light and color...”<sup>275</sup> which makes one wonder: is this a work of art, a political technique, a fashion statement or a marketing technique? The reference to joy, light and color makes evading facial recognition seem frivolous, exciting and even fun, like a craft project one can pick up and put down experimentally, without any real stakes. Unlike Stealth Wear, *CV Dazzle* offers its techniques free of charge on open source software, and is even working on a toolkit where the success of somebody’s camouflage techniques would be tested against actual facial recognition software.

The *CV Dazzle* website reads like a fashion show, advertising the camouflage “look book,” which features pictures of thin models (again white or Eastern, this time

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<sup>274</sup> Robinson Meyer, “Anti-Surveillance Camouflage for Your Face,” *The Atlantic*, July 24, 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/07/makeup/374929/>.

<sup>275</sup> Meyer., n.p.

East Asian) in successful makeup, and offers “style tips for reclaiming privacy,” referring to those applying the makeup as “stylists”— a luxury typically afforded only to the wealthy and famous, who can afford to hire somebody else to dress and beautify them. These tips discourage users from wearing masks to keep from being recognized, because masks are illegal in some cities. Instead the user is encouraged to exploit facial recognition software’s reliance on facial symmetry and dark and light tones—to disrupt the symmetry with makeup, cut the planes of the nose with wild hair pieces or loud accessories. Because facial recognition distinguishes skin tone, use light colors on dark skin and dark colors on light skin.

Though it is open source, the website nonetheless features an “All content © Adam Harvey” logo. While the open source software and apparently universally accessible makeup tips gesture toward a commitment to democratic values, the trademarking of content reminds us that Harvey’s work is equal parts art and branding. Stealth Wear sells for hundreds or thousands of dollars and the process for creating each piece is virtually impossible to replicate. Stealth Wear is literally commodified and sold, again under the banner of Harvey’s personal brand, effacing the labor that went into the line’s production. Harvey’s work is indeed contemporary, though not in the sense of future-oriented utopianism espoused by Rancière or the dialectical synthesis of material and content favored by Osborne. Rather, Harvey is an example of the way speculating on art de-fetishizes the art commodity, but only through the fetishization of the artist—the labor of the artist is entirely transparent and the artist as brand is now what is being sold. These works encapsulate contemporary neoliberal capitalism’s interest in the promise of individuality through aesthetics, social participation, and the reclamation of privacy; the latter concern dominates popular surveillance discourse. Surveillance scholar Torin Monahan sums up the relationship between camouflage and neoliberal values in the following way:

Anti-surveillance camouflage enacts a play of surveillance avoidance. It frames the enemy either as state and corporate actors invading one’s privacy or as malicious individuals seeking to violate helpless others through voyeuristic

transgressions. The gaze is always unwanted; it always individuates; it always objectifies. In this narrative, there is little room to engage the problems of categorical suspicion that undergird marginalizing surveillance because the unit of analysis is the individual, not the group. There is little room to explore complex amalgams of desired surveillance, extractive systems, and hidden effects. The provocation is one of the enlightened, bourgeois subject asserting his or her right to be left alone, which is a claim that by its very implied utterance already reveals the relative privilege of the one making it.<sup>276</sup>

As this critique points out, this artistic approach to camouflage misunderstands power as a set of top-down repressive actors against whom the free individual must defend their rights—particularly the right to their bodily autonomy and privacy. But as we saw with Foucault, and more recently in Deleuze, power is a diffuse network whose most impressive mechanism is the interplay or feedback loop between the auto-performance of surveillance and the invisible systems of control that function through a relationship to inconceivably quick network technology in the service of late capitalism.

Harvey's work is exemplary of Deleuze's dividual; he posits the surveillant gaze as an unwanted, unilateral Big Brother, while his clothes and makeup offer a way for the singular subject to assert their right to privacy precisely through their individuality—they can apply their own personal makeup and style their hair and Stealth Wear in unique ways. “The individual conceived through these technologies of power is a dividual, a social entity that can be segmented into traits to be controlled selectively in each relevant dimension that is currently examined and which—most importantly—can be calculated in an aggregate way.”<sup>277</sup> Stealth Wear in particular, because of its limiting price point, is an extreme case that reveals, as Monahan says, the privilege of those claiming privacy. *CV Dazzle*, meanwhile, makes suggestions about hiding one's face based on the principles of supposedly “bad” facial recognition software, which equates faciality with a universal

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<sup>276</sup> Torin Monahan, “The Right to Hide? Anti-Surveillance Camouflage and the Aestheticization of Resistance,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2015): 161.

<sup>277</sup> Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” 90.

(ableist) symmetry, and privileges certain skin tones and textures as the most legible.<sup>278</sup> As Monahan puts it, “it would seem, then, that systems of oppression and discrimination—racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc.—are preserved or at least not directly contested by anti-surveillance artistic experiments.”<sup>279</sup> Turning to hyper-visibility as an anti-hegemonic tactic is also not necessarily an antithesis to the logic of surveillance capitalism, itself born from the condition of the hypersubsumption of modes of production to the logic of information-based capitalism. As Marx explains in the *1844 Manuscripts*, “the capitalist mode of production—which now first appears as a mode of production *sui generis* (in its own right)—creates a change in the shape of material production. On the other hand, this change in the material shape forms the basis for the development of the capital-relation, whose adequate shape therefore only corresponds to a particular level of development of the material forces of production. We have examined the way in which the worker’s relation of dependence in production itself is thereby given a new shape.”<sup>280</sup> Though he is referring to the change from formal to real subsumption, in our case we can extend the statement to hypersubsumption, or to how the prominent contemporary modes of production—namely those that rely on value extraction through social sorting and consumer tracking, facilitated by surveillance as martial gaze—affect not only the production-consumption cycle and shape what is produced and desired, but also the perceptions of what is “within” or “outside” capitalism.

Capitalism is more sophisticated than a simple dichotomy between the visible and the hidden. On the contrary, as Jasper Bernes explains in his discussion of logistics and cognitive mapping: “Logistics is capital’s own project of cognitive mapping. Hence, the prominence of “visibility” among the watchwords of the logistics industry. To manage a

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<sup>278</sup> “Given that biometric systems already “fail” at a greater rate for racial minorities, effectively nominating those populations for increased scrutiny, what might be the effects of someone marked as Other openly and intentionally challenging state surveillance systems? Could this lead to anything but intensified observation, search, and intervention?” Monahan, “Right to Hide,” 165.

<sup>279</sup> Monahan, 162.

<sup>280</sup> Karl Marx, “Marx’s Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63 (Part 3) Relative Surplus Value,” marxists.catbull.com, accessed December 9, 2019. <https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1861/economic/ch37.htm/>.

supply chain means to render it transparent...the more transparent and ‘user-friendly’ the computerised processes are, the more opaque the total process they control becomes. His conclusion should trouble any simplistic conception of the powers of visibility or the ‘cognitive map’ as such.”<sup>281</sup> Surveillance is a function of the extension of logistics under hypersubsumption; what was once for the military a way to track the material supply chain has expanded through lightning-fast informational technologies and absorbed or reshaped not only the production process but consumption and consumers as nodes in the supply chain that must be monitored and quantified.

As I said earlier, the process of banoptic social sorting is meant to facilitate friction-free participation in social goods for desirable consumers. We can see how visibility, instead of fighting against the black-box of top-down power, is actually a vital part of the operation of capitalism. Not only that, but the making-visible of surveillance, as a part of the operation of logistics, does not necessarily provide any epistemological clarity or greater understanding, and does nothing to undo the asymmetrical relationship of power and control afforded the network of forces who benefit from the global roving eye.

Another approach to anti-surveillance art that operates through a logic of camouflage is artist and theorist Zach Blas. Blas’ work actually begins from the premise that the universal principles underlying facial recognition technology are biased, and moreover that their universality is based on average features that, when taken all together, do not and cannot equate to any real human being. *Facial Weaponization Suite* is a series of machine-fabricated masks, which Blas describes on his website as follows:

*Facial Weaponization Suite* protests against biometric facial recognition—and the inequalities these technologies propagate—by making “collective masks” in workshops that are modeled from the aggregated facial data of participants, resulting in amorphous masks that cannot be detected as human faces by biometric facial recognition technologies. The masks are used for public interventions and performances. One mask, the *Fag Face Mask*, generated from the biometric facial data of many queer men’s faces, is a response to scientific studies that link determining sexual orientation through rapid facial recognition

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<sup>281</sup> Bernes, “Logistics, Counterlogistics, and the Communist Prospect,” n.p.

techniques. Another mask explores a tripartite conception of blackness: the inability of biometric technologies to detect dark skin as racist, the favoring of black in militant aesthetics, and black as that which informatically obfuscates. A third mask engages feminism's relations to concealment and imperceptibility, taking veil legislation in France as a troubling site that oppressively forces visibility. A fourth mask considers biometrics' deployment as a security technology at the Mexico-US border and the nationalist violence it instigates. These masks intersect with social movements' use of masking as an opaque tool of collective transformation that refuses dominant forms of political representation.<sup>282</sup>

The masks themselves are uncanny, arresting, and obviously unwieldy—that is, they do not have apertures for the wearer to see, hear, or even breathe, and are meant, as Blas says, for strategic performances and short-term use. That is, they are strictly “art.” *Fag Face*, a Pepto-Bismol pink monstrosity, has all the unnatural angles of Lovecraftian geometry or a tormented face of the David Lynch variety. Each mask is a set of strange curves that build and twist upon each other and thus give off the silhouette of a precarious upside-down pyramid. This is fitting, as the masks are eerily reminiscent of nineteenth century death masks—but only in the context of the works being placed on the shoulders. Death masks, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, were plaster casts taken of the faces of the recently deceased. Unlike other funeral masks, European death masks were not meant to be placed on the deceased's face for burial. On the contrary, these masks were meant for the living, used as funeral effigies or—because they predated photography—as models for sculptors and painters. As with Blas' masks, which are addressed to the eyes of facial recognition, death masks were also aimed at a particular gaze—that of the living who were left behind. And this gaze, in turn, was the condition of possibility for such masks, which could only be made after the Gorgon stare<sup>283</sup> of the living fixed the deceased as “dead.” Thus death masks can be placed within the lineage of the martial gaze outlined by Bousquet. They predate photography but

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<sup>282</sup> Zach Blas, “Facial Weaponization Suite,” [zachblas.info](http://www.zachblas.info), accessed January 15, 2020. <http://www.zachblas.info/works/facial-weaponization-suite/>.

<sup>283</sup> Gorgon Stare is itself the name of an aerial surveillance program developed by the U.S. military, consisting of nine rotating cameras attached to a flying drone.

prefigure the relationship between violence, visibility and annihilation that photography would eventually usher in.

Blas' masks also harken back to death masks in their strange structures: according to Wikipedia, "it is sometimes possible to identify portraits that have been painted from death masks, because of the characteristic slight distortions of the features caused by the weight of the plaster during the making of the mould."<sup>284</sup> With the advent of the nineteenth century and its turn to scientific rationalism, death masks were used by scientists to study physiognomy. Death masks taken from famous dead people and notorious criminals became part of early developments in phrenology and contributed to racist ideas about morality as biologically encoded behavior that differed along racial lines, thus allowing the newly biopolitical governments of the West to discriminate against certain populations.

This is itself a direct precursor to both the social sorting of banopticism as well as the system that made possible the creation of *Facial Weaponization Suite* in the first place; the type of algorithmic analysis and prediction performed by facial recognition, which (falsely) claims to differentiate a queer face from a heterosexual one, is a direct descendent of the scientific tradition that linked behavior to so-called biological difference. Thus the nineteenth century death mask can be seen as a form of social sorting and biopolitics, while Blas' masks could be said to themselves be a type of death mask—monuments to the contemporary relationship between destruction and droning, or the specific type of visualization that manifests under the surveillant gaze.

However, these masks are also only symbolic heads, recognizable as masks only through the relation to the rest of the body. Left to its own devices, the masks in *Facial Weaponization Suite* would not immediately read as masks, or have any overt relationship to faciality. Not only do the masks offer no sensory pathways for the wearer, there are also no overt facial markers for the viewer—either the human audience or the facial recognition machine. Of course, this is the entire point—that a mask like *Fag Face*,

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<sup>284</sup> Brian Rose and Marianna Lovink, "Recreating Roman Wax Masks," *EXPEDITION* Vol. 56 (3) (2014): 34-37.



which is taken from real biometric data based on facial scans of various queer men and then aggregated and averaged, does not produce any recognizably human face—not even to the machine that scans for these precise markers. There is no average queer citizen, no universal queerness, and since this impossible universal is built from a collection of particulars, there must also be some calculation error in recognizing the particular as well.

The concept of informatic opacity, which Blas uses to describe his work, is an amalgam of Alex Galloway and Eugene Thacker’s informatic invisibility<sup>285</sup> and Édouard Glissant’s concept of opacity.<sup>286</sup> For Blas, security, including the watchful eye of surveillance and droning, strives to make subjects as transparent as possible, primarily through various technological interfaces. While Harvey’s art exploits rigid technological infrastructure in order to seek out its blind spots for the purposes of hiding in them, Blas’ work posits severing the relationally that is an inherent tenet in the operation of security “in order for security to secure, it must first relate...I would argue that security may operate as an independent entity but its automated independence exists not as an entity whose structure is made to be falsely independent in favour of discursive relationships, but instead resembles a discrete anonymous entity, as headless as it is blind.”<sup>287</sup> In this case, surveillance, by way of facial recognition, stands in for the security apparatus. Is it true, then, that Blas’ project depends on a relation between the surveillant eye and those in hiding from it? If so, what is the status of the human in this relation with the surveillant gaze—could it be anything other than as prey is to predator?

According to Blas, “informatic opacity, then, is best understood as a prized method of contra-internet aesthetics...This demands an inexhaustible openness, as something not fully known but sensed—a longing, the fantasy of a future. Thus, the

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<sup>285</sup> Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 131.

<sup>286</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

<sup>287</sup> Robert Jackson, “Objects of Surprise: Violence, Security and Metaphysics” *Violence and the Limits of Representation*, ed. Graham Matthews (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 162.

promise of contra-internet aesthetics is a utopian horizon.”<sup>288</sup> Blas’ statement, with its references to futurity and utopianism, has the ring of both Rancière and Osborne. It seems that the fantastic future he is referring to is one that operates according to a counter-hegemonic sensual regime through a reorganization of spatio-temporal logics. Monahan also comments on Blas’ work: “Rather than simply substitute one bizarre collective representation for an alienating singular one, the Facial Weaponization Suite aspires to erase identity markers altogether. It denies the legitimacy of a market of discrete identities and the systems that would reduce people to them.”<sup>289</sup> True to Glissant’s own work, Blas’ use of opacity attempts to sever relationality by denying legible representation. Glissant’s work is a plea to the parties in a relation to leave the object of their stares alone—to allow them to be opaque and thus to deny subjectivity by disallowing relationality as that which, like the surveillant gaze, fixes each member in place and opens them up to violence. Glissant writes: “the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics... give up this obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures... the opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence.”<sup>290</sup> By insisting on the Other’s right to opacity, a true relationality is made possible. For Glissant, “[to] disindividuate relation is to relate the theory to the lived experience of every form of humanity in its singularity. This means returning to the opacities, which produce every exception, are propelled by every divergence, and live through becoming involved not with projects but with the reflected density of existences.”<sup>291</sup> Glissant’s work focuses on poetics as an aesthetic form of novelty that allows for ruptures in relation and ushers in

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<sup>288</sup> Zach Blas, “Informatic Opacity,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 9 (2014), n.p. <http://www.joaap.org/issue9/zachblas.htm/>.

<sup>289</sup> Monahan, “The Right to Hide,” 168.

<sup>290</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 155.

<sup>291</sup> Glissant, 195.

opacity. Though this chapter is focused neither on poetics nor on relation per se, there is an obvious resonance between Glissant's ideas of new communities based on singularity and divergence through the aesthetic sensorium and Rancière's dissensus, in which art creates ruptures in the hegemonic order of sensation which in turn allow for political action that allows new communities of sense to be part of the social order (while remaking that order by their very existence).

In order to achieve opacity in *Facial Weaponization Suite*, however, Blas turns to an oversaturation of subjectivity/individual identity in order to overload facial recognition and render the masked person illegible to its systems. Unlike Glissant's focus on de-individualizing, the masks cannot help but be an individualistic solution to the problem of facial recognition. Not unlike Harvey's work, *Facial Weaponization Suite* posits itself as symbolic, artistic and political—in other words, available to those whose situation allows for the leisure of a symbolic solution—those not in the crosshairs. For Monahan, Blas' work “frames surveillance from enemies as an inevitable, natural state of affairs that demands creative adaptation on the part of the would-be prey. It is a framing that—in neoliberal and social Darwinian fashion—responsibilizes avoidance of undesired scrutiny and implies that those who cannot evade the predator deserve targeting and are unfit for survival.”<sup>292</sup> In creating masks that utilize algorithmic data from facial recognition, however, Blas' work inadvertently legitimizes the categories (queer, Black, woman, etc.) that the work seeks to critique. Monahan sums up the issue and offers the following potential solution in his paper:

In accepting scientific claims about queerness and the body, Blas might be unwittingly affirming the validity of constructed truths about measurable biological difference. In essence, the *Facial Weaponization Suite* says that the identity markers ascribed to us by institutions, including the institution of mainstream science, are accurate, so only by erasing and evading (not debunking) them can we obtain freedom... The hegemony of militaristic framings bounds what is viewed as possible and practical, positioning resistance problematically as threatening to the nation state and deserving of criminalization. Perhaps, taking a cue from Jacques Derrida, a better goal might be to defuse, instead of combat, the

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<sup>292</sup> Monahan, “The Right to Hide,” 164.

violence of binary logics. Such a discursive move could inspire a greater tolerance for ambiguous identities and the messiness of social worlds.<sup>293</sup>

Monahan's critique is aimed at the reactive nature of Blas' work. By using facial recognition technology, even if it is hacked or otherwise augmented, Blas must rely on the existence of the martial gaze and then inflict that gaze on others. Though Blas' masks are literally meant to conceal, they actually operate under the same logic of revealing/concealing as Bridle's work. They reveal the hidden networks of surveillance and facial recognition at work, and usefully make explicit the relationship between biometric surveillance in the West and its deadlier counterpart in other parts of the world. But we are left wondering—what then?

## 6.4 « Counter-production: Beyond the Visible »

This final section focuses on the work of geographer and photographer Trevor Paglen, particularly two series titled *Limit Telephotography* and *Untitled (Drones)*. Although the former does not deal explicitly with drones, it does speak to surveillance and the concern with invisibility/bringing to light, as well as militarized spaces and the public sensorium. The two series can be studied side by side as parallel critiques of contemporary modes of looking.

*Untitled* is a series of long-distance photographs of aerial drones in flight, high in the sky, against various dynamic and color-saturated skies. Each individual work is called *Untitled* (\_\_\_\_), in which the blank is filled by the name of the drone being photographed (Predator, e.g.). In addition to the photographs of the distant sky, *Reaper Drone* is a blurry photograph of the title's namesake on a classified U.S. military base, captured from two miles away. The images of drones in the sky present the drone as a tiny, barely identifiable speck against a vast atmospheric landscape; in fact, Paglen, who has formal training as a geographer as well as an artist, has commented that his body of work explores landscape in multiple ways: "one is thinking about landscape just as a

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<sup>293</sup> Monahan, 169.

form, another is about the sky as a kind of landscape.”<sup>294</sup> Like the work of Ansel Adams, Paglen’s photographs of drones in flight do evoke wonder at the vastness and beauty of the sky. This connection to early American landscape photography, as well as other art historical references, is intentional:

Ideologically and technologically, today’s military and reconnaissance spacecraft are directly descended from the men who once roamed America’s deserts and mountains photographing blank spots on maps... The patriarchs of western photography—Carleton Watkins, Edward Muybridge, Timothy O’Sullivan, and others—all played a part in asserting control over the landscapes they drew into their cameras. Watkins got his start in the mountains here shooting for-hire photos used to resolve land disputes and documenting mining interests before famously photographing Yosemite for the benefit of people who would never see it firsthand. Muybridge, likewise, spent time making a living from photographs of Yosemite’s granite cliffs and forested valleys, but he also worked for the United States Army, documenting the military assault on the Modoc... Harold Eugene ‘Doc’ Edgerton, whose strobe cameras picked up where Muybridge’s research left off, developed high-speed cameras that were first installed in reconnaissance aircraft and then improved to photograph nuclear explosions—dissecting, nanosecond by nanosecond, mushroom clouds at the Nevada Test Site. Edgerton soon realized that triggering a camera to record nuclear blasts wasn’t that different from triggering the blasts themselves; his company, EG&G, became a major military contractor by turning his photographic triggers into detonators.<sup>295</sup>

Here, Paglen expresses the relationship between so-called “blank spots on the map” (which is also the name of a monograph he published) and the frontier ideology of manifest destiny, which can be seen at work in early photographers’ desire to capture, and thus tame, “empty” landscapes and non-human animals (among others). These early photographers were often explicitly employed by military or private militarized interests and developed pioneering photographic techniques on behalf of military research. These art historical references demonstrate the relationships between historical and contemporary modes of seeing as responses to socio-historical circumstances. Paglen views his own work in this constellation as follows:

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<sup>294</sup> Helen Soitas, “Trevor Paglen, Machines Visions,” *The Art Newspaper* (June 2018), n.p. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/feature/trevor-paglen-machine-visions/>.

<sup>295</sup> Tom Vanderbilt, “Trevor Paglen talks about ‘the other night sky,’” *Art Forum* 47, no. 7 (2007): 228.

My own surveying and photographing of ‘the other night sky’<sup>296</sup> is yet another iteration of the frontier photographers’ tradition of visualizing and ordering blank spots on maps...If, as was the case with the landscape photographers of the past, the production of symbolic order goes hand in hand with the exertion of control—if, that is, we can only control things by first naming or imaging them—then developing a lexicon of the other night sky might be a step toward reclaiming the violence flowing through it. But this is not a passive exercise. As I photograph the other night sky, the other night sky photographs back.<sup>297</sup>

But how does Paglen work to avoid or subvert the controlling, imperialist functions of photography under that kind of ideology? And if it is revealing “blank spots,” he has said that this also results, paradoxically, in a kind of problem-solving process for the government and NGOs whose satellites patrol the skies. For instance, in response to Paglen’s work, these titans merely move their celestial bodies into other, once-again-secret orbits.

Returning to the drone photographs, the distance from which the photographs are taken invokes a kind of vertigo in the viewer—an awe at the span of sky and the drone’s seemingly insignificant image captured against it. As Jayne Wilkinson eloquently puts it: “With a small but powerful presence, drones look back at us; they activate the space between viewer and viewed with an eyeless vision and a geographically indeterminate location. Such indeterminacy is manifest in Paglen’s visual strategy, the flat, all-over, abstract fields of color he employs in the drone series. With no horizon line to orient us towards either earth or sky, we are thrust into a vividly atmospheric space. As viewers we neither look up to the drone, nor down to the earth, confusing our sense of spatial orientation.”<sup>298</sup> However, the photographs also rely on the public’s existing knowledge of

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<sup>296</sup> This refers to *The Other Night Sky*, another of Paglen’s works that photographed the hundreds of secret satellites that orbit the Earth’s sky every night like stars from an alternate universe. The sky itself no longer holds the promise of infinite freedom and unknowability. Instead, it is shown to be dotted with manmade structures that are always watching, in some cases with a lethal gaze. Instead of wondering at unseen galaxies, the viewer is left with the vague dread of the invisible presence of hundreds of machines traversing the sky.

<sup>297</sup> Vanderbilt, “Trevor Paglen,” 228.

<sup>298</sup> Jayne Wilkinson, “Animalizing the Apparatus: Pigeons, Drones and the Aerial View,” *Shift: Graduate Journal of Visual and Material Culture* 6 (2013), 10. <http://shiftjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/wilkinson.pdf/>.

what drones are, as well as the symbolic place they hold in the public imagination. Under those conditions, the distance and size of the drone in the sky is inverted, where the awe at the violent power and technological unknowability dwarfs that of nature's sky. In other words, these photographs reveal the expanse of the drone in the imagination as yet another vast, untraversed landscape. "Perhaps this is why the question of aesthetic representation persists in Paglen's work, because with striking and sublime images he paradoxically makes clear that the sky can no longer act as a projection of our desire for limitless freedom. To gaze upwards is not to look continually out to the heavens but to realize the paradox of humanity's complete intervention into the natural world."<sup>299</sup> In the bright field of abstract color, where a viewer is groundless, unmoored and without a referent, the figure of the drone suddenly appears and conjures with it all the force and power of electromagnetic telecommunications, a global flow of information and the ever-present question: is it armed?

*Reaper Drone* works differently, because it is a close up of a drone on the ground, surrounded by distorted lights from vehicles and the suggestions of military personnel. The hulking, larger-than-life presence confronts one with the thought that even if it were in focus, the inner workings of the drone, and by extension the military-industrial complex, would still be vague outlines produced through a combination of secrecy and tacit public consent. Unlike the fields of color in the other works, this image is dominated by both the grey concrete of the surrounding space and the grey body of the Reaper, suggesting that in our digital age, death comes not on flapping black wings but strapped to a buzzing, grey metallic shadow moving faster than any fleshy muscles would allow—the horrible and awesome apotheosis of man's domination over nature, Kant's sublime come to roost. *Reaper Drone* is a literal manifestation of the way secrecy warps vision—the public is only able to view drones on military bases from enormous distances, never without technological prostheses, and these images are neither clear or distinct. So what are we to make of them? Paglen's references to art history serve as an interrogation of the function of representation in contemporary art, asking whether the simple act of

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<sup>299</sup>Wilkinson, 11.

photographing a person or object in focus allows a transparent understanding of who or what that object or person is, as well as the social milieu they arose from. The drone photographs' swirling masses of colors and the indecipherability of the image without a guiding title or curator's note could be compared to Impressionism's challenge to the conventions of realism or the indictment of pictorial figuration found in abstract painting.

In *Limit Telephotography*, Paglen once again turns his lens on secret military installations in the Nevada desert. This time, however, the photographs contain no discernible people or objects. Paglen was forbidden by U.S. law to get close enough to the bases to take any documentary photographs in the traditional sense. As with the drone series (as well as *The Other Night Sky*, which used a modified version of this), he had to devise a way to take pictures from distant locations on public land, sometimes as far as forty miles away. He turned to existing techniques for viewing celestial bodies and created his own telephoto lens based on the long distance lenses used in astrophotography. Like heavenly bodies, these military installations are impossible to see clearly with the naked eye, and like the stars and planets, they seem inaccessible and otherworldly. The resulting images challenge the premises of documentary photography. Instead of verifying that which they document, these images are blurry, garbled by the static of dust and debris as well as the phenomena of atmospheric distortion that happens when taking photographs through vast distances—the air literally warps the image, placing us face-to-face with the material conditions that all photography implicitly encounters. The pictures are illegible by themselves—they reveal nothing about the functioning of the military, neither do they disclose any clandestine operations. It is remarkable that the images are distorted *only* by the desert air. No other presence, animal or vegetal, flits along the lens or leaves its shadow on the photographs. It is as if the bases themselves are “blank spots on the map”—seemingly unoccupied territory, revealed through Paglen's camera but not captured by it. The military, after all, goes on about its daily business even as its picture is being taken.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> It is worth noting that Paglen has been deterred or detained while working, even though he does so from public land. See Jonah Weiner, “Prying Eyes,” *The New Yorker*, October 15, 2012, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/22/prying-eyes/>.



The very name, *Limit Telephotography*, gestures at the material limitations of producing photographs of secret sites at such vast distances, but also refers to the epistemological and representational limits at work in each image. Though Paglen's photographs are ostensibly images of military bases, they do not use the same play of revealing and concealing as Harvey and Bridle, because the photographs are not discernibly "of" anything. The images produced are as mysterious as that which they claim to photograph, and the only way one "knows" that the pictures are of this or that base, for example, is through cues given by the object label, explanatory placard, or when Paglen himself explains it. But why should viewers believe him? In fact, this belief depends—not unlike the public acceptance of the government's right to secrecy and surveillance—on ceding authority to Paglen as author and artist, which itself reveals the hegemonic inclinations of so-called fine arts and academic discourse. As Gary Kafer explains:

Paglen registers his work as an 'experimental geography.' Such a practice rearticulates the documentation of material space along alternative perceptual systems, while also gesturing to a spatial understanding of knowledge production. In this way, Paglen's *Limit Telephotography* series attempts to understand how political effects can be located at the site of production, rather than purely in the image. At the same time, as a relational aesthetic, limit-telephotography reconsiders how documentation can contribute to political agency at the site of encounter with the image. Understanding how collaborative art practice can function as a form of documentation relieves the image from political responsibility, and gestures outwards to the ways in which limit-telephotography can mobilize different processes of civic engagement against the black world...It is Paglen's project to make visible precisely these locations that resist visibility and in fact require invisibility to maintain standard operating procedures. Through his limit-telephotography, Paglen not only gestures to the limits of trying to make these sites visible, but also to the limits of translating their presence into forms of knowledge which can then circulate in public discourse.<sup>301</sup>

In line with the proclamation that the sky is a kind of landscape, experimental geography takes spatial production and cultural production to be inseparable, and turns the question of art into a question of what kind of social space produced this art, and what kind of

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<sup>301</sup> Kafer, "Political Agency," 55-58.

space does a given work of art in turn produce? Moreover, Paglen claims that his art practice is explicitly experimenting with creating different forms of space, leading more than one theorist to situate his practice within a Rancièrian paradigm. As Kafer argues: “We might then approach the resistive potential of experimental geography ‘not in terms of their production of new images, objects, or experiences, but in terms of their production of potentially new spatial-political configurations.’ ... while it cannot be assumed that such creative interventions generate critical or radical results, they can produce the potential to represent the ways in which discourses shaping social and political life might be reproduced, changed, or disrupted.”<sup>302</sup>

While Paglen’s own understanding of his work refers to “relational photography”<sup>303</sup> and is self-professedly indebted to Adorno’s negative dialectics, the connection to Rancièrè is clear in Paglen’s concern for the relationship between the technical production of art and its ability to produce new spatial relations, which are themselves the space of the work’s consumption—this is what leads the above theorists to say that Paglen is concerned not with a political didactics or documentary per se, but with the productive tension between modes of vision and regimes of truth. Relational photography, with its explicit attempts to frame the complex interplay between discourse and praxis, attempts to open a caesura, a pause, between belief and sight, truth and visibility—a new, dissensual space where the viewer may question the prevailing sensual organization. Then—or more accurately, there—as Rancièrè claims, is the space within which democratic politics happens. The inquiries made possible by the images in *Limit Telephotography* or the *Untitled* drone series only symbolically disrupt the surveillance

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<sup>302</sup> Kafer, 67.

<sup>303</sup> Wilkinson, with some help from Paglen’s own words, summarizes the practice of relational photograph as follows: “...the process required to produce his images, what he terms relational photography. This fully engages image and apparatus, where his practice encompasses the ‘seeing machines,’ that allow a historically determined type of vision. Paglen states that the means of achieving a particular abstraction are critical to the final image since ‘they imply a politics of seeing and of relations of seeing.’ Thus the image and its production are in constant tension, in an ‘apparent disjunction between process and visual result.’ Well aware of this potentially problematic disjunction, Paglen uses a relational practice to productively reveal it, shifting our attention ‘from the truth or exposure value of the image to photography’s complex framing of the relation between knowledge and vision.’” Wilkinson, “Animalizing the Apparatus,” 12.

systems they capture. What viewers of these works instead interrogate are the social systems and relations of power that produced these spaces in the first place, as well as the relationship between aesthetics and power that allow such powerful systems to operate invisibly. As Kafer says, “[i]t is then not the case that Paglen’s images contain the radical potential to subvert the discourses of secrecy operative in the black world, but rather that his practice of limit-telephotography produces the very political spaces from which these aesthetic objects may emerge.”<sup>304</sup> He makes an explicit connection between dissensus and the spaces produced by Paglen’s experimental geography, which are productive not simply of critical discourse or as modes of resistance in themselves, but are rather spaces of potential—the “experimental” in experimental geography—for new aesthetic regimes. This also means that Paglen’s art will not necessarily succeed in producing these. However, because the final artistic product cannot come clearly into view, his work is focused on the process of art production as well as the continual process of its reception, rather than the congealment of ideas and process into the art object (which would be the very definition of commodification).

Some have referred to Paglen’s work (and that of his contemporary, Harun Farocki)<sup>305</sup> as works of “semi-opacity”—works that reveal networks of control through a kind of analog hacking of their blind spots, using the blind spots of the system to produce semi-legible objects meant to mimic and thus reveal the fantasy of total transparency and control that many secretive surveillance structures rely on. Rafael Dernbach, a proponent of this narrative, describes this process as a “detourning” of control images, and claims

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<sup>304</sup> Kafer, “Political Agency,” 68-69.

<sup>305</sup> Harun Farocki was a German filmmaker whose work often focused on surveillance and droning, and frequently made in the documentary style. Farocki’s work was often shown in the same exhibits as Paglen’s, as both were interested in the operations of the military-industrial complex. He also coined the term “operational images,” which Grégoire Chamayou summarizes as follows: “Harun Farocki tells us that the technology of military vision produces not so much representations as ‘operative images,’ images that do not represent an object, but instead are part of an operation.’ Here, vision is a sighting: it serves not to represent objects but to act upon them, to target them. The function of the eye is that of a weapon. The link between the two is the image on the screen, which is not so much a figurative representation as an operative function.” Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 2015), 114.

“By embracing hacking, ‘the penetration of systems of rationality that seem infallible’, they adapt their activist strategies to oppose modulating systems of control: not through plain resistance or counter-surveillance, but through the creation of navigational tools that enable us to see the procedures and limits of control systems.”<sup>306</sup>

I will talk more about detournement near the end of this chapter, but for now I want to focus on the techniques of hacking and visibility Dernbach attributes to Paglen. Though the intent is to celebrate Paglen’s work, these claims misunderstand the nuanced distinction between his work and that of other artists who rely on the interplay between vision and invisibility. I would argue that Paglen’s work precisely *does not* rely on hacking or on the blind spots of surveillance systems, because while his use of these systems is instrumental to creating his works, it does not define them. The so-called “blind spots” that he supposedly utilizes in the works I have mentioned are the public spaces that even immense government apparatuses cannot forbid him from accessing, both in the horizontal (*Limit Telephotography*) and vertical (*Untitled drone series*) planes. With the assistance of careful curation, what Paglen’s work does is open the spatial interplays of the world and render surveillance in 3D, bringing our attention to it specifically as a system of world building through control of the production of the sensible qua control of space. But attention is not the same thing as knowledge—the systems themselves remain opaque to varying degrees. This work is not a form of activism, and it certainly provides no useful “tools” for viewers’ resistance. It is debatable whether it relies on hacking, which Dernbach frames (using Wark’s definition) as the penetration of systems of rationality that seem infallible.<sup>307</sup> However, the reference to penetration provides a useful place to offer a distinction: while Paglen’s work does

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<sup>306</sup> Rafael Dernbach, “Hacking the Vision Machine: Farocki’s and Paglen’s detouring of control images,” *Revista Teknokultura*, 11, no. 2 (2014): 389.

<sup>307</sup> McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 2009), 83. It should be noted that Wark’s manifesto relies on an accelerationist logic that encourages the working classes (or what she calls the vectoralist class) toward further abstraction in an attempt to appropriate the production of surplus value until capitalism self-destructs. However, “the limit of Wark’s accelerationist account is that the productive logic of capital is left intact along with its murderous inclinations.” (Mike Neary, “Educative Power: The Myth of Dronic. Violence in a Period of Civil War,” *Culture Machine* 16 (2016), n.p.)

operate through the weaknesses of the seemingly omnipotent behemoth that is government surveillance, it is unclear whether his images penetrate this system. The term penetration conjures a piercing insight, a visual paradigm that sees beneath or through a form of obfuscation, much like Descartes' meditations are meant to see through appearances to produce clear and distinct ideas. In Paglen's work, the material production of the images—Paglen's position as far enough outside these systems that he is deemed safe by them, so that his affecting them seems laughable—as well as the condition of the images themselves, are not revealing but hazy, obscure, strange and unreadable. They do not produce counter-hegemonic discourses or new, penetrating truths, and as such they avoid (for the most part) the reification of commodities—they avoid being “set to work.” Paglen's work is patently not an aesthetic intervention. Of course, that is not to say that Paglen's art is devoid of any relationship to capitalism or politics, but rather that the relationship is placed in the realm of discourse. As Kafer writes, while “...these devices identify the political potentials of Paglen's experimental geography, they also nullify such effects by situating the vital dissensual properties of limit-telephotography within a consensual critical discourse—that is to say, such images are political because they are proclaimed to be so.”<sup>308</sup> Though his work largely tends to engage in a praxis critical of capitalism on the production side, the consumption of his work as art and the precise need for symbols and referents to make the works legible enough to be put on public display also weaken the radicalness of each project through its necessary positioning as “political art.” Within the Rancièrian paradigm of dissensus, art must be separate from the social, and art itself must not be political in order to activate political potential: “...the more [art] goes out into the streets and professes to be engaging in a form of social intervention, the more it anticipates and mimics its own effects. Art thus risks becoming a parody of its alleged efficacy.”<sup>309</sup> Paglen's *Limit Telephotography* thereby reveals the limits of art as political.

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<sup>308</sup> Kafer, “Political Agency,” 69.

<sup>309</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus*, 156.

While Paglen's work is decidedly concerned with the spatial, it is also important to examine its relationship to the temporal as contemporary art, which reveals itself not as a movement or genus but a condition of analysis of socio-historical formations and the responses to them. Osborne claims that contemporary art is postconceptual art, meaning (1) the contemporary is a speculative horizon for the future unity of different times and (2) art is a bearer of contemporaneity because of its social and material constitution, which makes it (3) a self-reflexive (dialectical) process of production/consumption. As a theorist who works to articulate the relationship between contemporary capitalism and art, Marina Vishmidt challenges the efficacy of looking to the future to open new possibilities. She proposes a "speculative ontology of art," under which contemporary art as speculative practice claims to expand social or conceptual possibilities, performs a radical break between form and material, and produces "speculative subjectivities" through artists engaging in self-described identitarian artistic practices, which are often future-oriented.<sup>310</sup> Under this system, art, like high frequency trading (HFT), which Vishmidt aptly uses as the apotheosis of speculative capitalism, mediates the future. According to Vishmidt, these practices ultimately end up closing potential horizons. Like Osborne's definition of contemporary art, Vishmidt's version also engages with the future, and like Rancière's dissensus, it is interested in alternative social forms. However, under my union of the theories of Rancière and Osborne, contemporary art is only oriented towards the future, it does not actually mediate it. It opens the possibility of new social forms, rather than actually instantiating these forms itself. The rupture between form and material, or concept and object, also experiences a dialectical overcoming by becoming postconceptual. As quoted above, Osborne explains that "[c]ontemporary art is 'post'-conceptual to the extent that it registers the historical experience of conceptual art, as a self-conscious movement, as the experience of the impossibility/fallacy of the absolutization of anti-aesthetic, in conjunction with a recognition of an ineliminably conceptual aspect to all art. In this respect, art is postconceptual to the extent to which it

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<sup>310</sup> Marina Vishmidt, "Speculation in a Sense: Aesthetics and Real Abstraction," *In The Mind But Not From There: Real Abstraction and Contemporary Art*, ed. Gean Moreno (London: Verso, 2019), 171-73.

reflectively incorporates the truth (which itself incorporates the untruth) of ‘conceptual art’: namely, art is necessarily both aesthetic and conceptual.”<sup>311</sup> What is vital to see here is that images with distinct content, produced by an identifiable artist (e.g., Paglen) are not didactic, programmatic or avant-garde (in the traditional sense). Rather they envision the idea of new sensoriums (or aesthetics according to Kant and Ngai) that could then lead to new political engagements and social formations.

The temporality of art is also contingent on its relationship to heterogenous social spaces (or, to use Rancière’s words, different regimes of sense), and defines itself along both of these axes. It smashes into the barrier between art and the social or political, at the apex of its self-reflection, as an exploration of both its materiality (the risk of being “merely” aesthetic) and the conceptual horizons (an attempt to be completely allegorical) that make art susceptible to becoming parodic of itself. Osborne makes explicit that contemporary art as postconceptual art is the art that most closely mimics the situation of contemporary capitalism, which is for him the ultimate form of the union of disjunctive social spaces and immaterial materiality, which he sees as realized in contemporary digital photography. Digital photography is a multiplication of visualizations that frees image-centered art (photography) from being medium-centered. According to Osborne, within the digital image or digital photograph, empirically or referential reality—once the crux of photography’s claim to “realism” via its indexical properties—is no longer significant. The place of photography has been displaced, and what is important is its infinite reproducibility and the easy exchangeability of one image with another.<sup>312</sup> This exchangeability is part of what relates digital art to contemporaneity, because its structure most closely mimics the post-Fordist situation of infinite exchangeability. When Osborne refers to this unmooring of a digital image from a so-called privileged original, he calls it a “visible copy” of an invisible original.<sup>313</sup> While this comment is not explored further in

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<sup>311</sup> Osborne, “Contemporary art is post-conceptual art,” 11.

<sup>312</sup> It is difficult not to be reminded of Bridle’s *Dronestagram*, with its infinite stream of exchangeable, similar photos that stand in the role of commodities.

<sup>313</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 129.

Osborne's work, it is borne out in Paglen's *Limit Telephotography*. The images produced by Paglen are the visible traces of the largely undetectable U.S. surveillance network. Both the physical inscrutability of the photos due to effects of the landscape on long-range photography and the lack of transparency of each image with regard to exactly what it is without reference to some curated guiding text is indicative of the collapse of the empirical and symbolic certainty of both the systems being photographed and the photographs themselves. In a kind of mimicking of the structure of the commodity fetish,<sup>314</sup> what the images are "of" is big surveillance's inability to disappear completely—there will always be huge military installations, server farms, satellites and the money trails that link them all; they will always take up space.

*Limit Telephotography* is also notable for its experimental use of the latest and (according to Osborne) most influential technological innovations—digital photography and imaging—as its medium, "since it is the peculiar generality of the photographic image that laid the ground for the destruction of medium-specificity in the visual arts and the inauguration of a 'post-medium' or 'transmedia' condition."<sup>315</sup> Photography is a unifying structure that transcends specific media in its ontological valences, and this unity "derives from a chain of relations between technologies that is sustained as a distributive unity by their common cultural functions. In this sense, a distributive unity is a pragmatic unity. It is a condition of this commonality of function that the types of images produced share a certain de-materialized generality that transcends their technologically particular material forms and acts as a kind of relay between them."<sup>316</sup> This sort of "unity" is precisely what defines the contemporary for Osborne, and we can

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<sup>314</sup> Marx's description of the commodity fetish in chapter one of *Capital*, Vol. 1 seems bleak, as the emergence of the commodity under capitalism obscures the labor relations belying each object and thus turns use value into exchange value and starts the whole loathsome circuit of exchangeability. However, in a classical dialectic move, the commodity is also the object that breaks down under analysis into its truth as a fetishization and reification, precisely because of the nature of its materiality. Though the Cloud conjures images of a fluffy, ethereal pool of infinite space, this name only covers the infrastructures actually required to operate these data repositories, from enormous server farms to huge dams for cooling the servers...and of course, as we have seen before, information itself is material.

<sup>315</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 123.

<sup>316</sup> Osborne, 123.



see now how technological development plays a vital role in the production of contemporaneity as both a unifying function and a mirror of disparate social landscapes. Paglen's work, therefore, not only operates along the spatial axes of an experimental landscape, it is actually spatio-temporal in its role as contemporary art. Contemporary art provides a distributive or speculative horizon of unity of socio-historical aesthetic forms through its material and conceptual arms, and frames the current historical time as transmedial, fractured and infinitely exchangeable under an inescapable diffuse unity. This reflection of the contemporary through the aesthetic in contemporary art therefore reveals the hegemonic regimes of sense, and in doing so, creates the possibility for the emergence of new ones.

## 6.5 « Technological Subsumption and Art »

As has often been noted, post-Fordist capitalism is adept at subsuming symbols and techniques of resistance, either by putting them to work through commodification or by using often-lauded “hacks” as unwaged debugging of its own systems. Indeed, under hypersubsumption, any finished work or supposedly closed system is *a priori* part of the capitalist productive system through its genesis in it, though in reality it may take a certain amount of time to achieve this potentiality. Both Harvey's and Blas' work is open, to differing degrees (Harvey explicitly puts his artistic wares on the market at very high prices and obfuscates their production through his own brand name) to becoming part of capitalism's own project, helping it see more clearly. What is particularly nefarious and ironic about hypersubsumption is that projects are themselves blind to the hegemonic structures they are helping to reproduce. We saw this with a work as sophisticated as Blas', which relies on the resistant structures of queerness and opacity but ultimately reaffirmed neoliberal identitarian structures precisely in its attempts to undermine their strategies. Bernes offers a useful summary when he writes that “there is no reason to assume from the start...that all existing means of production must have some use beyond capital, and that all technological innovation must have, almost categorically, a

progressive dimension which is recuperable through a process of ‘determinate negation.’”

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Hypersubsumption, as the process by which capitalism co-opts labor before it even happens, reifies all forms of productive labor into commodified entities. It does so particularly through a parasitic relationship with technological advances, which capitalism had already placed under its valorization model with real subsumption. Hypersubsumption, however, takes place as information technology becomes inextricably linked with the production of subjectivity, when the technological prosthesis is one’s being-in-the-world. Because of this ontological valence, hypersubsumption means that pre-subjective, pre-individuated structures are already capitalist structures of value production, so any subjectivity generated from these positions will exist for the purposes of generating value. Examples of this are both a social esteem of capitalist values like “productivity,” branding, promotion and wealth, and more importantly, the ability of post-Fordist capitalism to now extract value from every process without moving through the stage of use value to the labor that produced it. In other words, this kind of valuation no longer extracts the labor that once belonged to another person—now work belongs to capitalism from the start.<sup>318</sup>

The difficulty, then, of critiquing capitalism and its reliance on surveillance (as one example) through a model of counter-production is escaping the capitalist lineage of commodities—or rather, the capitalist foundations of production that turn produced objects into value-generating objects and valorize the production process itself. It makes

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<sup>317</sup> Bernes, “Logistics, Counter-logistics and the Communist Prospect,” n.p.

<sup>318</sup> As Marx presciently explains in section 489, “Mystification of Capital, etc.” of Chapter 2 of “Results of the Direct Production Process,” from Chapter 6 of *Capital*, Vol. I, “the social character of the conditions of labour—which includes among other things their form as machinery, and fixed capital in all its forms—appears as something entirely autonomous, which exists independently of the worker as a mode of capital’s existence, and therefore also as something arranged by the capitalists independently of the workers. Like the social character of their own labour, only even more so, the social character the conditions of production acquire as communal conditions of production of combined labour appears as capitalist as a character possessed by those conditions of production as such, independently of the workers.” Under advanced capitalism, the worker has become subsumed under the means of production. Where before it was merely naturalized as part of capitalist production, under advanced capitalism—saturated with machines—labour-power itself is now a function of capitalism.

a certain amount of sense to use the latest technology—the same ones being used in capitalist military and telecommunications systems—to turn these objects to new uses. Under the auspices of a hypersubsumptive capitalism, however, it is not merely that objects and subjects are subsumed or commodified. As Jeremy Crampton notes, contemporary thinking about the drone must focus “not so much on drones as objects, but as [socio-technical] assemblages of the vertical.”<sup>319</sup> Droning is the defining feature of the social-factory under hypersubsumption. It is, in a literal way, an ontology—a way of being that has emerged under contemporary capitalism. Artists like Harvey and Blas, who experiment with drones and other such technologies, are at the forefront of attempts to co-opt the technologies themselves. Mike Neary, discussing the work of McKenzie Wark, points out some of the issues with such practices:

McKenzie Wark (2003; 2013) considers drone culture as a new form of political administration or ‘vectoral power’. For Wark, vectoral power means merging commodity-space (where everything is proximate in the world market) with strategic-space (where everything is relative to the battlefield borders that enclose it), bringing them both under the control of the communication vector. He describes this new arrangement as ‘third nature’, through which the tensions of second nature—alienation, class struggle and the planner-state—are resolved in the form of new conflicts and collusions that emerge as yet more chaotic violent spaces.<sup>320</sup>

The attempt to “fight fire with fire” ultimately results in the creation of new violent spaces.

These artists are also participating in orthodox Marxism’s sacred doctrine: the seizing of the capitalist means of production by the proletariat. Under traditional dialectical materialism, this move leads to revolution. With today’s capitalism, it becomes difficult to decipher what constitutes the means of production; the boundaries between consumer and producer are blurred (in the figure of the prosumer), as are the identitarian categories of worker, bourgeoisie, capitalist, etc., in most of the world. The

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<sup>319</sup> Jeremy Crampton, “Assemblage of the vertical: Commercial drones and algorithmic life,” *Geography Helvetica* 71 (2016): 137.

<sup>320</sup> Neary, “Educative Power,” n.p.

aestheticization of politics by means of a hegemonic sensorium complicates things even further: it is no longer a matter of seizing the means of production (which nowadays can only tentatively be identified as “technology”), but rather “hacking” or detourning<sup>321</sup> them.

Detournement presents an object anew via a swerve from both the historical-material origins of an object and its conceptual meaning; the arrangement of these same two considerations makes up postconceptual art. Under droning (the prevailing mode of life that has emerged through the imbrication of aesthetic gazing and militarized capitalism) the process of detournement in art, or co-opting technology for recuperative purposes, is therefore the process of creating a genuine postconceptual art. We now see why it is important to evaluate Bias and Harvey’s work against the criterion of contemporary art laid out earlier in the chapter. Successful detournement of a control technology, for example, is equivalent to the dissensual potential of contemporary or postconceptual art. Furthermore, this is achieved not through a finished product but by the continual process of an analytic of concept and material that provides a critique of socio-historical forms and culminating in a privileged form of contemporaneity. By focusing on production and consumption as processes that inform the art object (thereby turning it into something whose meaning and form is always shifting and changing), Paglen’s work is not a constellation of objects and techniques being used in novel ways—instead the works are merely components of the larger production process. Rather he is concerned with the aesthetic (in the Kantian sense) possibilities that emerge through the creation of social landscapes and the conditions for the possibility of politics, as opposed

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<sup>321</sup> Detournement, or “diversion,” refers to a method of creating an artwork by subverting an original work through a farcical copy. Coined by Guy Debord, it was a favorite tactic of the 1960s French Situationists. According to Urban Dictionary, which surprisingly provides a concise and cogent definition, “In the [Situationist International’s] own words ‘there is no Situationist art, only Situationist uses of art.’ Detournement is distinct from ‘theft’ plagiarism, which only subverts the source of the material and post-modern ‘ironic quotation’ plagiarism which only subverts the meaning of the material, the source becoming the meaning.” (Sonic, “Detournement,” *Urban Dictionary*, accessed January 16, 2020. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Detournement./>)

to providing a series of experiments with possible revolutionary tactics by means of reified “art works.”

Of course, this is not to say that artists like Blas or Harvey ultimately “fail” at their work, nor that Paglen’s creations avoid being ensnared in the minefield of capitalist value production altogether. There is no “outside” of capitalism after all; to return to a metaphor I used above, artistic responses to this problem must instead be asymptotic to an escape velocity—running ever closer to it without achieving it, for they are earth-bound by the chains of the materials they use and the social milieu they emerge from, which with the advent of hypersubsumption, are inescapably capitalist. The importance of the contemporaneity of contemporary art is precisely its future orientation; this is also what connects contemporary art with the speculative function of surveillance, and the cybernetic control of the future that distinguishes it from previous modes of biopolitical control (which could not act on the future so insidiously or effectively). Both surveillance mechanisms and contemporary art have recognized the way in which technological development is essential to facilitating the future-orientation of surveillance. Art is the privileged vanguard of contemporaneity and thus allows us a peek at the speculative horizon of a more utopian (communist) future. This “peek” is actually a chasm, a tear in space that reveals vistas of a multiplicity of sensoriums that are not only spatial but temporal, since they exist in the democratic future.

## 7 « Conclusion »

### 7.1 « Hypersubsumption Overview »

The common thread connecting the fields of inquiry in this dissertation has been hypersubsumption. In the introduction, I stated that I would use Marx's concept of subsumption to categorize contemporary capitalism in a manner that accounted for its emphasis on technology, subjectivity and creating value from unwaged digital labour. Through each chapter, new features of hypersubsumption were revealed. Though hypersubsumption is too complex to define in a single-sentence, we can now review these defining features in order to put together a final, comprehensive definition of hypersubsumption that brings together the focus of each chapter.

In the first chapter, I argued that tracing Marx's concept of subsumption would be a fruitful way to characterize the features of contemporary post-Fordist capitalism. As we can recall, subsumption as a whole refers to the relationship between labour and capitalism, and production and capitalism. Under formal subsumption, which is the initial form of capitalist takeover (after primitive accumulation), capitalism takes hold of existing modes of production and expands the working day to create absolute surplus value. We then move to real subsumption, during which capitalism actually changes the means of production themselves to make their primary directive the production of surplus value. This is the point where capitalism begins to affect not just the immediate present, but the future, primarily by shaping new technologies for its own purposes of self-valorization. At this juncture I posited that a new kind of subsumption has now taken hold, corresponding to the advent of network technologies and what Lazzarato calls "immaterial labour."

The first chapter emphasized that hypersubsumption is a necessary consequence of and logical outgrowth of previous forms of subsumption. While formal subsumption generally affected labour-power, and real subsumption was concerned with production, hypersubsumption works on living labour itself. Through a specific return to individualism facilitated by technology, it capitalizes on unproductive labour and

consumption, and realizes capital's long-standing dream of ridding itself of labour. Furthermore, capitalist production has become fundamental to the production of subjectivities, where the phases of consumption and production have merged. This also means that hypersubsumption invokes a state of pure abstraction, wherein abstract concepts, masquerading as real social interactions, shape and create society.

In the second chapter, we saw how surveillance capitalism is fundamental to hypersubsumption; with the advent of digital technologies, immaterial waged and unwaged labour has become the prevailing means of surplus value creation for contemporary capitalism. This form of value is referred to as network value. In order to extract this value, contemporary capitalism relies on a series of vast surveillance and capture technologies, born from military research. The expansion of surveillance has created a state of near-total exposure, corresponding to what Alliez, Lazzarato, and separately, Virilio, refer to as a state of total war,<sup>322</sup> which has become vital to capitalist valorization.

In the third chapter we saw the effects of this condition on workers themselves. Hypersubsumption was shown to be specifically linked to information technologies and to the integration of these technologies with the production of subjectivity. As immaterial labour became the dominant form of class exploitation, a new relationship emerges between individuals and technology, productive and unproductive labour, and living labour. I referred to this emergent matrix as coerced posthumanism, and argued that posthumanism is not a subjective position itself but a form of technologically mediated labour that generates network value (which is extracted by surveillance capitalism)

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<sup>322</sup> “The two world wars are responsible for realizing, for the first time, ‘total’ subordination (or “real subsumption”) of society and its ‘productive forces’ to the war economy through the organization and planning of production, labor and technology, science and consumption, at a hitherto unheard-of scale. Implicating the entire population in ‘production’ was accompanied by the constitution of processes of mass subjectivation through the management of communications techniques and opinion creation.” (Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, 21). The authors stress the role of the State (with a capital S) in the ontological constitution of capitalism. According to them, it is the distribution of the State's monopoly on “legitimate force” that gives capitalism the ability to extend itself across the globe. Paul Virilio refers to the current state of globalized capital as one of “total war” in *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006).

through the self-creation of individuals as variants of constant capital— aka machines. Hypersubsumption, therefore, occurs with the total domination and inversion of humanity’s species-being through technology. It takes the future-directedness of real subsumption and applies it to individuation itself, controlling not just the means of production but the potentialities of social life itself.

The fourth and fifth chapters focused on contemporary art and its encounters with contemporary capitalism under hypersubsumption. Both surveillance capitalism and contemporary art share a speculative orientation toward the future. Surveillance capitalism attempts to control the future through cybernetic algorithms and digital platforms, molding it into a series of predictable behaviors that can be monetized. Through a combination of the aesthetic theories of Peter Osborne and Jacques Rancière, we arrived at a theory of contemporary art that described it as art that opens new sensoriums through the radical act of dissensus, a disruption of the senses that changes heretofore normalized perceptions of social space. At its best, dissensus makes visible previously invisible sensoriums and opens them as spaces for potential political action. These newly open sensory spaces are necessarily future-oriented and utopic (in the classical definition of the word as “other space”), because they produce both the time and the space for new communities to emerge in society. This redistribution of the sensible itself is what we might call politics.

## 7.2 « Critiques of Dissensus »

Here, we need to revisit the third chapter’s concern with posthumanism. Included in that chapter was Ray Brassier’s critique of Rosi Braidotti’s critical posthumanism, and one of Brassier’s claims was that Braidotti’s reliance on posthumanism rescuing or revealing a “missing people” is born of capitalist neoliberalism, under which they are already acknowledged as “excluded”: “The counter-actualization of virtual potencies required by Braidotti’s hope is effectively the cultivation of empowerment within existing social



relations.”<sup>323</sup> In actualizing the virtual potencies of excluded peoples, Braidotti reifies existing social relations. So how does Rancière’s dissensus, which claims to make visible excluded subjectivities, differ from Braidotti’s project? In many ways, it does not:

On the one hand, the ‘community of sense’ woven by artistic practice is, in the present, a new set of vibrations of the human community; on the other hand, it is a monument that stands as a mediation or a substitute for a people to come. The paradoxical relation between the ‘apart’ and the ‘together’ is also a paradoxical relation between the present and the future. The art work is the people to come and it is the monument of its expectation, the monument of its absence. The artistic ‘dissensual community’ has a double body: it is a combination of means for producing an effect out of itself: creating a new community between human beings, a new political people. And it is the anticipated reality of that people. The tension between ‘being apart’ and ‘being together’ is tied up with another tension between two statuses of artistic practice: as a means for producing an effect, and as the reality of that effect.<sup>324</sup>

Rancière even explicitly refers to Deleuze’s “missing people” in this section. Without augmentation by Osborne’s explicit concerns with capitalism and the relationship between art and capitalism’s dialectical movements through history, Rancière’s thesis does indeed seem to fall victim to the rhetoric of concealing and revealing that I criticized so heavily in the fifth chapter. However, an important distinction that can perhaps save the dissensual thesis is Rancière’s emphasis that it does not merely reveal marginalized or “missing” communities that have been somehow “hidden” or “invisible” within the current fabric of society; rather, since it is a function of art creation, dissensus does not act on communities directly—it acts on the senses and the sensible:

[Dissensus] is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world where they live and the way in which they are ‘equipped’ for fitting it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Brassier, *Human*, n.p..

<sup>324</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art,” *ART&RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 5.

<sup>325</sup> Rancière, 11.

Dissensus does not frame any communities. It is selective disorientation that disturbs the familiar fabric of our external intuition and creates gaps that refer to the possibilities of our internal intuition—a.k.a. time. It is neither programmatic nor rhetorical, and it is certainly not victorious because it has not *done* anything but rather undone or unravelled something.

Perhaps it is a stretch to save dissensus this way. There are many things to be rightly critical or suspicious of in this theory. What makes this idea worthwhile, useful and adequate (albeit with some modifications and tampering) for this project is Rancière's explicit acknowledgement that dissensus is only potentially radical. As he makes clear, there is no reason an experience of sensory disorientation and clash between heterogenous sensible regimes would create any awareness, let alone action, because art cannot be deployed in such a straightforwardly tactical manner. The bottom line is you cannot control what an artwork "says," "does" or "means." This is precisely the problem with most of the artworks described in chapter five, which focus too much either on didactics or on the finished work of art and its message, rather than on art's material and social conditions of production and the disjuncture between what an artwork or artist intends and how their work is received. At its best, Rancière's concept mobilizes precisely this unknown and uncontrollable element—he has this in common with Paglen.

### 7.3 « Posthuman Inversion »

When we looked at the effects of hypersubsumption on labour, consumption and production in chapter three, we saw that they have produced a new type of capitalist subjectivity: coerced posthumanism. Contrary to twentieth century ideas about the explicit force behind ideological repression, or the straightforward needs-driven selling of one's labour on the so-called "free market," capitalist subjectivity today offers itself willingly, if not always happily, to the algorithmic wasteland. As Terranova notes about unwaged digital activities:

“These activities fall outside the concept of ‘abstract labor,’ which Marx defined as the provision of time for the production of value regardless of the useful qualities of the product. They witness an investment of desire into production of the kind cultural theorists have mainly theorized in relation to consumption.”<sup>326</sup> The activities users perform in their free time on digital platforms have enormous real benefits; they provide sociality, a sense of identity, convenience, and access to a type of unique digital citizenship, the absence of which can ironically create a profound sense of alienation. It appears that instead of commodities meeting on the marketplace in their producers’ stead, it is actually people meeting in social interaction. This appears to be the society imagined in species-being discourse. However, as was discussed in the third chapter, this is not the case. In reality this is the domination of the general intellect by capital: “The collective dimension of networked intelligence needs to be understood historically, as part of a specific momentum of capitalist development.”<sup>327</sup> In other words, this type of activity is immanent to capitalism—it is made possible through capitalist technology and will only be sustained by it.

This bastardized form of species-being also brings about strange consequences for the subjectivities within it. As I mentioned earlier, I call the form of subjectivity that involves individuals and collectives doing unwaged digital labour coerced posthumanism. The above discussion of pleasure and society explored the coercion aspect of coerced posthumanism. However, this dissertation also posited a queer reversal of roles between humans and machines in the creation of value. Before, humans were considered variable capital and were the only source of creating value directly, while machines were constant capital, which could be used over and over through its lifespan, with proper maintenance, and transferred its “value” through being used by living labour. Now, however, it seems the relationship has shifted with the site of value extraction.

Network value is created largely through the unwaged activity of users *over time*. This is the cybernetic aspect of surveillance capitalism—cybernetic control attempts to

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<sup>326</sup> Tiziana Terranova, “Free Labour: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy,” 42.

<sup>327</sup> Terranova, 44.

predict and then control future behavior, which is only possible after studying a repeated set of data. That means enough users must log in time and time again and create a consistent, trackable profiles. Art theorist Etan Ilfeld makes even more specific observations about the relationship between cybernetics and digital art in general:

The key relation between third-wave cybernetics and digital art is exemplified in the conceptualization and practice of emergence, which has opened new horizons and modes of art production. Howard Rheingold correlates the emergence of an on-line ‘collective intelligence’ as analogous to the behavior of swarm systems where agents residing on one scale produce higher-level behavior and patterns. Emergence may also occur when a recursive feedback loop evolves within a system in such a way as to lead to previously unforeseeable phenomena. Emergence provides an indeterminate and noninstrumentally playful evolution, allowing for a creative freedom.<sup>328</sup>

Ilfeld’s references to “emergence” and new modes of art production are remarkably similar to chapter four and five’s discussion of contemporary art vis-à-vis dissensus, and counter-production in art. Emergence seems to be an analogue of contemporaneity or future-orientedness. And non-instrumentalized modes of production, with or without an emphasis on play, are at the heart of Trevor Paglen’s works as discussed in chapter five. A non-instrumentalized mode of art production means that an artwork is not attempting to say or mean something in particular—it is rooted neither in the mimetic nor representational regimes of aesthetics. Ilfeld also remarks that “new media art employs third-wave cybernetic discourse and champions notions of emergence, virtualization, de-authorization, gift economies and digitization.”<sup>329</sup> New media art here works as a stand-in for artveillance, since artveillance is considered new media. Here we see an echo of chapter five’s champions of the virtues of hacking—Rafael Dernbach claims that anti-surveillance artworks created by artists like Trevor Paglen and Harun Farocki “are fighting the phantasm of the objective, totalizing ‘vision machine’ with its own principles.”<sup>330</sup> He claims that Paglen’s works mimic and detourn the image surveillance

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<sup>328</sup> Etan J. Ilfeld, “Contemporary Art and Cybernetics: Waves of Cybernetic Discourse within Conceptual, Video and New Media Art,” *LEONARDO* 45, no. 1 (2012): 62.

<sup>329</sup> Ilfeld, 62.

<sup>330</sup> Dernbach, “Hacking the Vision Machine,” 388.

techniques they seek to expose and undermine through the naturally occurring blind spots in these digital systems. Dernbach's brilliant observation is that rather than claiming that Paglen's works oppose control images with control images (which would just be a straightforward re-inscription of scopical violence through the art object), Paglen's work is deliberately opaque, which challenges the totalizing hegemonic transparency claim by militarized surveillance. While I agree with this observation of the distinction between Paglen's work in *Limit Telephotography* and something like James Bridle's *Dronestagram* series, my argument from chapter five is adamant that a detournment of control images through control technologies is impossible, and neither is it what Paglen is attempting. While it can be argued that the disturbance in the normal sensible regimes constituted by dissensus is akin to the crafty utilization of blind spots in hacking, there is a world of difference between opening a rupture or disturbance and using an existing one for another agenda. The issue with exploiting blind spots in a system, as hackers know, is that eventually the system will take advantage of this free de-bugging to shore up the system. Dissensus, however, does not work within any specific system or toward any specific end, so while it might be more difficult to always harness the political power of new sensoriums, it is also much harder to exploit them.

To return to the relationship between digital platforms and coerced posthumanism, users who do not commit to a platform, product or form of self-presentation are valuable to capitalism as well, since they provide a field of exclusion for algorithmic targeting. It is also important that such network value can only be extracted by algorithmic technologies. This extraction occurs at the point where platform and user meet—the moments when users are creating and sustaining their subjectivities within the networked world. Network value comes from feeding on this information while simultaneously sustaining the source of that information; the machines are now maintaining the humans.

## 7.4 « Posthumanism and Human Senses »

Earlier chapters in this dissertation have referred to Marx's elaboration on the emancipation of the human senses from egoism, which comes through a disavowal of private property and presumably the return of species-being in a non-capitalist world. According to him, emancipated senses are a vital part of man's essential powers which shape and are shaped by human reality. The human nature of the senses comes about when humans are...humanized: "The objectification of the human essence, both in its theoretical and practical aspects, is required to make man's sense human, as well as to create the human sense corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance."<sup>331</sup> It may seem tautological, but actually the implications of this complex section of the *1844 Manuscripts* are that there can exist non-humanized senses (or perhaps dehumanized). After all, Marx obviously is not suggesting that bereft of species-being, humans can no longer see, hear, think, etc. What he is saying is that without species-being, human senses are no longer humanized—their objective relationship to their reality is not immanent to their essential powers to shape that objective reality. Under capitalism, the senses have become abstract, or what he calls "restricted." Marx uses the example of eating for somebody who has been denied adequate sustenance: "The sense caught up in crude practical need has only a restricted sense. For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food."<sup>332</sup> This is the case under hypersubsumption, where species-being has been twisted, through the complete domination of the general intellect through telecommunications technology, into only what is useful for valorization. The senses that therefore exist for coerced posthumans are—as one might expect—not human. They are posthuman.

## 7.5 « Looking Backwards and Forwards »

An important question comes to mind when thinking of coerced posthumanism together with artworks that play with the traditional distribution of the senses: does one need to

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<sup>331</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 46-7.

<sup>332</sup> Marx, 46-7.

emancipate the senses in order to produce truly contemporary art (under the standards we have set forth in the previous chapters)? Or does art, through dissensus, open the possibility for new sensoriums? If so, are these new sensoriums full of emancipated senses? Perhaps the senses at work within new sensoriums would be post-posthuman, just as they would be correspondingly post-capitalist. Answering these questions would open new paths of inquiry outside the scope of this project, but it is important to acknowledge the consequences of connecting coerced posthumanism, species-being and counter-production art in the manner that I have done here.

While I have explored multiple layers of analysis in this project and brought together discussion from different fields, it all serves the ultimate goal of scrutinizing the tactics, techniques and efficacy of surveillance art in the milieu of contemporary capitalism. It was necessary to characterize today's capitalism in a way that would relate explicitly to surveillance throughout the dissertation, which not only brought forth the concept of hypersubsumption but also allowed a detailed examination of surveillance's role in value production. This brought us to network value, a by-product of immaterial unwaged labour which was discussed in chapter one and then elaborated on throughout the dissertation. Next, we had to examine the labourers producing network value and found that they would not be considered labourers under strict Marxist definitions, but were doing unwaged unproductive work directly on their subjectivities. These working subjectivities were deemed coerced posthumans. Finally, the last two chapters were able to articulate a theory of contemporary art that sufficiently addressed its production under the conditions of contemporary capitalism with the structure previously described. Focusing specifically on surveillance art appropriately manifested the themes the rest of the dissertation is concerned with, and thus allowed the conclusions about artveillance to apply to hypersubsumed capitalism. By combining dissensus with Osborne's notions of contemporaneity and embedded historicity, we also created a schema of what constitutes contemporary art as a standard against which to judge specific works of art.

We discovered that some artveillance was not anticapitalist (Harvey), while other works attempted but failed to turn capitalist surveillance systems against themselves. The

play of revealing and concealing was not sufficient to provide an active critique of capitalism, while hiding through camouflage seemed like a tacit acceptance of the present system—or at the very least a stagnant retreat. Only works that grappled non-programmatically and explicitly with the hegemonic sensoriums of the capitalist present could potentially achieve the kind of dissensual meeting of heterogenous regimes of sense that open the potentiality for a future politics.

In a world ravaged by climate catastrophe, extreme wealth inequality, sexism, racism—the list is unending—it can be difficult to accept that no work of art can tell us what to do, how to get out of the here and now. The future is fraught with fear and danger, and capitalism seems to thrive in crises, so there is no reason it should stop creating them anytime soon.<sup>333</sup> Writing this dissertation provided a revelation that I suppose I knew before but had not really internalized: the reason capitalism seems so totalizing and impossible to escape is because it closes off possibilities, especially in today’s world of the social factory, etc. That is the situation I was trying to articulate in the first three chapters, as I described the specific and intentional methods capitalism uses today, as well as the effects these methods have on human subjectivity. The other epiphany I had was quieter, more subtle, and perhaps obvious to everybody else: if capitalism forecloses the future through rigid cybernetic control of the possible, then first we need to figure out how to create possibilities. Like Socrates’ famous torpedo fish,<sup>334</sup> counter-production art disorients and disrupts, not just disrupting consciousness, it disrupts the entire network of the sensible. After all, as Marx said, human senses are not just the usual five but also thinking, feeling, enjoying...and even though we do not see it, perhaps we feel, through the jagged edges of our torn sensibilities, the flutter of other possible futures.

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<sup>333</sup> For a detailed analysis of the way capitalism actually creates a pattern of crises that then strengthen, rather than disrupt it, see Katerina Kolozova’s discussion of the 2008 financial crisis in *Toward a Radical Metaphysics of Socialism: Marx and Laruelle* (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2015).

<sup>334</sup> Dale Jacquette, “Socrates’ Ironic Image of Meno,” *The Personalist Forum* 12, no. 2 (1996): 123-34.



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