

who wins?

1. the information regime.

1.1 the power in knowledge.

1.2 internet profiling.

1.3 consumer cattle.

the power in knowledge.

power depends not on the possession of the means of production but on access to information that is used for psychopolitical surveillance and the control and prediction of behaviour.

Byung-Chul Han (2022). "Infocracy: Digitalization and the Crisis of Democracy".

With the term 'information regime' I refer to a form of domination in which information and its processing by algorithms and artificial intelligence have a decisive influence on social, economic and political processes. Under such a regime, what is exploited is information and data rather than bodies and energies, as is the case under disciplinary regimes. Power depends not on the possession of the means of production but on access to information that is used for psychopolitical surveillance and the control and prediction of behaviour. Information regimes are tied to information capitalism, which develops into surveillance capitalism and reduces human beings to consumer cattle that provide data. (...)

Information capitalism uses communication and interconnectedness, rendering obsolete the disciplinary techniques of spatial isolation, the strict regulation of work, and physical training. The ideal of the information regime is not 'docility', with the compliance and obedience it implies. The submissive subject of the information regime is neither docile nor obedient. The information regime assumes rather that its subject is free, authentic and creative. This subject produces itself and performs itself. (...) Information capitalism appropriates neoliberal technologies of power.

Where the power technologies of the disciplinary regime worked with compulsion and prohibition, the neoliberal ones work with positive incentives. They exploit freedom instead of repressing it. They control our will at an unconscious level instead of violently breaking it. Repressive disciplinary power gives way to smart power, a power that does not give orders but whispers, that does not command but nudges. In other words, it pokes us with subtle tools that influence our behaviour. (...)

The rule of the information regime is hidden because it is fully incorporated into everyday life. It hides behind the friendliness of social media, the convenience of search engines, the soothing voices of the virtual assistants and the courteous servility of smart apps. The smartphone is in fact an efficient informant that exposes us to 24/7 surveillance. The smart home turns a whole apartment into a digital prison in which our daily lives are recorded minute by minute. The smart vacuum cleaner may save us from some tedious cleaning, but it also maps our home. The smart bed and its networked sensors continue the surveillance while we sleep. Surveillance creeps into daily life by way of convenience. In the digital prison, this smart comfort zone, there is no resistance to the ruling regime. The like prevents any thought of revolution.

Psychometrics, also called psychographics, is a data-driven method for establishing a personality profile. When it comes to predicting a person's behaviour, psychometric profiling outperforms even that person's friends or partner. Given sufficient data, it is even possible to generate information that goes beyond what we believe we know about ourselves. A smartphone is a psychometric recording device that we feed daily, even hourly, with data. It makes possible the precise calculation of its user's personality. All the disciplinary regime had at its disposal was demographic information, which made possible its biopolitics. The information regime, by contrast, has access to psychographic information, which it uses for its psychopolitics.

Psychometrics is an ideal tool for psychopolitical marketing in politics.

So-called micro-targeting makes use of psychometric profiling. Voters are sent personalized advertisements, based on their psychograms, via social media. Like consumer behaviour, voting behaviour is subjected to unconscious influences. (...) Micro-targeting does not inform voters about a party's political programme. Instead, voters receive manipulative electoral advertisements, and often fake news, based on their psychograms. Thousands of variations of an advertisement are tested for their efficiency. These psychometrically optimized dark ads represent a danger to democracy. (...) Dark ads contribute to the division and polarization of society and poison the discursive atmosphere. They are invisible to the public and thereby unhinge one of the fundamental principles of democracy: society's self-observation.

given sufficient data, it is even possible to generate information that goes beyond what we believe we know about ourselves.

internet profiling.

How else can we explain the election of Trump? I recently watched a BBC documentary on the Silicon Valley oligarchs who hold sovereignty over our online lives (and, increasingly, our offline lives too). The most chilling fact to emerge from this investigation was that at the control centre of the Trump digital election campaign, in an anonymous building in San Antonio, Texas, employees of Facebook, Google and YouTube were seconded to make the 'delivery system' function using their online platforms. (...) What does it mean to the future of democracy, to the future of government? A senior official from the now-abandoned control centre was interviewed. In a moment of unexpected candour, she offered this alarming observation: 'We wouldn't have won it without Facebook'.

The type of control offered by Mark Zuckerberg's enterprise (which the designer

Paula Scher calls 'the new suburbia') has been the wet dream of dictators for millennia. It's now possible, via Internet connectivity and smart algorithms, to control thought - or at least to control emotion. 'Internet profiling' - to use the benign-sounding terminology of Silicon Valley - means that Facebook can manipulate emotion and this affect decision-making. Individual psychology can be altered merely by sending Facebook users positive or negative messages. What makes it worse is that it is facilitated by us, the users of the Internet. No force is involved. No coercion is needed. Instead, we give our consent the second we step into the digital terrain of the World Wide Web. Here - take everything, we say. It's yours. Go make trillions of dollars with it. Go win elections with it!

*the more data we generate
and the more intensely
we communicate, the
more efficient surveillance
becomes. (...) big data and
artificial intelligence enable
the information regime to
influence our behaviour at
a level that lies below the
threshold of consciousness.*

consumer cattle.

Byung-Chul Han (2022). "Infocracy: Digitalization and the Crisis of Democracy".

Digital information technology turns communication into surveillance. The more data we generate and the more intensely we communicate, the more efficient surveillance becomes. The mobile phone is a surveillance and subjugation apparatus that exploits freedom and communication. Under the information regime, people do not feel that they are under surveillance. They feel free. Paradoxically, it is the feeling of freedom that secures the rule of the regime. This is the fundamental difference between the information and the disciplinary regimes. When freedom and surveillance coincide, domination becomes complete.

The information regime has no need for disciplinary pressure. It does not impose panoptic visibility on people. People expose themselves out of an inner need – without any external compulsion. People produce themselves, that is, play to the gallery. The French verb *se produire* means to present oneself. Where the disciplinary regime imposes visibility, the information regime relies on the fact that people seek to be visible. They voluntarily enter the limelight. Whereas the inmates of the disciplinary panopticon try to avoid visibility, the subjects of the information regime actually desire it.

The information regime pursues its policies in the name of transparency. To think of transparency exclusively in terms of institutions and individuals making information publicly available is to miss its true significance. Transparency is the systemic compulsion of the information regime. The imperative of transparency is: everything has to be available as information. Transparency and information are synonyms. The information society is a transparency society. The imperative of transparency is that information must circulate freely. It is not people but information that is truly free. The paradox of the information society is that people are imprisoned by information. By communicating and producing information, they shackle themselves. The digital prison is transparent. (...)

Whereas Big Brother's telescreen is untouchable, the smart touchscreen makes everything available and consumable. (...) Under the information regime, being free does not mean being able to act but being able to click, like and post.