

Human Capital and Information in the Society of Control

Callum Howe

What Foucault (1984) recognised in Baudelaire regarding his definition of modernity was a great movement, a perpetual contingency upon which its (fleeting) social organization is manifested ceaselessly. That is to say that modern life was that which ferociously enveloped its people in a temporal dizziness and a dissociation from traditions, from the stability of the past and its rigidity. All life was a moment which could potentially pass by faster than our ability to comprehend it.

What implications does this have for the subject? In what ways are they expected to produce, and order their lives? Modernity, in a sense that is almost paradoxical,



produced an attitude that Foucault claims "consists in recapturing something eternal that is not beyond the present instant, nor behind it, but within it" (Foucault 1984; 37). The attitude of the modern citizen is one with a faith in the egoistic heroic, of the individual triumph over one's environment and the ability to exercise individual freedom.

Of course here the question arises as to whether or not (and to what extent) modernity actually permitted the exercise of such great freedom of the will, and how far in fact the conditions of such a society increasingly structured the territories of our lives. Surely, the ideas most fundamental to the modernist project; the Enlightenment theory of Kant and also the pervasive rationalism woven into the fabric of its entire productive network (under which all subjects of modernity are inextricably connected), are intoxicatingly liberating on a discursive level, yet the conditions that they manifested were indeed both alienating and isolating.

As Marx claimed; not only does the industrial subject live "entirely by his labour (a narrow, abstract labour), only as a *worker*" (Marx 1990; 176) but also in a state of individual affective misery, without the idealistic and liberal potential to "develop freely a physical and mental energy" for their self (Marx 1990; 177). Under the industrious clamour of modernity it is near impossible to imagine an embodiment of that free Kantian subject divorced from authority and faith over

their thought (Kant 2007). Society increasingly connected all peoples through communication and chains of production, and despite the insurmountable influence it had on modernity's most pervasive systems of value (which in turn lead to this wide individualisation), Kantian thought proves too idealistic in its extolling of "freedom".

The alienation that modern life produced was much less an existential phenomena as it was a fundamentally oppressive strategy of capitalism (Marx 1990), a process connected to the persistently expanding productive dimension and a means of exerting disciplinary power over the bodies of its subjects (Foucault 1991). Capital, for these subjects, is something both broadly collective in its production (the rational nature of production under this strictly modern capitalism organizes labour in a universally efficient manner) but also disciplinarily isolating in the feeling it produces.

What then, has changed? So many conceptions of present society are formulated through the claim of an *afterwards* or a dynamic *change* to industrial production, modernity, information and capital itself. Do our lives not remain vertiginous, though? Do we no longer experience, collectively, the constant assault of power(s) on our bodies? The weight of productive responsibility? Indeed, the question here is "how is the subject and their relation to capital different now"? It is difficult to produce a definitive time-frame for these changes; concepts from

Lyotard's (1979) postmodernism to Bauman's (2000) liquid modernity, Webster's (1995) information society to Tronti's (1962) social factory, have been appearing as assemblage since the 1960s.

What it is possible say however, is that through various economic and socio-political mutations in the last 60 years, capital has changed its form in accordance with its inherent expansionist intents. What these theories share is the idea of a complete saturation of information and the now diffuse nature of information/communication nurtured by new technologies and their connections to the agency-driven values of a neoliberal capitalism.



For Webster the many "informational developments" (Webster 2002; 6) that have occurred in order to form our understanding of an "information society" are each linked to these varying theories, and all

contain their own relevance and mode of observation to our current social situation. He is keen to stress that it is not only the sheer quantity of information that has multiplied through these developments but indeed the way in which the subject is related to information, how it defines the way in which "we conduct ourselves these days" (Webster 2002; 9).

What many of the new concepts Webster (2002) locates must share then, is a direct and fundamental emphasis on the subjectivisation of bodies and our connections to increasingly personalised systems of control, made possible by the expansion of biopolitical

knowledges and technologies. Increasingly the subject is implicated in (and held responsible for) the production of a personalized, entrepreneurial capital, that is to say; *human capital*. What is most notable, however, is how these techniques of biopolitics have become more discrete and specific in their deployment by governing powers.

Deleuze (1992) elucidates on the metamorphoses of biopower in regards to Foucault; claiming that the realms and "enclosures" (1992, 3) of power that defined the industrious society of the factory model have exploded outwards, a diagnosis that closely resembles (and is in fact, inseparable from) the explosion of information that Webster (2002) notes. In the same vein as Mario Tronti (1965), who recognised that capitalist power "requires a society based on production" and that "consequently production, this particular aspect of society, becomes the aim of society in general" (Tronti 1965; 28), Deleuze (1992) notes that the model of the factory has not dissolved, but rather *evaporated* into a gaseous state, a form which is resolutely and fundamentally fluctuating and rhizomatic (Deleuze 2015).

Society now takes the shape of the corporation, rather than the factory (Deleuze 1992, 4), and power takes the form of an interpersonal and self-reflexive *control*; rather than the previously static confines of general disciplinary power (Foucault 1991) embodied

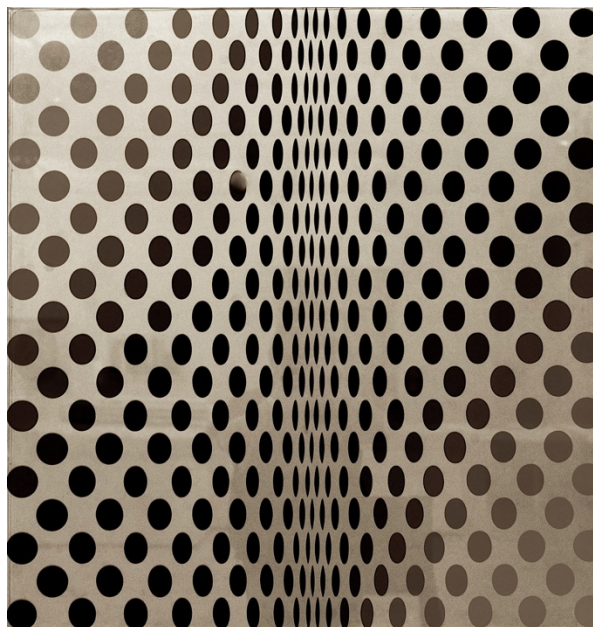
in the zones of the factory, the school, the hospital and so on. With this change in the way power is exerted upon populations (against a network of "individuals", rather than in modernity's "groups"; workers, students, inmates, etc.) comes a change of relationships to production, interwoven now with a production of *self-knowledges*.

The subject's productive capacity in the information society is no longer limited to material labour, nor is it simply split between industrial and service sector work; it demands the constant recapitulation of personal data, a sort of immaterial labour (Lazzarato, 1996), as well as a greater confrontation with

theoretical knowledge in the regular social and productive activity of all people (Webster 2002).

Immaterial labour was previously that which "produces informational and cultural content of the commodity" (Lazzarato 1996, 132), it can be said now however with the advent of the "social factory" (Tronti 1962) that immaterial

labour is the interminable responsibility of all subjects, beyond the borders of all workplaces. The proliferation of information has lead Lazzarato (1996) to define a "mass intellectuality", not only has the role of information and the strategic re-organization of labour changed the "composition, management and regulation of the workforce" but it has also restructured "more deeply, the role and functions of intellectuals and their activities within society" (Lazzarato 1996; 133).



In his suggestion of a "theoretical information", Webster (2002) indicates that information exceeds a quantitative state, a new state which "evokes much more than agglomerated bits of information" (Webster 2002; 28).

The idea that Webster (2002) doesn't analyse then is the controlling impact that the submitting of our bodies to knowledges, and the tremendous growth of information, has on its newly constituted subjects. Lyon (2010), in his reading of Bauman, claims that the maintenance of this production of self knowledge lends to a much wider apparatus of controlling surveillance. He describes this data as "problems of individual biography rather than institutional responsibilities" (Lyon 2010, 326).

No longer is the collection of information on subjects the concern of institutions in the society of control (Deleuze 1992); it is instead the private slave-labour of the individual. As such, Baudrillard (1983) states "the Law no longer exists, it is the operational immanence of every detail that is law" (Baudrillard 1983; 62). Such a relationship to an omnipresent information forms a "programmed microcosm", a "satellisation" of society through information and technology (ibid; 62) that is capable of predicting every movement of the subject individually.

In the same way as the rhizomic principle (Deleuze 2015), satellisation forms a vast interconnectedness of generalized relations between all singularities; not constructed by discipline, but by threat of annihilation, exclusion; consumptive freedom and economic advantage. Control is that power by which we are held responsible for its very maintenance; for the production of the information it requires in order to qualify the opportunities through which we are able to

travel. To replace a resignation to the "impossibility" of escaping such a ubiquitous power we ask; "to what extent is the information we create our own? And what is it that happens if we refuse to produce it?".

Bibliography:

Baudrillard, J. (1983) **Simulations**. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Bauman, Z. (2000) **Liquid Modernity**. Oxford: Polity Press.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (2015) **A Thousand Plateaus**. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Deleuze, G. (1992) **Postscript on the Societies of Control**. Paris: L'Autre Journal.

Foucault, M. (1991) **Discipline and Punish**. London: Penguin Group.

Foucault, M. (1984) "What is Enlightenment" in Rabinow, P. (ed) **The Foucault Reader**. New York: Pantheon Books: 32-50.

Kant, I. (2007) **Critique of Pure Reason**. London: Penguin Group.

Lazzarato, M. (1996). "Immaterial Labour" in Virno, P. & Hardt, M. (eds). **Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 132-146.

Lyon, D. (2010) "The Contribution of Zygmunt Bauman to Surveillance Studies". **International Political Sociology, Issue 4**: 325-338.

Liotard, J.-F. (1979) **The Postmodern Condition**. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

Marx, K. (1990) **Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy**. London: Penguin Group.

Tronti, M. (1962) **Factory and Society**. operaismoinenglish.wordpress.com: online:

<https://operaismoinenglish.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/factory-and-society.pdf>

Tronti, M. (2007 [1965]) "The Strategy of Refusal" in Lotringer, S. & Marazzi, C. (eds).

Autonomia: Post-Political Politics.
Semiotext(e): 28-35.

Webster, F. (1995) **Theories of the Information Society** (*First Edition*). Abingdon: Routledge.

Webster, F. (2002) **Theories of the Information Society** (*Second Edition*). Abingdon: Routledge.

Pictures:

<https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1291597>

<https://pxhere.com/en/photo/108272>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pedrosimoes/7/28011298583>