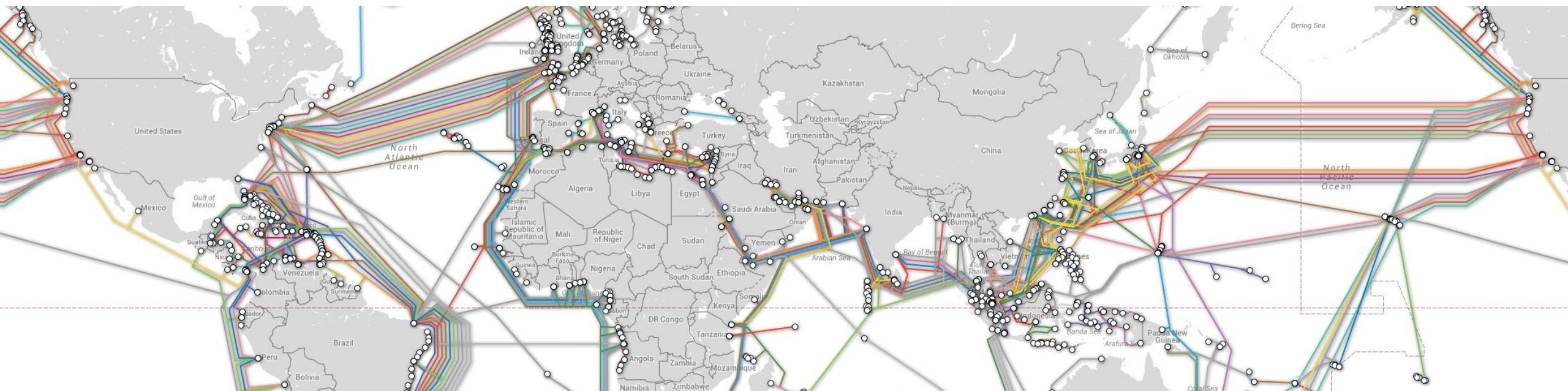




DATA, IMAGE & DESIRE

Postcapitalism and Platform Society

Coexistent Perspectives (ADAA7000)

Platform (Networked) Society

A Capitalist Critique

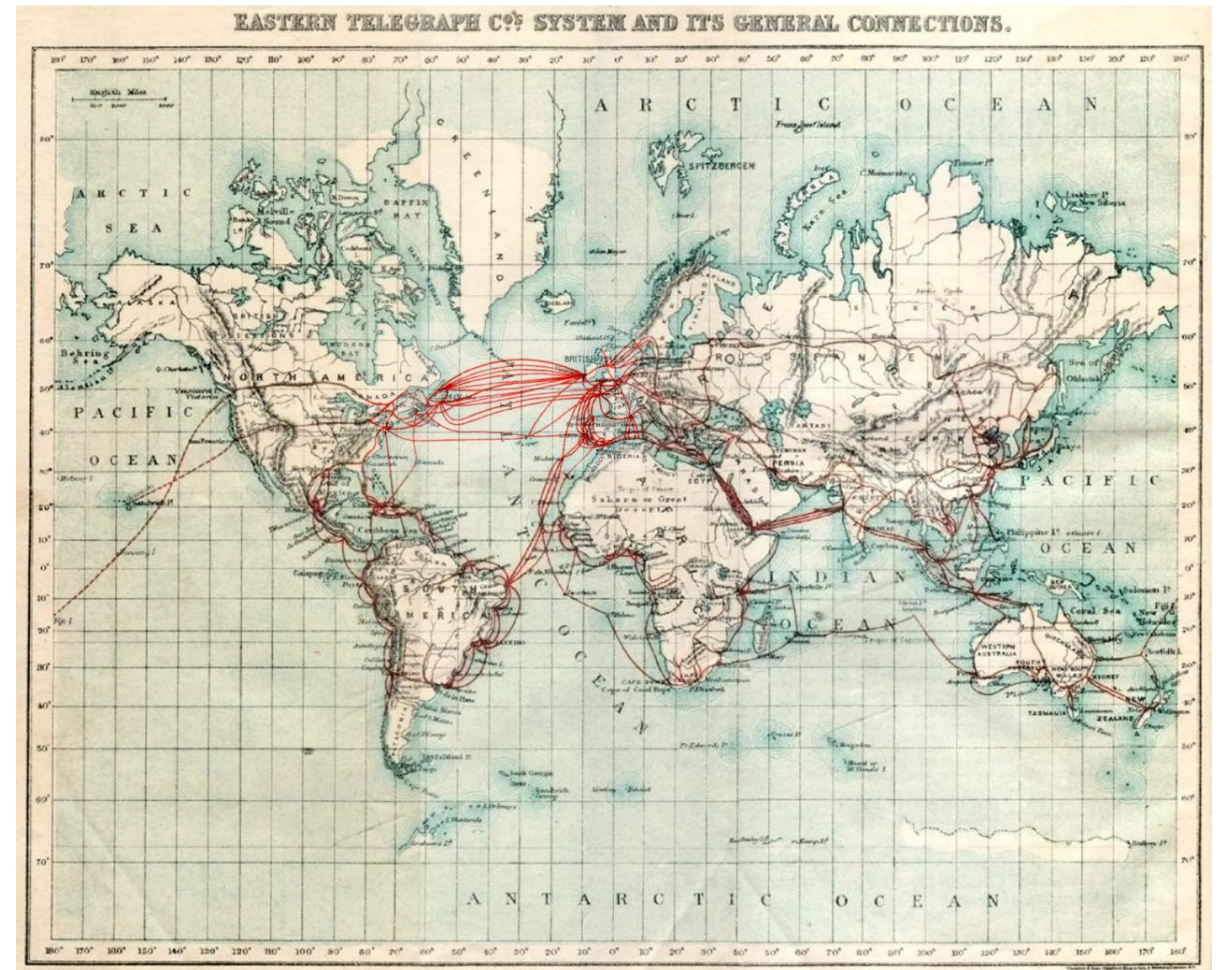
(RE)MATERIALISING NETWORKS: THE PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURES OF GLOBALISED ABSTRACTION

The earth itself becomes an impediment, something to be hollowed out in order to facilitate the circulation of capital.

Nick Smicek, Alex Williams, 2014

That unity, imposed by the British sword, will now be strengthened and perpetuated by the electric telegraph.

Karl Marx 1853



‘The Internet Does Not Exist’

This invisibility of contemporary networks truly captures our sense of a **technological sublime**.

The internet seems to exist somewhere in and around us, you can almost feel it coursing the molecules of your skin.

The internet’s seamless flows pump through **copper and sand, through silicon and quartz**.



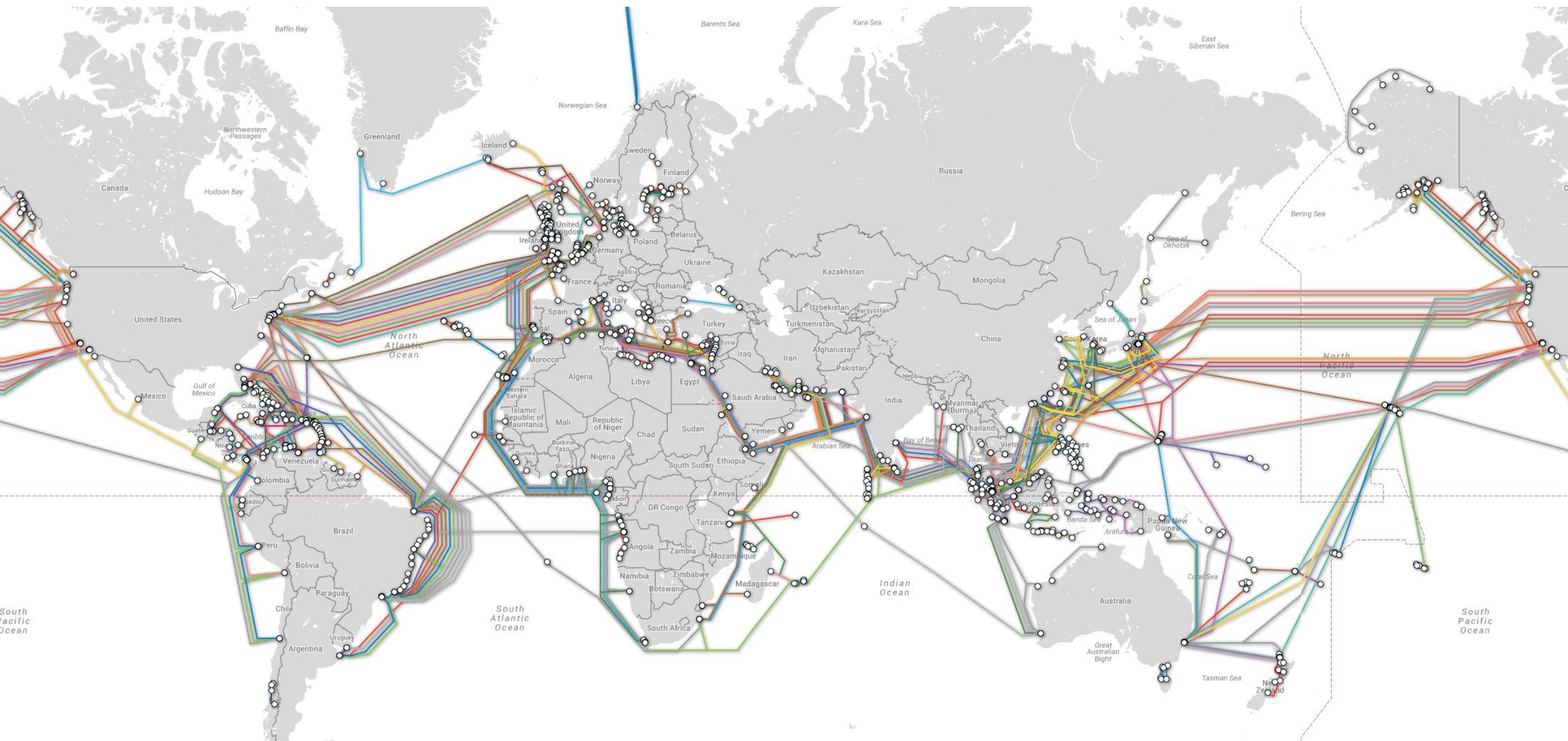
There is no Internet connection

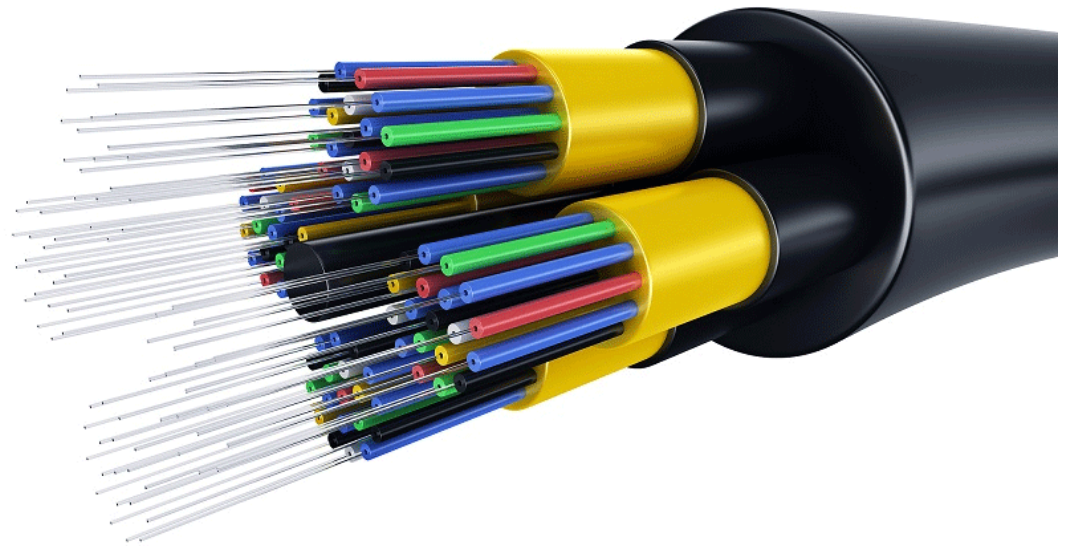
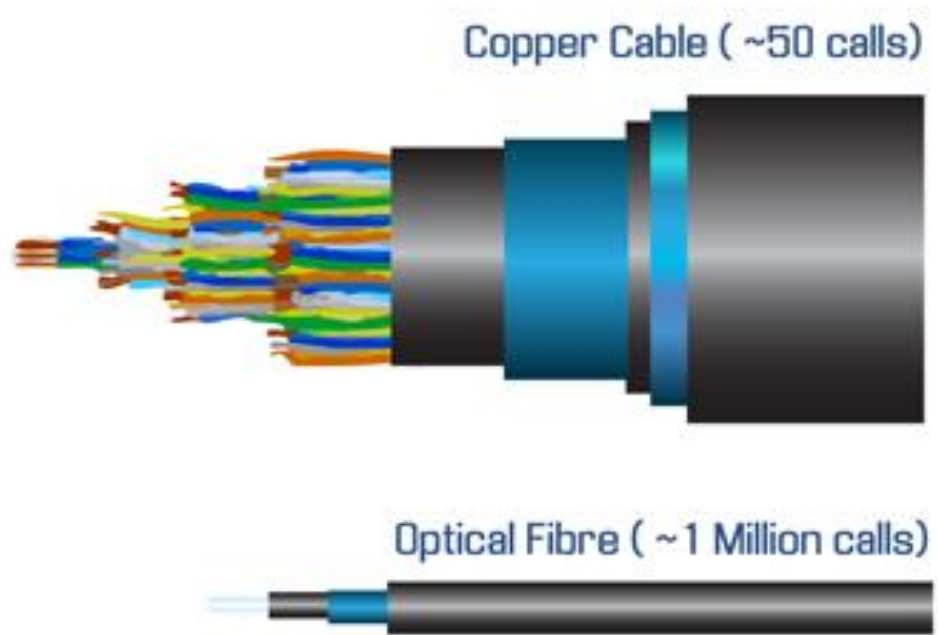
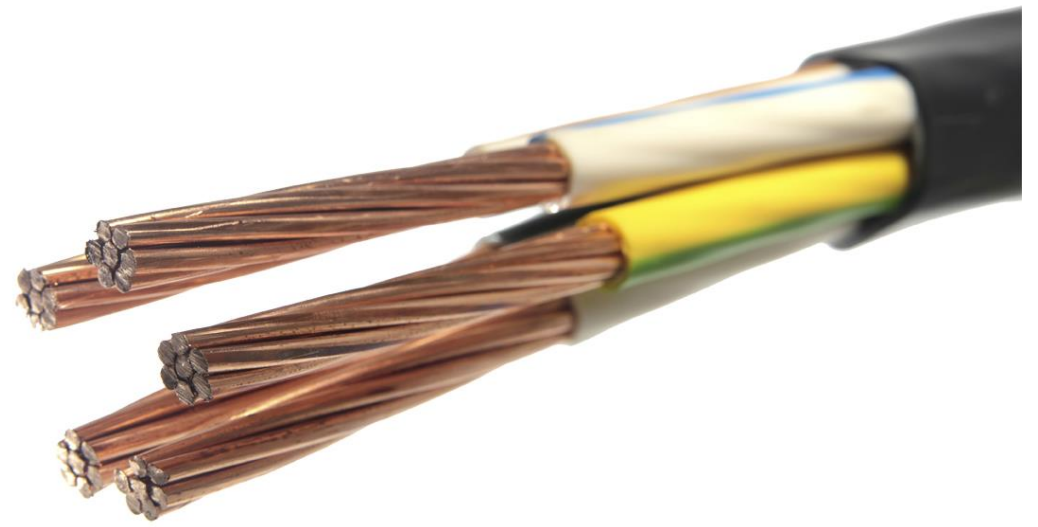
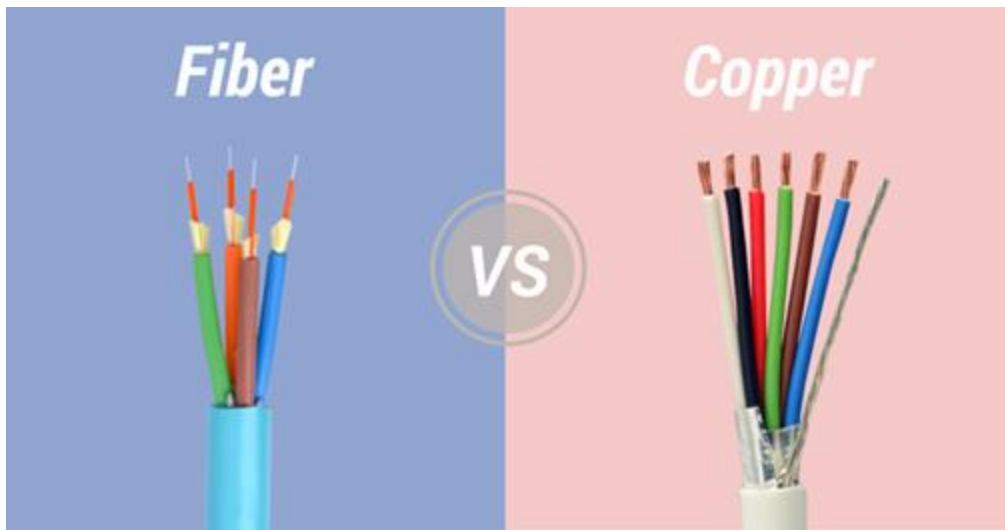
Your computer is offline.

Try:

- Checking the network cable or router
- Resetting the modem or router
- Reconnecting to Wi-Fi

ERR_INTERNET_DISCONNECTED

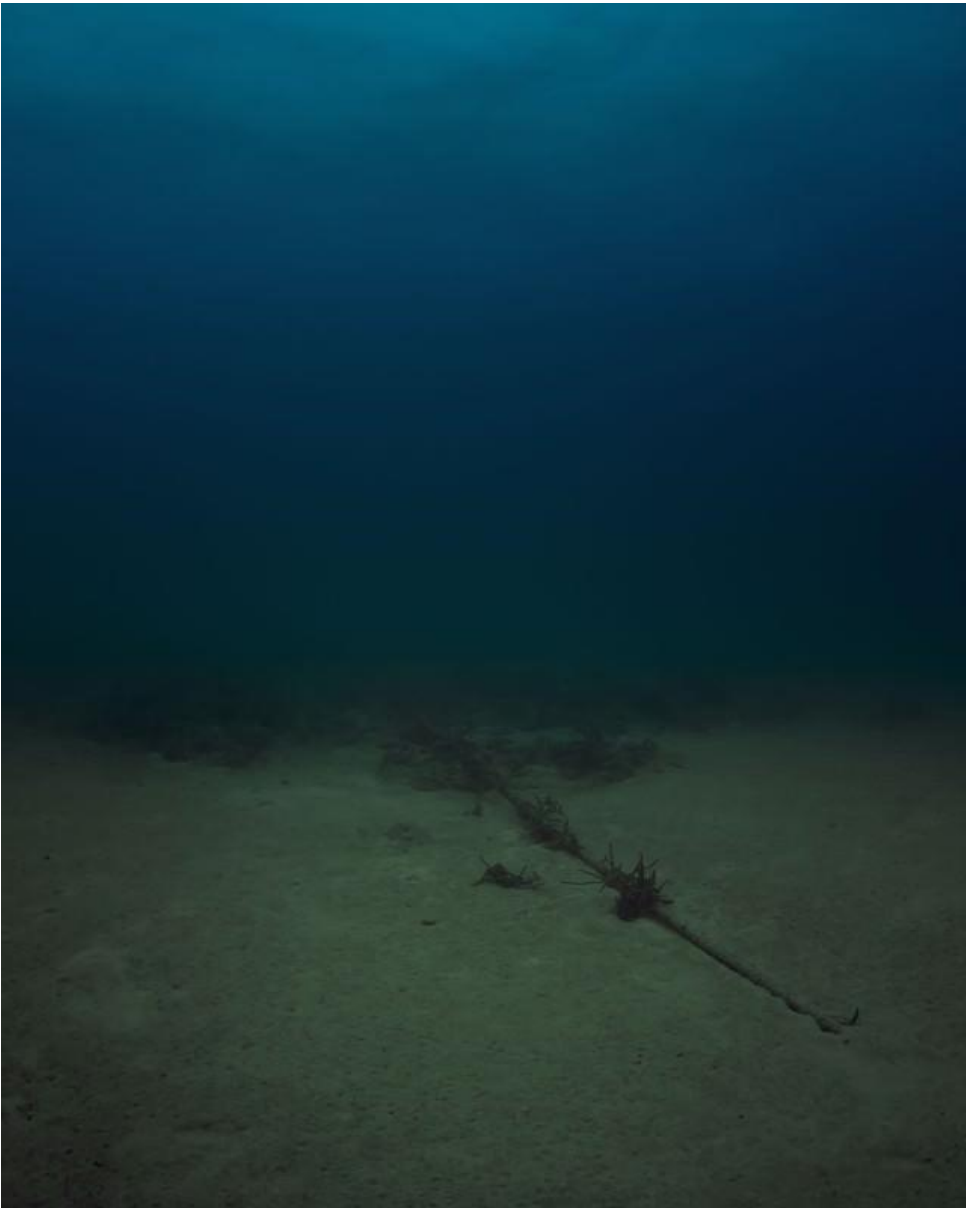












Trevor Paglen



"Much of the way we understand the world is through images. That's what I think good art does—it teaches you how to see the historical moment that you live in."

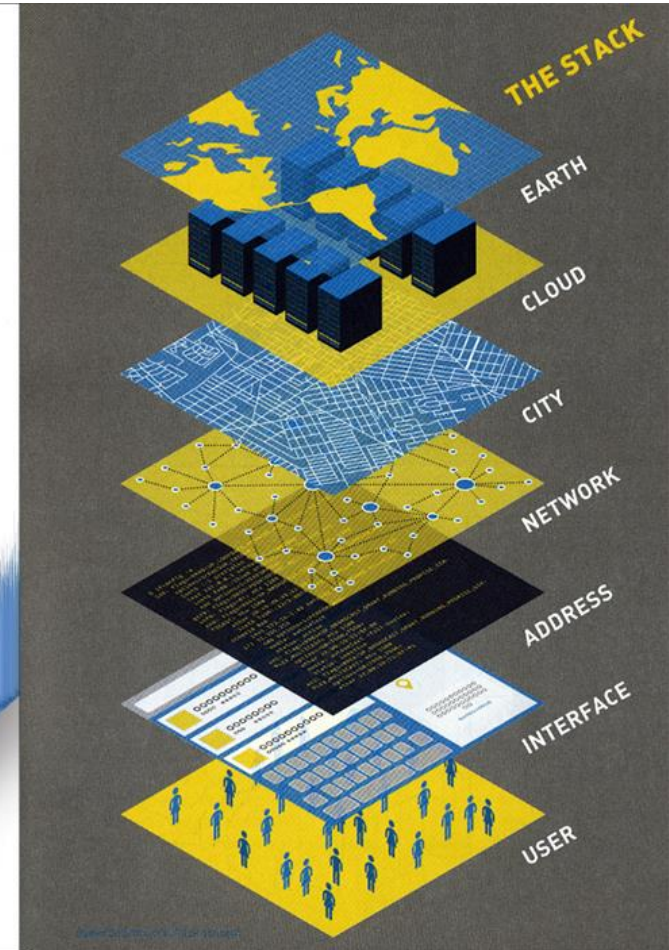
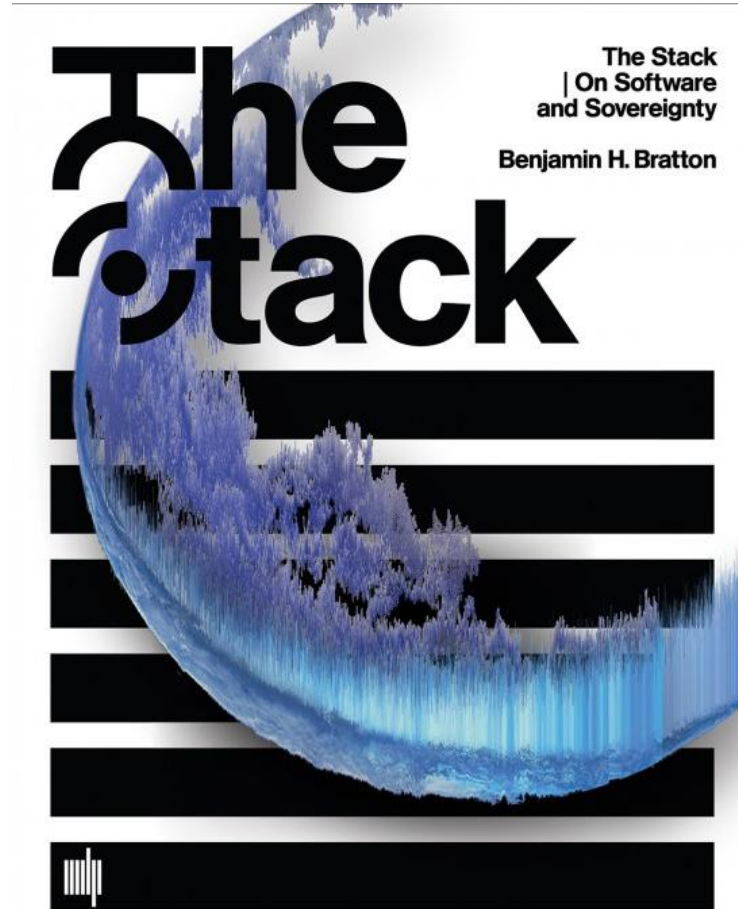


FRAGMENTS ON MACHINES

A FILM BY
EMMA CHARLES



Benjamin H. Bratton



A comprehensive political and design theory of planetary-scale computation proposing that The Stack—an accidental megastructure—is both a technological apparatus and a model for a new geopolitical architecture.

The Stack to Come

What has planetary-scale computation done to our geopolitical realities? It takes different forms at different scales—from energy and mineral sourcing and subterranean cloud infrastructure to urban software and massive universal addressing systems; from interfaces drawn by the augmentation of the hand and eye to users identified by self—quantification and the arrival of legions of sensors, algorithms, and robots. Together, how do these distort and deform modern political geographies and produce new territories in their own image?

Benjamin H. Bratton



What has Photography become in the Networked Age?

“what becomes of photography when the locus of power shifts from the optical nerve to the fibre-optic cable?”

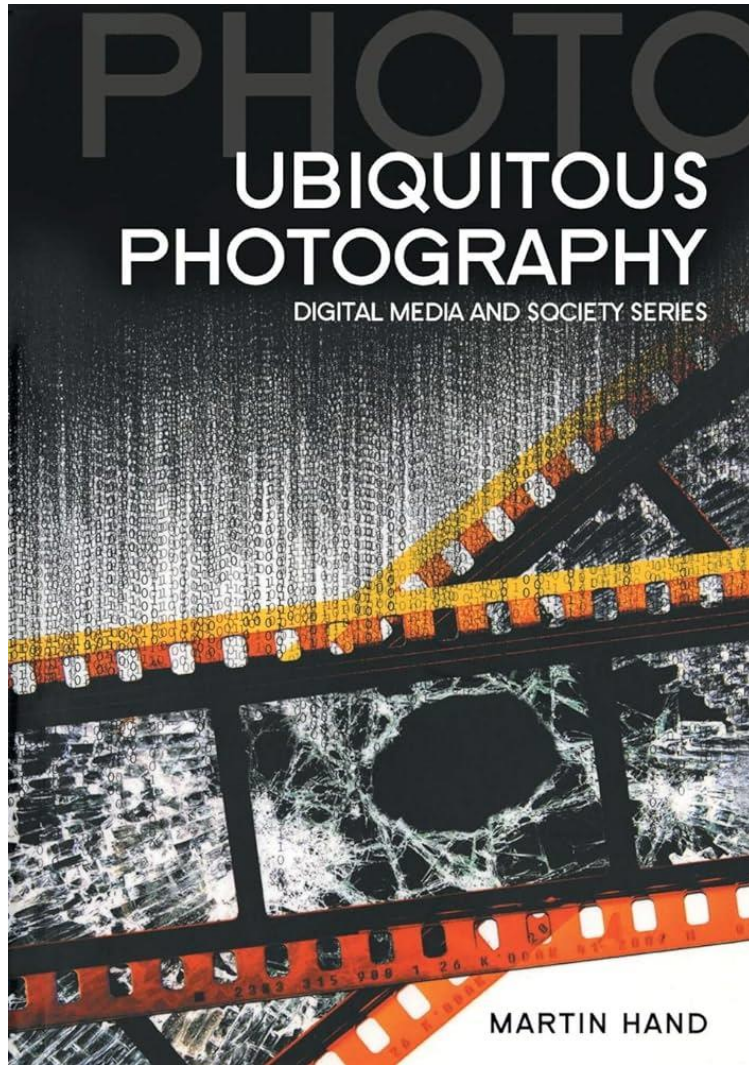
Daniel Rubenstein



What is Big Data Photography?

Big Bang Data Exhibition | Somerset House



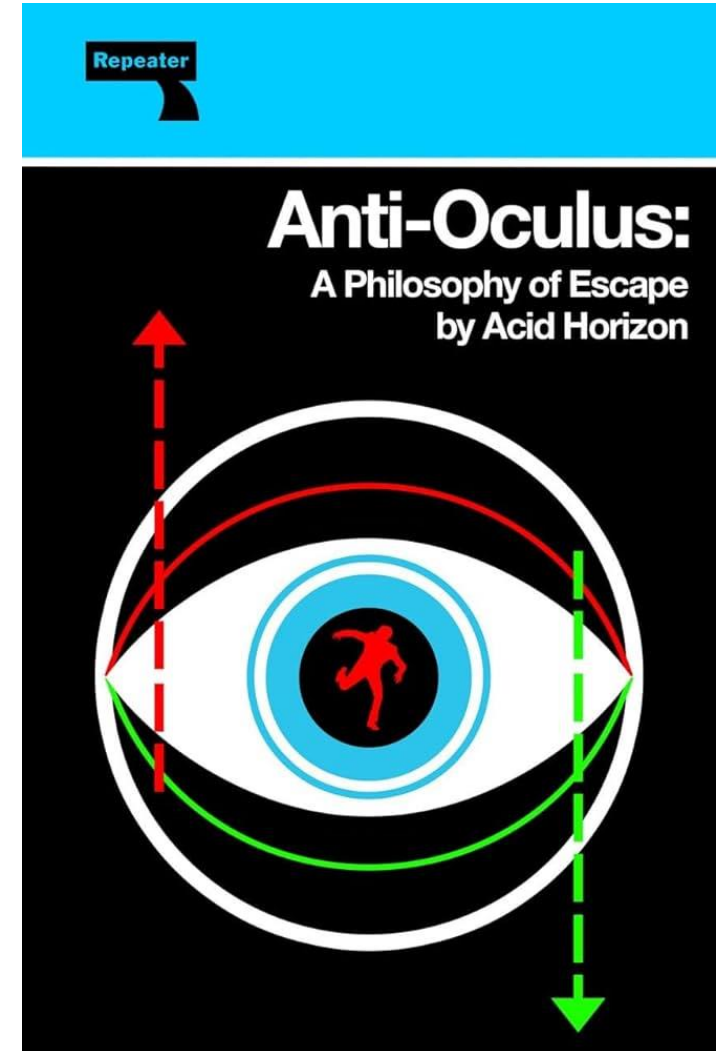


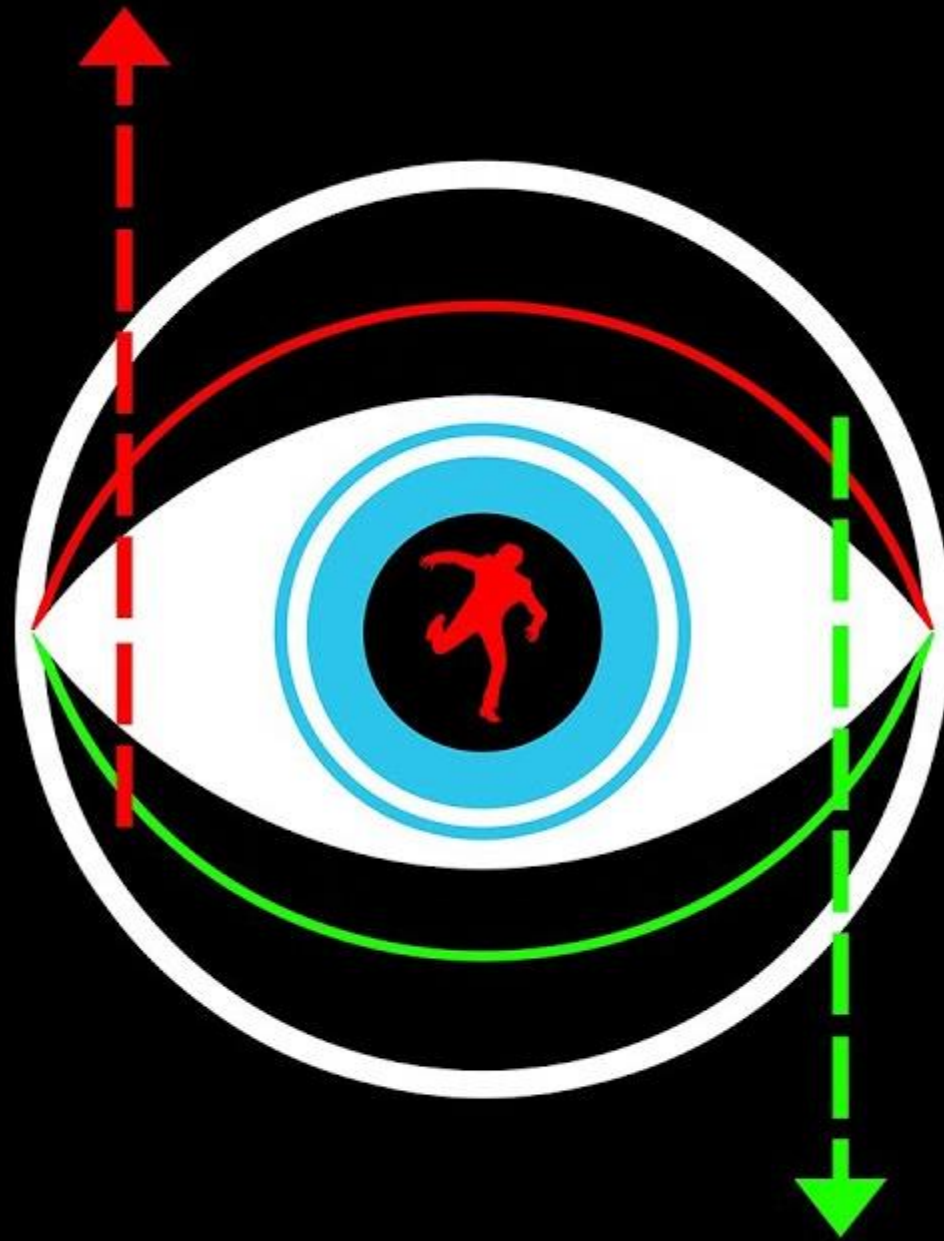
The *"A good guide to our times."
—Times Literary Supplement*

Social Photo

On Photography
and Media

Nathan
Jurgenson

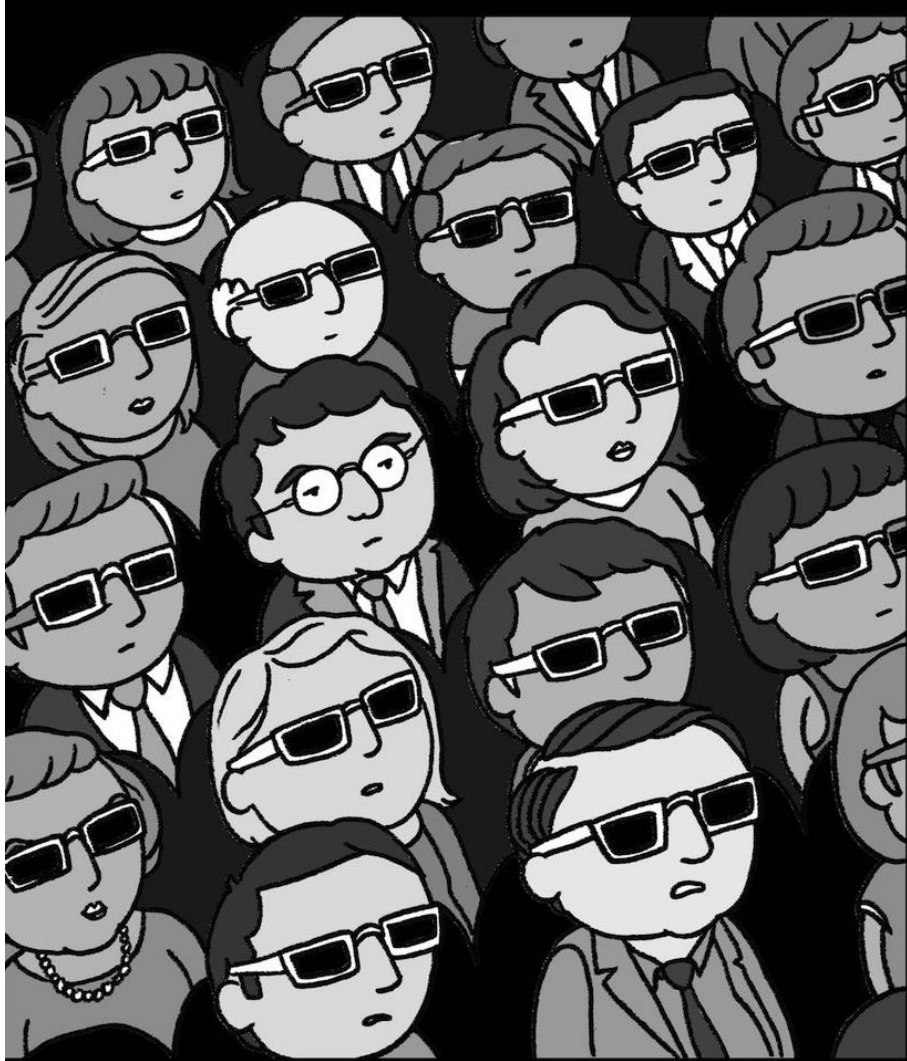




Spectacle and/or Surveillance

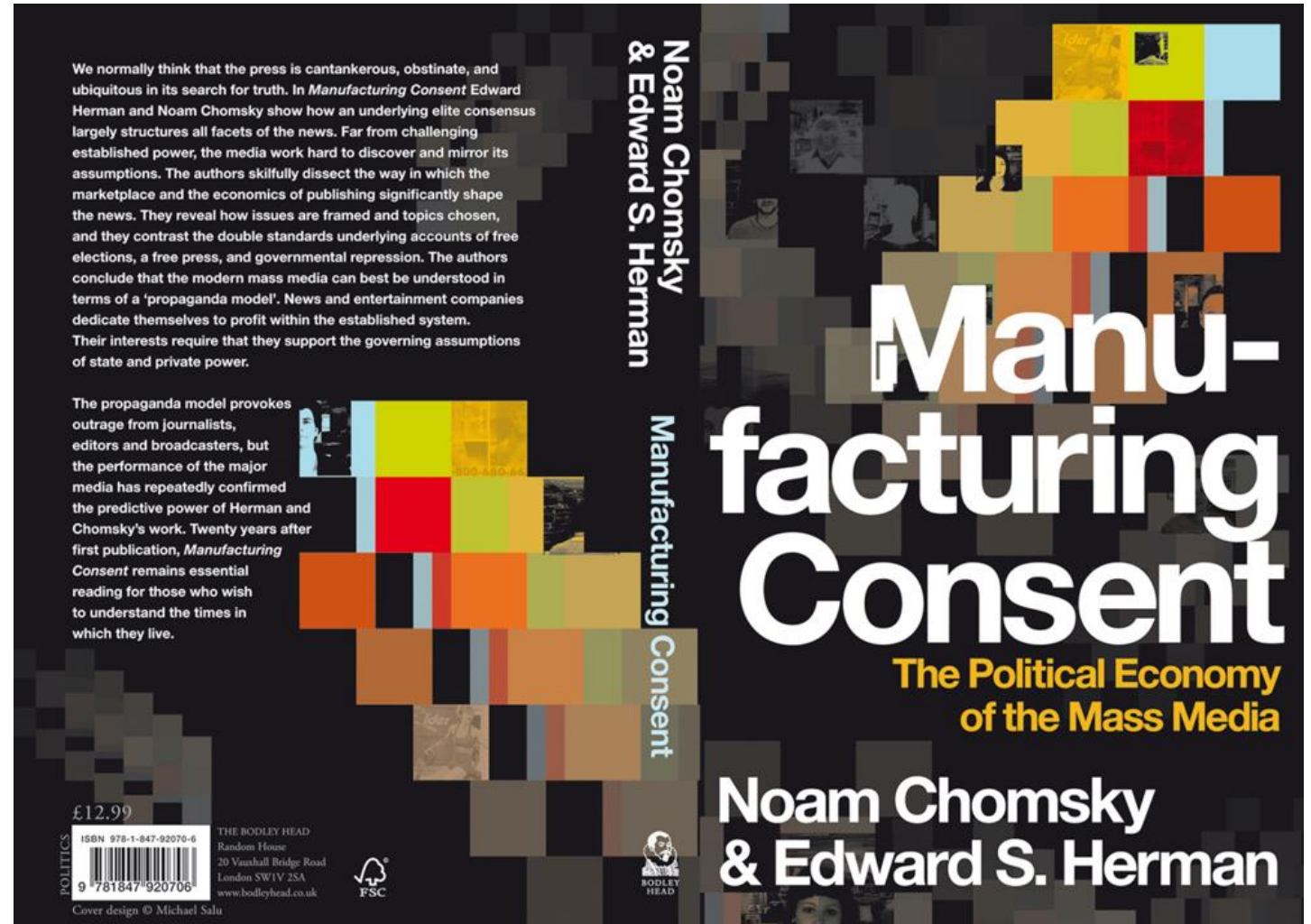
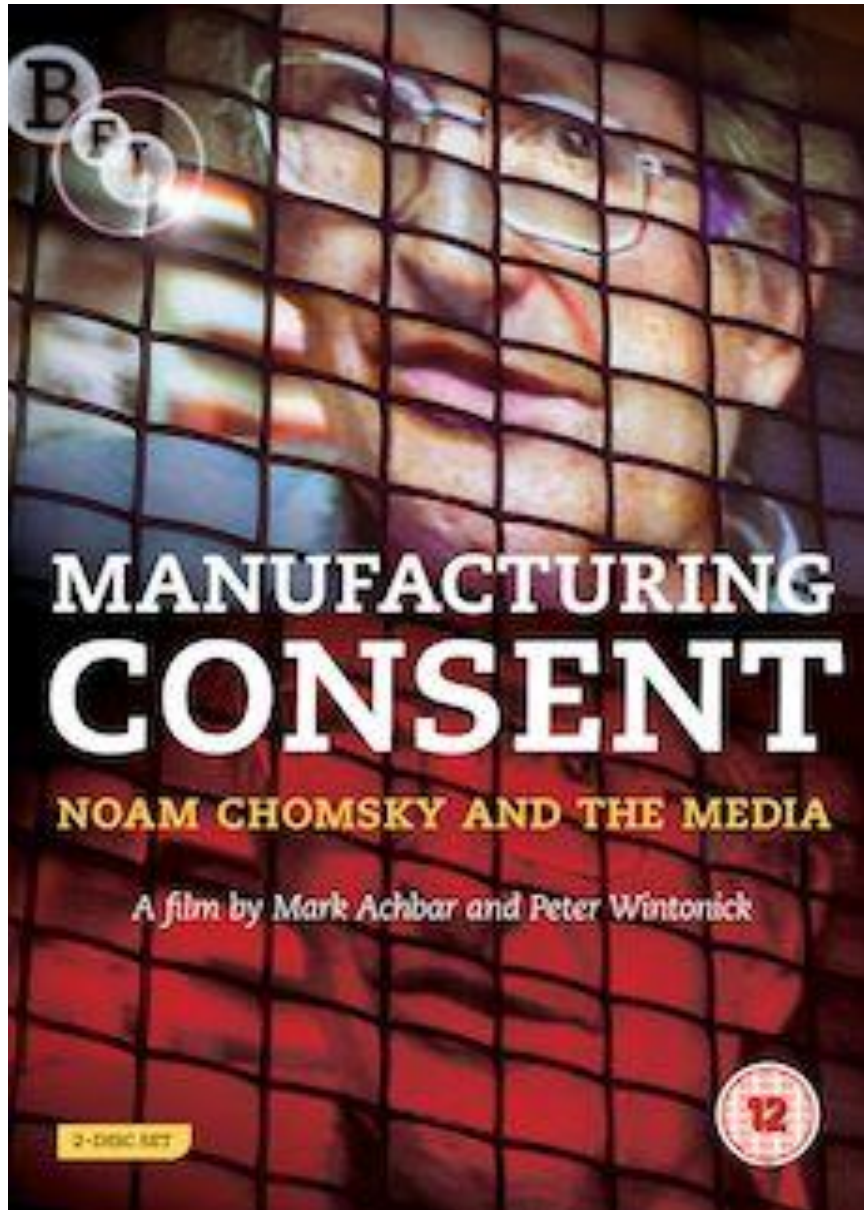
is the heart of the unrealism of the real society"

The Society of the Spectacle



Guy Debord's (1931–1994) best-known work, *La société du spectacle* (*The Society of the Spectacle*) (1967), is a polemical and prescient indictment of our image-saturated consumer culture. The book examines the "Spectacle," Debord's term for the everyday manifestation of capitalist-driven phenomena; advertising, television, film, and celebrity.

Debord defines the spectacle as the "autocratic reign of the market economy." Though the term "mass media" is often used to describe the spectacle's form, Debord derides its neutrality. "Rather than talk of the spectacle, people often prefer to use the term 'media,'" he writes, "and by this they mean to describe a mere instrument, a kind of public service." Instead, Debord describes the spectacle as capitalism's instrument for distracting and pacifying the masses. The spectacle takes on many more forms today than it did during Debord's lifetime. It can be found on every screen that you look at. It is the advertisements plastered on the subway and the pop-up ads that appear in your browser. It is the listicle telling you "10 things you need to know about 'x.'" The spectacle reduces reality to an endless supply of commodifiable fragments, while encouraging us to focus on appearances. For Debord, this constituted an unacceptable "degradation" of our lives.



Published in 1988, *Manufacturing Consent* is a frighteningly relevant book in this time of media collusion in the take over of democratic governments and institutions by kleptocrats and neo-fascists. The book challenges the idea that the mainstream media acts as a check on political power. In fact, the media manipulates the public by acting as a propaganda machine.

The Society of Surveillance

“A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex. And it needs to gather unlimited amounts of information, the better to exploit natural resources, increase productivity, keep order, make war, give jobs to bureaucrats.

The camera's twin capacities, to subjectivize reality and to objectify it, ideally serve these needs and strengthen them. **Cameras define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers).**

The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself. The narrowing of free political choice to free economic consumption requires unlimited production and consumption of images.”



Susan Sontag, On Photography (1977)

Cameras define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as **a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers).**

On Photography (1977) , Susan Sontag

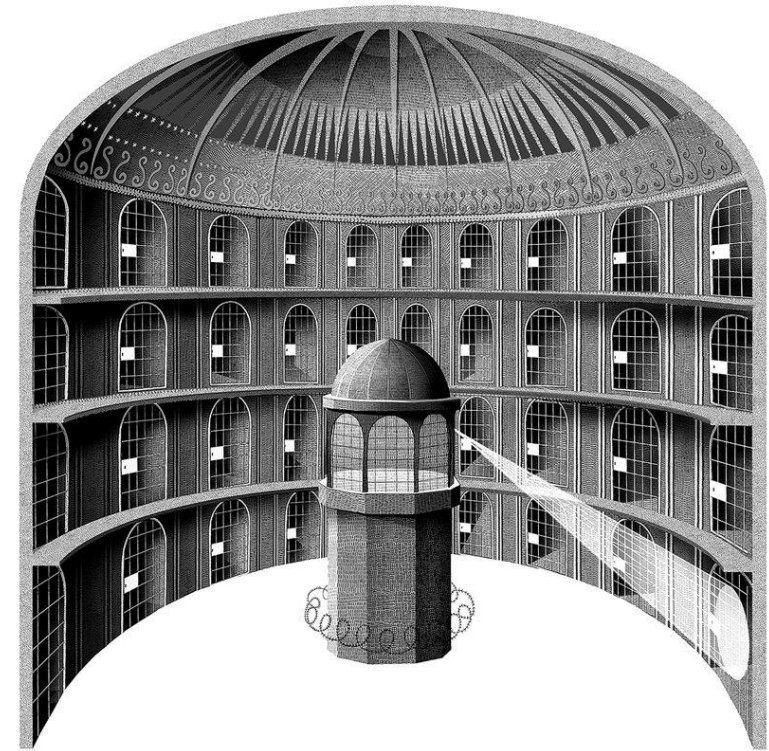
The Panopticon

The French philosopher Michel Foucault revitalised interest in the panopticon in his 1975 book *Discipline and Punish*. He describes the prisoner of a panopticon as being at the receiving end of asymmetrical surveillance:

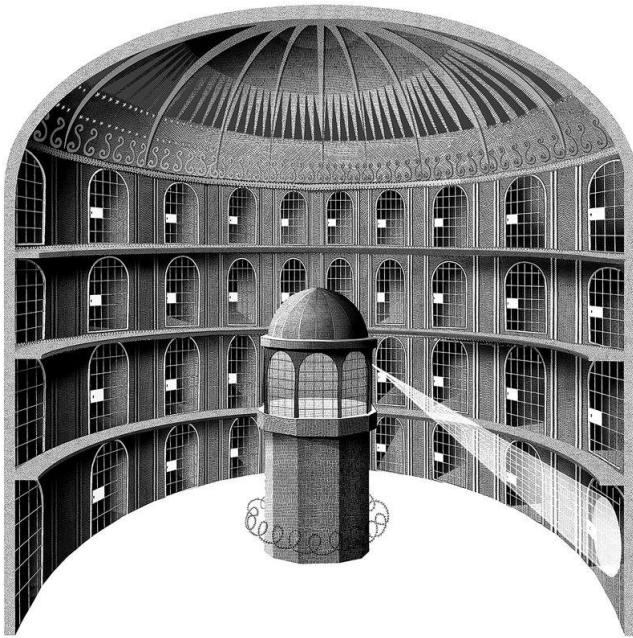
‘He is seen, but he does not see; he is an object of information, never a subject in communication.’

(Foucault, M., 1995, *Discipline and Punish*, (2nd Edition), Vintage Books, p.200)

As a consequence, the inmate polices himself for fear of punishment.



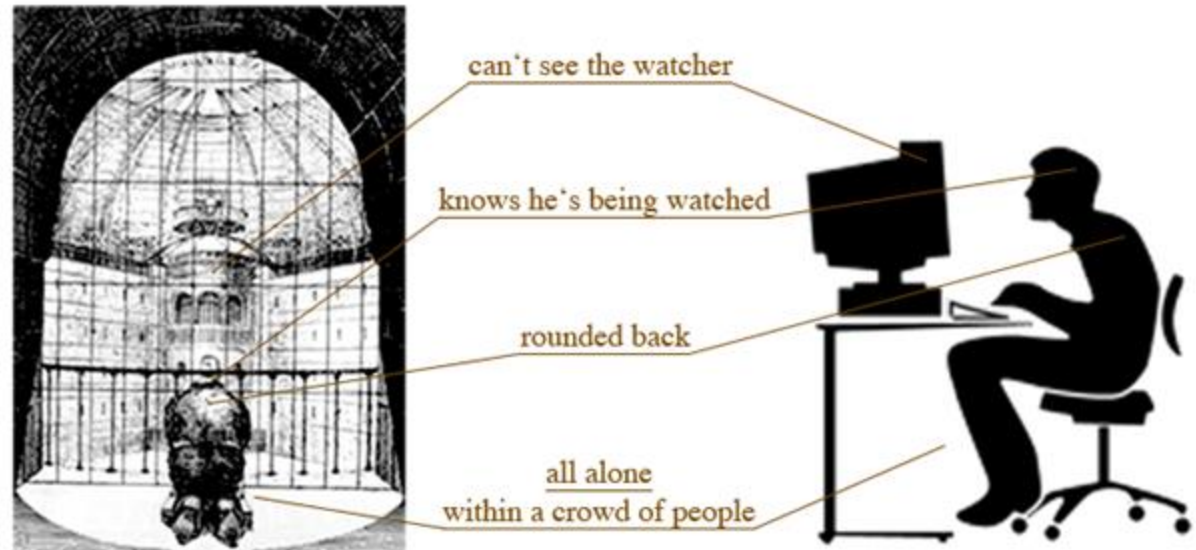
The Panopticon



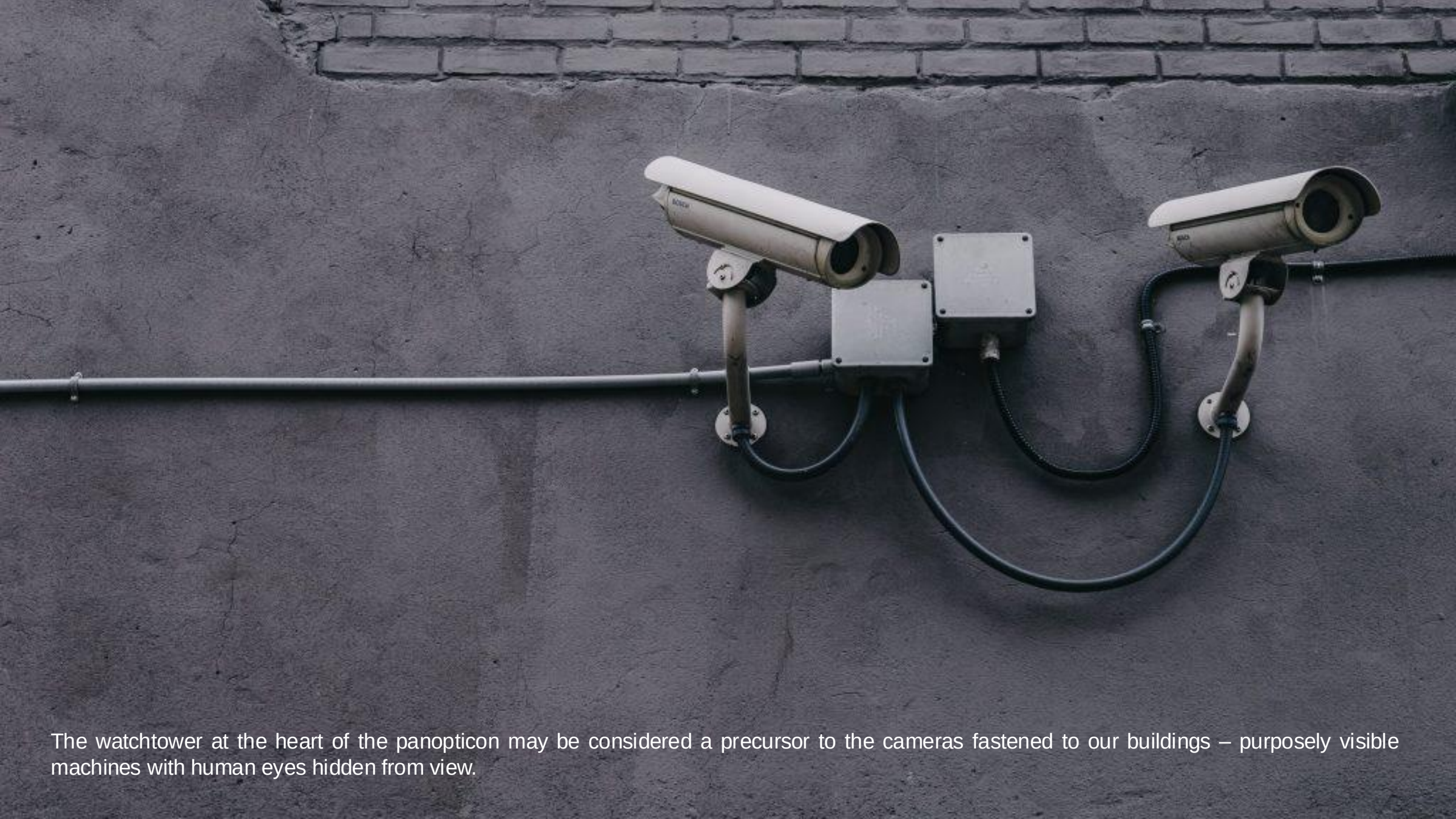
The Panopticon – Jeremy Bentham

Michel Foucault 'Panopticism'
Discipline and Punish The Birth of Prison

The Prisoner and the Free



What does the panopticon mean in the age of digital surveillance?



The watchtower at the heart of the panopticon may be considered a precursor to the cameras fastened to our buildings – purposely visible machines with human eyes hidden from view.

the Surveillance Camera Players
(completely distrustful of all government)



Ai Weiwei

Surveillance Camera and Plinth

There is a focus on surveillance and the police state in Ai Weiwei's works and practice. He has been fearless about publicly calling out the Chinese government and passionately advocating for one's rights. Much of his work is inspired by his own reality, **Surveillance Camera and Plinth** came to life after the artist discovered cameras and listening devices in his studio. Weiwei is a voice scrutinizing matters felt throughout the world, especially when it comes to artists and free thinking.

Ai Weiwei
Surveillance Camera and Plinth
marble
117.5 by 52 by 52 cm. 46 1/4 by 20 1/2 by 20 1/2 in
Executed in 2015



The Truman Show

Peter Weir's film, *The Truman Show* (1998) depicts and assesses the impact of reality television on notions of privacy and identity, adapting Orwell's account of constant visual scrutiny by fusing it with the contemporary adulation of celebrity. In *The Truman Show*, surveillance has morphed into entertainment.



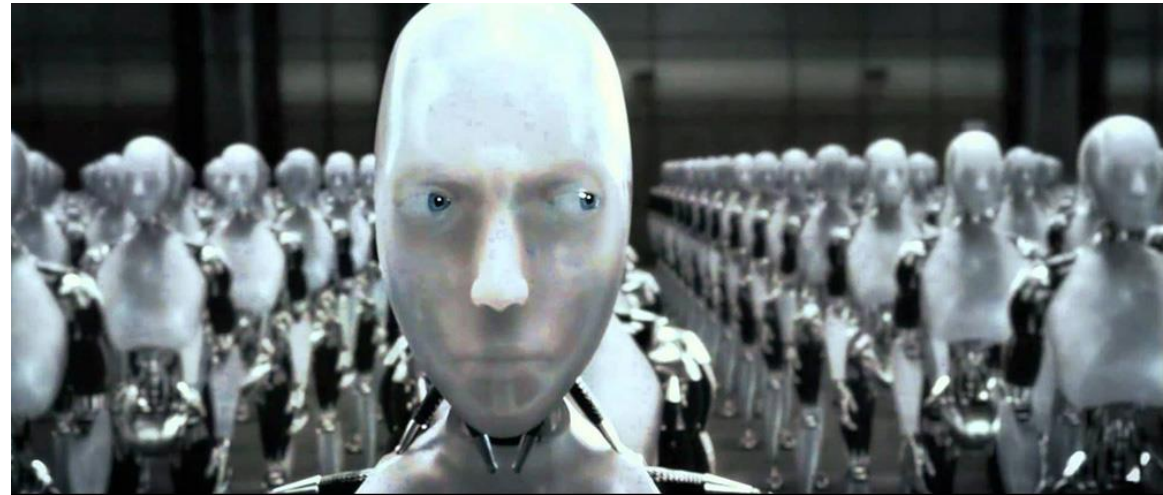
“Everything that deceives may be said to enchant.”

—Plato, The Republic

Technologies of the Self (1984)

Michel Foucault's concept of technologies of the self refers to the ways individuals actively shape and cultivate their own identities, behaviors, and ways of being within social and cultural contexts. It revolves around the idea that individuals are not just passive subjects influenced by external forces but are actively engaged in self-formation. Foucault explores how people, throughout history and across cultures, use various practices, disciplines, and techniques to shape themselves according to societal norms, values, and ideals. These techniques can include rituals, practices, and self-disciplines that help individuals mold their own identities, attitudes, and behaviors.

This concept emphasizes that individuals are not just influenced by external factors but are also active agents in creating and maintaining their own selves, often using societal norms and technologies (in a broad sense, not just digital) as tools for self-transformation. It encompasses a wide range of practices, from meditation and religious rituals to contemporary self-help techniques and digital self-presentation, all contributing to the ongoing construction and reconstruction of the self within societal frameworks.

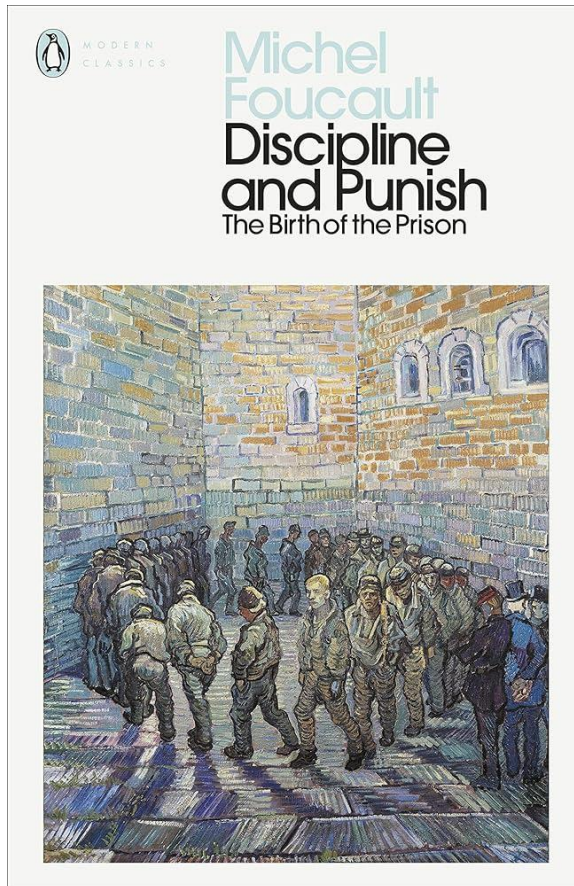


“[Socrates’s] mission is useful for the city--more useful than the Athenians’ military victory at Olympia--because in teaching people to occupy themselves with themselves, he teaches them to occupy themselves with the city.... I think that the main characteristic of our political rationality is the fact that this integration of the individuals in a community or in a totality results from a constant correlation between an increasing individualization and the reinforcement of this totality.”

- Michel Foucault *Technologies of the Self* (1988)

‘technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.’

Technologies of the Self and the **Politics of Desire**



Foucault's **technologies of the self** intersects with the theme of the politics of desire in intriguing ways. Desire, in Foucault's framework, is entwined with power dynamics and societal norms. The cultivation of the self, as per his concept, is not just about personal fulfillment but often aligns with societal expectations, norms, and power structures. Individuals shape themselves based on desires that are not solely personal but are deeply influenced by what society deems desirable or acceptable.

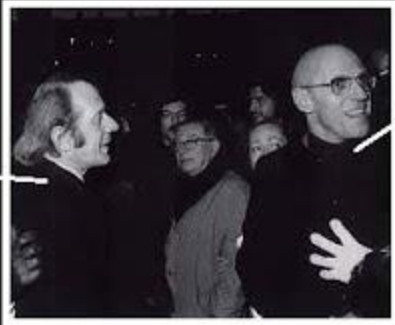
The politics of desire, within the context of Foucault's theories, can be seen as the negotiation and sometimes manipulation of individual desires within the broader social and cultural framework. The **construction of the self** through various techniques and practices often aligns with desires that are cultivated within societal norms and power structures. For instance, desires might be influenced by cultural norms or social expectations, leading individuals to shape themselves in ways that conform to these desires. In this sense, the personal desires an individual pursues are entangled with broader societal desires and power relations, creating a complex interplay between personal aspirations and societal norms. Foucault's notion of the **technologies of the self**, in this context, underscores the link between personal desires and the mechanisms individuals use to shape themselves, often in alignment with or in resistance to societal desires and power structures.

Postscript on the Societies of Control (1992)

Gilles Deleuze's concept of **societies of control** contrasts with earlier **disciplinary** societies. He theorised that contemporary societies have shifted from more rigid structures of discipline (as described by Foucault) to a new form of control that is less about confinement and more about modulation and constant surveillance. In these societies of control, power operates more through networks, information, and technology.

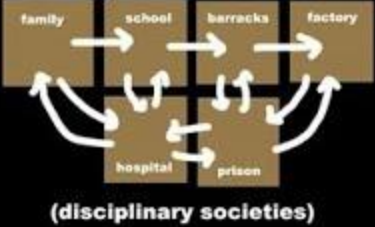
These societies are characterized by their capacity to shape and guide behaviors through more diffuse and decentralized methods. Control is exercised not only in specific physical spaces (like prisons or schools) but also through pervasive networks that influence desires, behaviors, and individual agency. This concept suggests a shift from centralized institutions to more fluid, network-based control mechanisms that continually adjust and redirect desires, often through the mechanisms of technology, information, and constant surveillance.

Postscript on the societies of control



Yeah, I've been meaning to talk to you about it.

Deleuze, WTF did you just do?



(disciplinary societies)

Dividuals & Control

Deleuze wrote (1992): "The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. [...] **Individuals** have become '**dividuals**' and **masses** [have become] **samples**, data, markets, or 'banks.'"

Postscript on the Societies of Control and the **Politics of Desire**

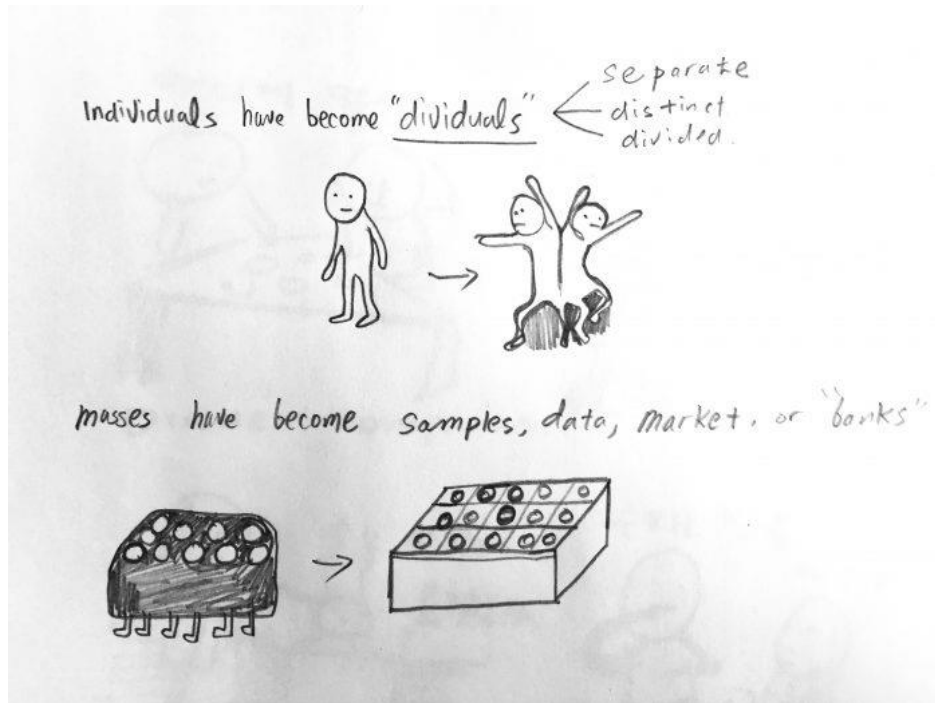
Gilles Deleuze's concept of **societies of control** resonates with the theme of the politics of desire, particularly in how individuals are molded and influenced within these systems.

Deleuze contrasts the idea of disciplinary societies, as described by Foucault, with societies of control. In disciplinary societies, individuals are confined within physical spaces (prisons, factories, schools), regulated by hierarchical systems and rigid structures. However, in **societies of control, there's a shift toward more fluid, decentralised forms of control through networks, information, and constant surveillance, which greatly impacts desires and behaviors.**

The politics of desire is interwoven with Deleuze's concept as societies of control, often driven by the **market and technology, manipulate and channel individual desires.** Control is less about confinement and more about modulation, encouraging desires that align with societal norms. These societies use information and technology to steer and influence desires, often through advertising, social media, and consumer culture, creating a continuous cycle of consumption and desire.

In the context of art, Deleuze's concept prompts artists to examine and critique how these societies shape desires. Art might challenge these systems, subvert or recontextualise the desires propagated by control mechanisms, and raise questions about individual agency within these structures.

Ultimately, Deleuze's societies of control shed light on **how desires are managed and influenced within contemporary systems**, emphasising the interconnectedness of desire, power, and the structures that shape individual aspirations and behaviors.



The Spectacle of the Self

‘Each implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes.’ (Foucault, Technologies of the Self)



...technologies of the self encompass both the external influences on individuals (such as disciplinary institutions) and the internal, self-directed practices individuals engage in to conform to societal norms. The quote above refers to the external modes of training and modification, which are significant in shaping the technologies of the self as individuals navigate and internalise societal expectations.

Excellences and Perfections (2014) Amalia Ulman

In **Excellences & Perfections**, Ulman created a fictional character named Amalia, who undergoes a transformation from a seemingly average girl to a glamorous and successful social media personality. The project unfolded in three acts, each corresponding to a different phase in the character's narrative. Ulman used the platform of Instagram to document this transformation, posting images and updates that mimicked the typical content shared by influencers on social media.



Perpetual Provisional Selves

A conversation about authenticity and social media

‘The measurable attention one receives through social media both consolidates and fractures the awareness of self. One hopes to be looked at because one knows that one will disappear in that gaze—one's objective realness will cease to be a problem, and identity will cease to be a burdensome responsibility.’ – **Rob Horning**

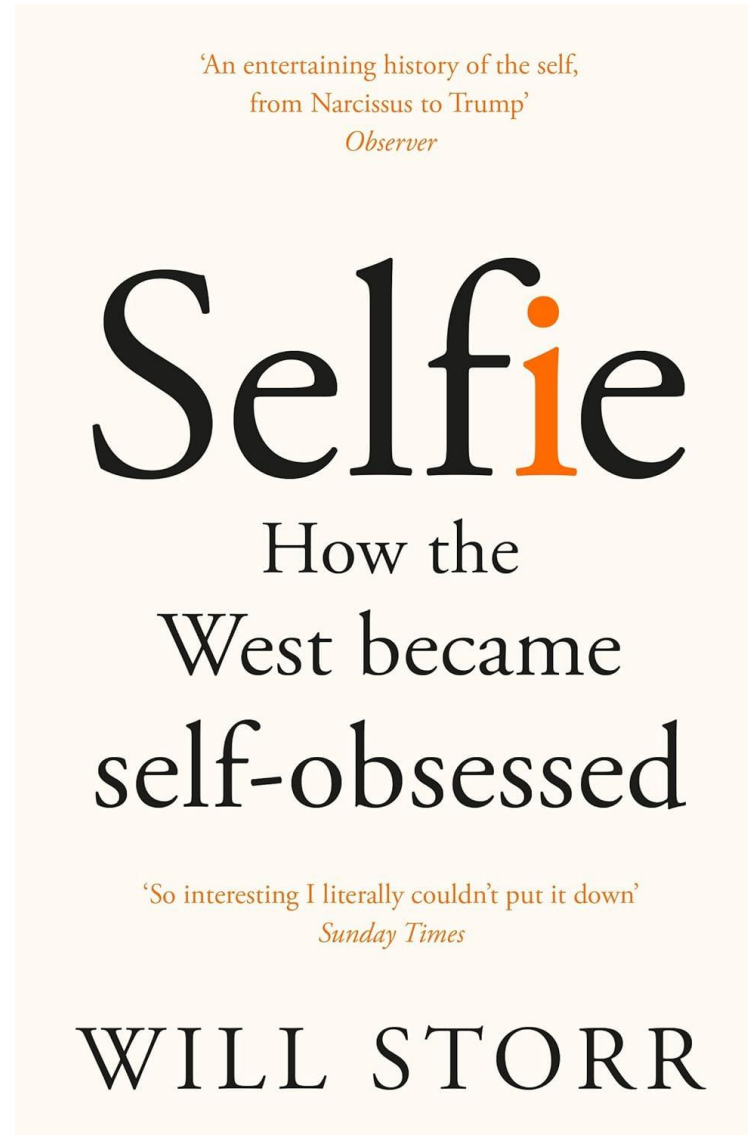
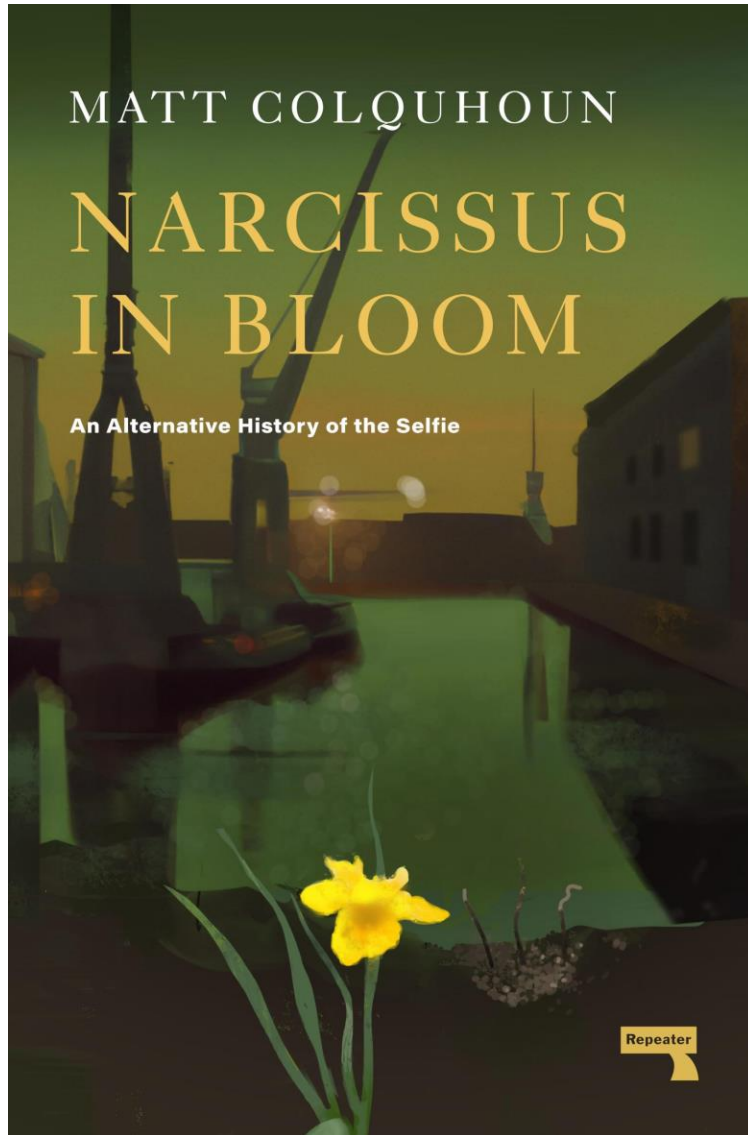


Perhaps the most culturally complex moments on social media occur when we become an audience for ourselves, when we can credibly **consume our own selves as a product, as a spectacle.**



Film Stills, 1977-1980
Cindy Sherman





data and desire

You are being tracked. Dissolve into the material flows of desire.

– O(rphan) d(rift>), 2012

Dronestagram

The Drone's-Eye View



Through the processes of abstraction - **recognition** (identification) is now starting to replace **representation** as the primary function of photography in the networked age.

Photography's holy trinity of the **index**, **punctum** and **representation** are reinvented – where **representation** is replaced by AI's increasingly sophisticated **image recognition** algorithms and the 'prick' of Barthes *punctum* becomes indexed as an identified target point within a **militarized image** for a potential **drone** strike or a consumer target for **surveillance capitalism**.



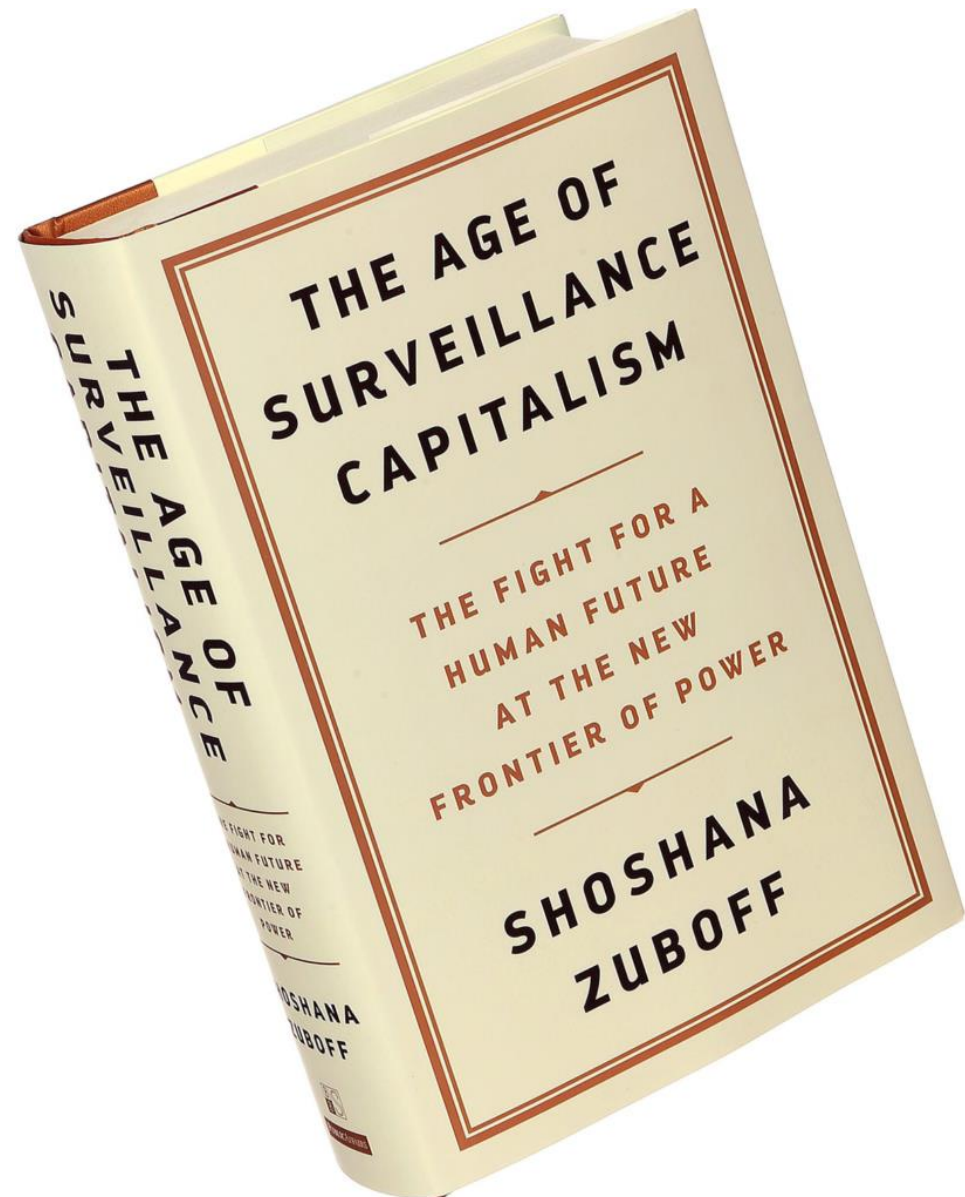
**THE RISE OF
SURVEILLANCE
CAPITALISM**



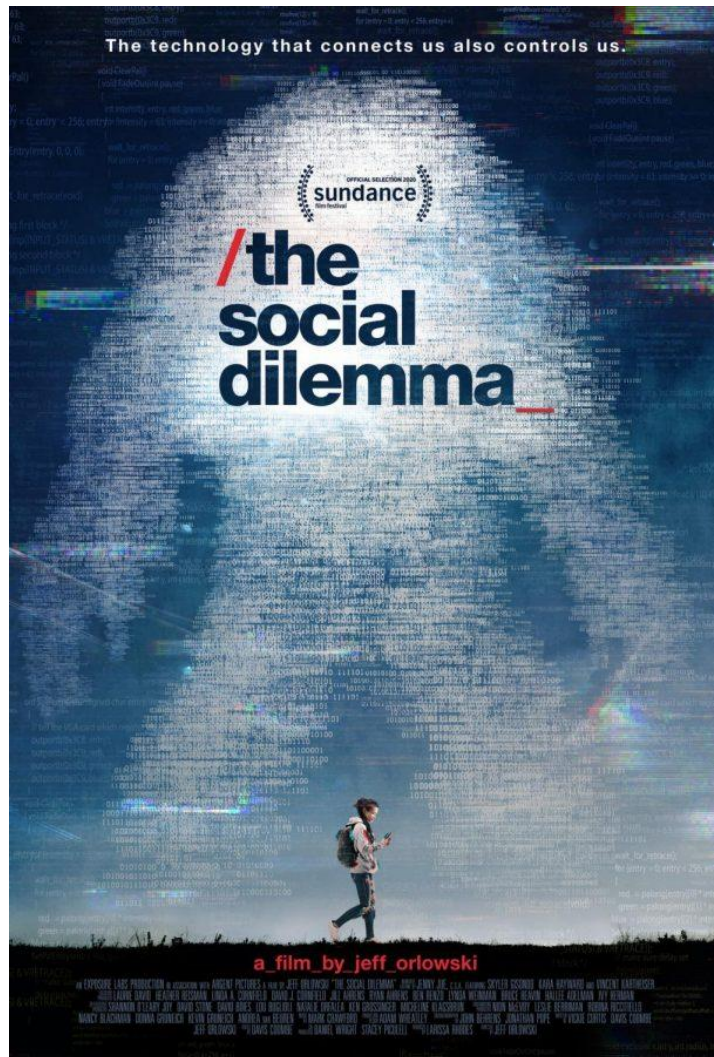
Age of Surveillance Capitalism: “We Thought We Were Searching Google, But Google Was Searching Us”

“Awareness requires a rupture with the world we take for granted; then old categories of experience are called into question and revised”

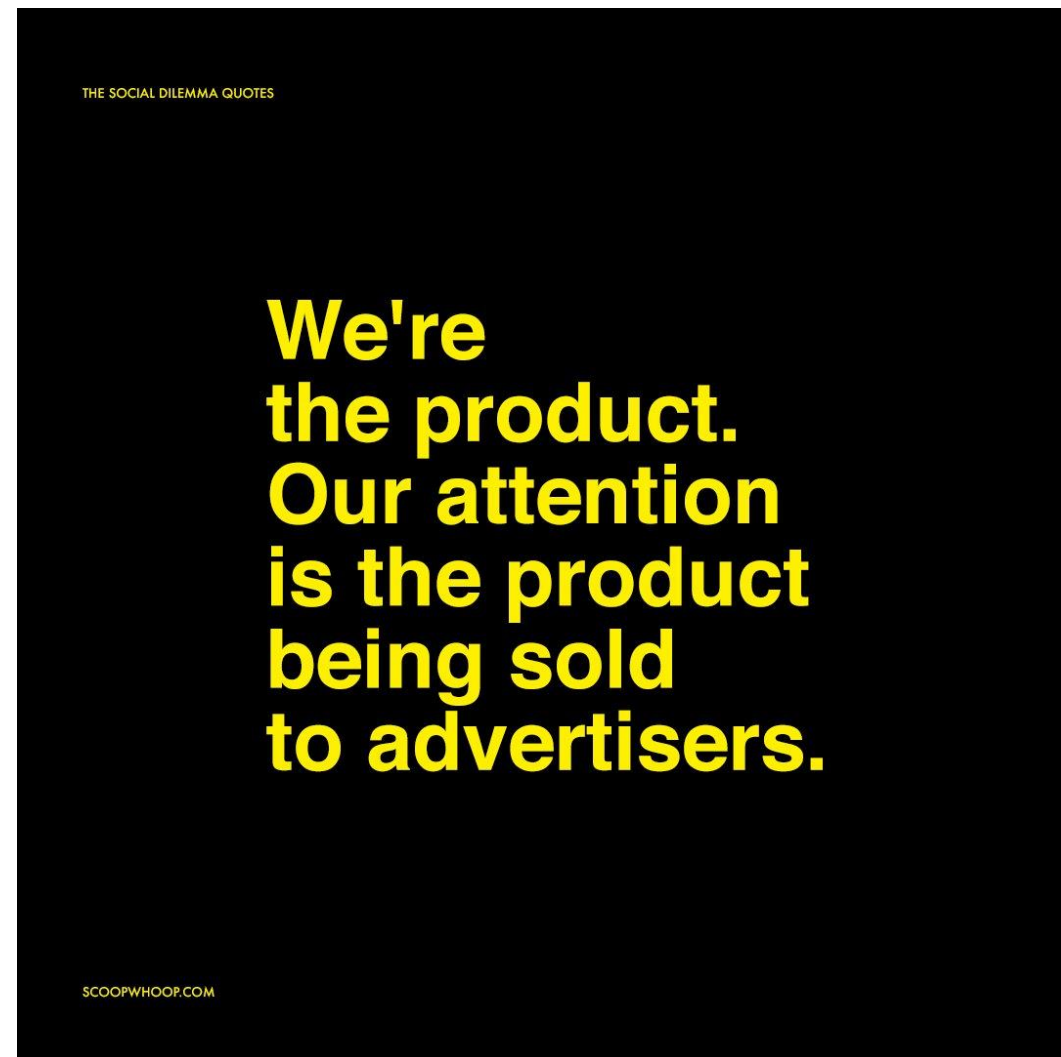
Shoshana Zuboff
American Professor & Author
Born 1951



Identity and Self



Identity as Cultural Construct



A young man with dark hair is looking down at a smartphone he is holding. The scene is dimly lit with a strong red light source from the right, casting a glow on his face and shirt. Overlaid on the image are several semi-transparent digital elements: a photo of three people in the upper left, a partial photo of a person on the right, and a text message bubble on the right that says "I can't wait for this weekend!".

**THE TECHNOLOGY
THAT CONNECTS US
ALSO CONTROLS US**



The Spectacle of the Self

Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other

Digital Stockholm Syndrome in the Post-Ontological Age

- Digital Stockholm Syndrome in the Post-Ontological Age by Mark Jarzombek explores the complex relationship between individuals and the digital world.
- **The book discusses the psychological and sociological impacts of technology on modern society.** Even the title itself hints at the idea of a psychological attachment or dependence on the digital realm, likening it to the psychological phenomenon known as Stockholm Syndrome.
- The **Post-Ontological Age** refers to a period where the traditional understanding of existence and reality is challenged or transformed by the digital landscape.
- The book investigates how our **identities, perceptions, and relationships** are shaped by the **digital environment**, and it likely delves into the **concept of the self** in an age dominated by digital technologies.



Identity and the Self

identity as cultural construct

what does the **contemporary self** want?

It wants to be **recognised**, wants to be **connected**: It
wants to be **visible**.

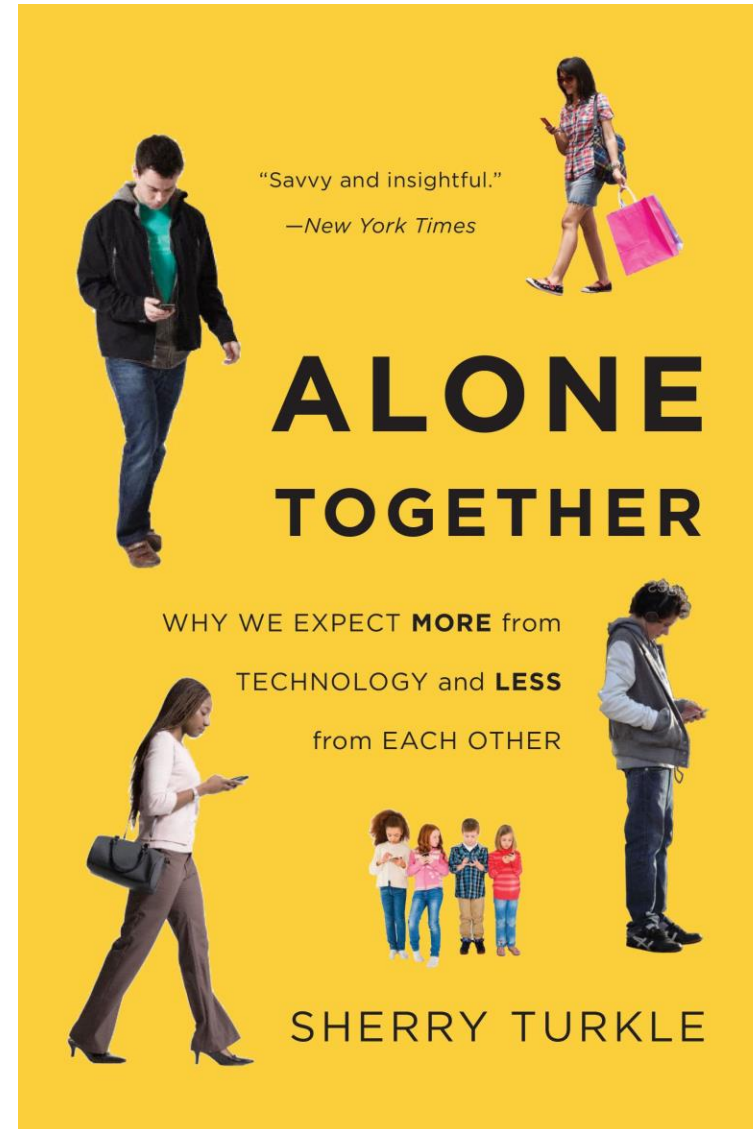
End of Solitude (2009), William Deresiewicz

ALONE TOGETHER

We expect more from technology and less from each other. We create technology to provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship.

These days, when people are alone, or feel a moment of boredom, **they tend to reach for a device.** In a movie theater, at a stop sign, at the checkout line at a supermarket and, yes, at a memorial service, **reaching for a device becomes so natural that we start to forget that there is a reason, a good reason, to sit still with our thoughts: It does honor to what we are thinking about. It does honor to ourselves.**

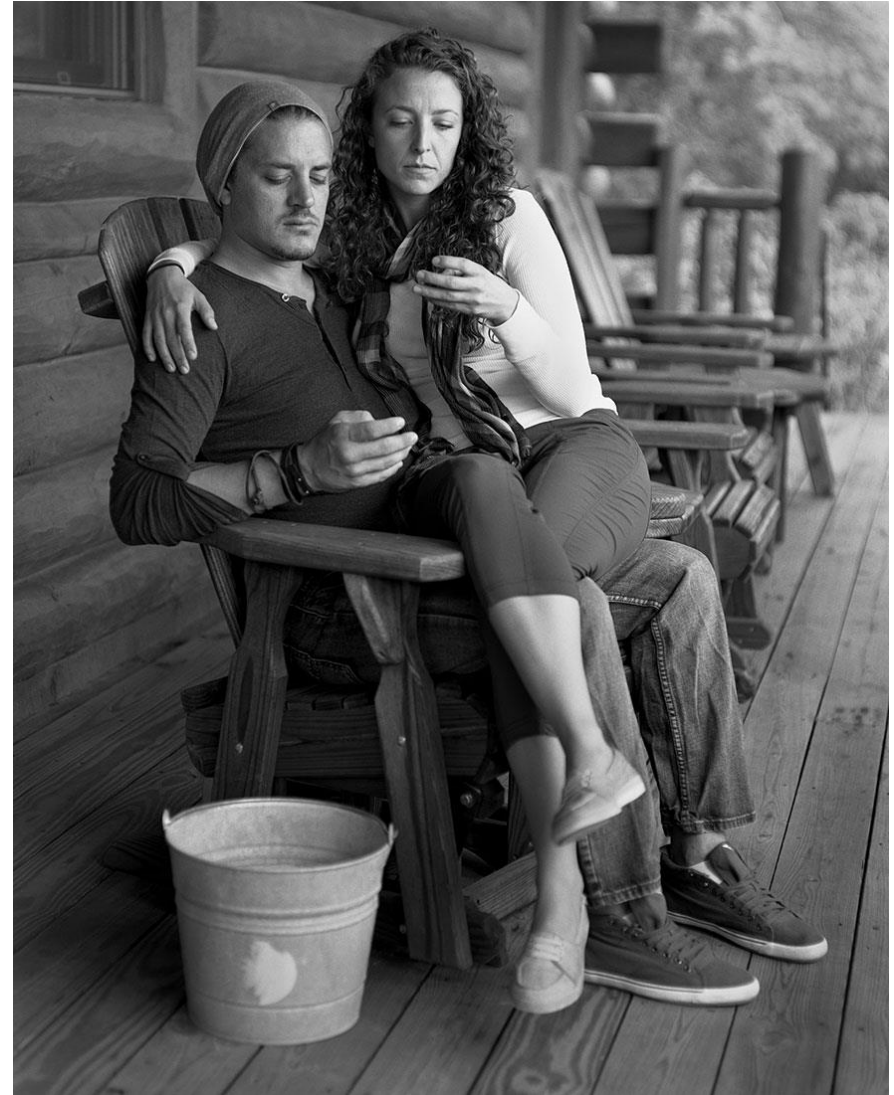
Alone Together: Why We Expect More from
Technology and Less from Each Other
by Sherry Turkle



ALONE TOGETHER

Human relationships are rich and they're messy and they're demanding. And we clean them up with technology. We sacrifice **conversation** for mere **connection**.

American photographer **Eric Pickersgill** photoshopped away the smartphones and digital devices from his portraits of everyday life. The project "Removed" aims to show our addiction to modern technology, social media, and hyper-connectivity. Pickersgill knows that he's also amongst the addicted.





He achieved the surreal effect in his photography art by asking strangers and friends to remain in position, taking the shot and then removing the devices in final photoshopped pictures.

