

Infocracy



**BYUNG-CHUL
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Infocracy

Digitalization and the Crisis of Democracy

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Originally published in German as *Infokratie. Digitalisierung und die Krise der Demokratie* © MSB Matthes & Seitz Berlin Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Berlin 2021. All rights reserved.

This English edition © Polity Press, 2022.

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
101 Station Landing
Suite 300
Medford, MA 02155, USA

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ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-5299-3

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022932415

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The Information Regime

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*.

The disciplinary regime is the form of domination characteristic of industrial capitalism. Its form is mechanical: each person is a cog in the disciplinary machinery of power. Disciplinary power enters the nerves and sinews, and 'out of a formless clay, an inapt Body', it produces a 'machine'.¹ It fabricates 'docile' bodies: 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.'² Docile bodies are production machines. They are not *bearers of data and information*; they are *bearers of energy*. Under a disciplinary regime, human beings are drilled to become *labouring cattle*.

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.

Foucault's disciplinary regime uses isolation as a means of domination: 'isolation is the primary condition of total submission'.³ The panopticon, with its isolated cells, is the ideal symbol of the disciplinary regime. Isolation, however, cannot be transferred on to the information regime, which exploits communication in particular. Under the information regime, surveillance takes place via data. The isolated inmates of the disciplinary panopticon do not produce data because they do *not communicate*.

The target of biopolitical disciplinary power is the body: 'For capitalist society, it was biopolitics, the biological, the somatic, the corporeal, that mattered more than anything else.'⁴ The biopolitical regime inserts the body into a production and surveillance machinery that optimizes it by way of a disciplinary orthopaedics. The information regime, whose emergence Foucault appears to have missed, does not pursue a *biopolitical agenda*. It is not interested in the body. It seizes *the psyche* by way of a *psychopolitics*. The body is now mainly understood in terms of aesthetics and fitness. At least in Western information capitalism, the body has for the most part been liberated from the disciplinary power that drilled it to become a labouring machine. The body has instead been seized by the beauty industry.

Every form of rule pursues a specific *politics of visibility*. For a sovereign regime, ostentatious demonstrations of power are essential. The spectacle is its medium. The ruling power presents itself with theatrical glamour. Such *glamour* even legitimizes it. Ceremonies and symbols of power stabilize rule. Pageantry, symbols of violence, grim feasts and ceremonial punishments are all part of the theatre and spectacle staged by the ruling power. Physical torture is publicly exhibited to achieve the greatest effect.