Part 3
Images, Art and Society

Chapter 5
Who Cares About Privacy? – The Documedia Surplus Value

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I. Prologue: The Virus and the Web

These Covid-19 crisis times are also times of 'smart working', and the question arises as to what is 'smart' about it. Let's start from an unquestionable point. As always, the current crisis is an ongoing and accelerating trend. For example, the transition from labour to mobilisation, occurring for at least twenty years, has blurred the distinction between working time and living time. Initially this meant the working as if you were on vacation, but of course it now signifies that you *also* work on vacation. There are two ways to view this phenomenon, and they are not mutually exclusive. However, the first is confined to the past, while the second looks towards the future.

Firstly, capital is expanding its dominion by no longer overseeing the means and places of production, a trend decisively driven by the virus outbreak's security requirements. There is some truth in this view, as one can easily understand. The problem, though, is that it involves a scheming and plotting supernatural entity, i.e., capital, or a modern Satan (wasn't it Marx who insisted on the Faustian character of capital?). But the collapse of stock markets, the unpreparedness of governments, and the current general turmoil should at least raise the legitimate suspicion that Satan was not quite in command of things and failed to promptly warn his followers so that they could take full advantage of the outbreak.

The second perspective, which is perhaps more complicated, does not involve Satan, but the human being. This view can give us not only hope, but actual solutions for the future – a future that will obviously look very little like the past, since the current crisis is of an epochal character, bringing together the two great components of the world, souls and mechanisms, life and technology.

Let's start from a simple observation: if computers could only be used in the office, at certain times and places, would we actually 'live' at home, leaving computers behind? Of course not. At work, at home, and when commuting between home and work, we always look at our mobile

phones, both for work and for other reasons. This is because mobilisation is not a command that comes from outside, but the fundamental characteristic of every soul. In fact, every soul is driven by vital urges, be they the remote consciousness of death or the very pressing need to have lunch.

We humans are particularly maladapted organisms because we grow slowly and are poorly endowed by nature. However, we also have mechanisms to enhance our scarce resources. To put it succinctly, we are organisms related to a series of automata which are indispensable to us. This is why even when we could be inert *à la* Oblomov[1] we tinker with our mobile phones instead.

The difference between organisms and automata is very simple. An organism has only two positions, on or off, dead or alive. An automaton, on the other hand, works serially: on/off, on/off, and so on, until the bulb burns out or the battery deteriorates. An organism has an internal purpose, its end is its end, so to speak, and in between there is life. An automaton has an external purpose: knives are made to cut, books to be read, fines to be paid.

This mass of external purposes enriches the life of the soul, giving it a little more meaning. Indeed, this is why pensioners often get depressed: depression is but the revelation of bare life, of the organism without automata. This is also why the human organism desperately requires automata, from clubs to fire to society to culture. But – and this is the main point – if we remove the organism, the soul, then the automata make no sense. Imagine the British Library or Times Square in a world without a soul (something that we can imagine quite easily today).

However, let's get back to Earth. Remote working is still the offshoot of a vanishing old world, a world where souls produce by using automata. But in the meantime, for about ten years now, automata have become capable of recording the souls' smallest gestures, recording them and replicating them. This is what artificial intelligence is. Instead of focusing on automata usurping control and stealing our jobs, let us view the matter more carefully, though not smartly as this term always involves a catch. Firstly, we should note that automata have no reason to usurp control as despite their name, they require souls to function. Secondly, if we lived in a fully automated world, the Covid-19 crisis would have been less serious.

Big Internet platforms are huge automata that record the souls' smallest gestures in an exchange that seems fair (I give you free information, and you give me free information). Yet, this quid pro quo is not fair as automa-

1 Goncharov (1859/2005).

ta can capitalise the information and translate it into automation and distribution, as well as profit, whereas souls cannot. However, automata cannot live and produce wealth without souls. They have certainly never produced as much wealth as this very moment when all souls are on the Internet. Automata need souls just as souls need food. And if souls die, automata are finished. Therefore, the survival of souls is indispensable on the end of all things, the end of time – total apocalypse. Of course, this only applies to the association of souls and automata – the rest of the world will get along great without us, but we won't be there.

Let me explain what the only kind of 'smart working' entails: doing nothing, 'far niente', that is, living, cultivating one's hobbies and interests, studying, writing, exercising and eating. Each of our acts, today, is recorded and produces value, precisely because it instructs the automata that live by imitating souls. This value must be redistributed, but first it must be acknowledged. Think of the groups that are the most exposed today, namely all those who are employed and poorly paid. What can be done for them? Those who fought against automation, in their case, may have done so for the noblest of reasons, but ultimately caused their own misfortune.

And what will support the souls once they have been replaced by automata? Digital welfare: the taxation of the enormous surplus value that souls, by the mere fact of living, generate in their interaction with automata. I repeat, the great Internet platforms have never earned as much as they do today, and if we think about it, the answer to the questions 'who will pay Corona bonds?' and 'what is the EU doing?' is very simple. Platforms will pay Corona bonds and the EU will collect the taxation and redistribute it in terms of welfare. Welfare means freedom from material needs, but also from ignorance and prejudice – therefore, it also means culture, i.e., a resource that seems particularly valuable in these weeks of quarantine.

If the virus, as is to be expected, accelerates these ongoing processes, then the immense amount of blood shed will not have been for nothing. But for this to happen we need to think of the future not as the projection of the past (that's what 'smart working' amounts to) but as a radically new era that is coming forward unceremoniously and will really change the world for the better.

II. Privacy, Post-Truth, and Documedia Surplus Value

92 per cent of young people do not read privacy terms and conditions but maintain that doing so is important. I do not know how many old

people like me do *not* read the terms and conditions nor believe it to be important, but I wouldn't be surprised if the percentage was even higher. Not only because many people are willing to give up their privacy to share their thoughts, words and works for free on social networks, but because, and above all, the centrality of privacy is a thing of the past. It belongs to the world of bourgeois freedoms and civil rights.

We have excellent reasons to regret the intrinsic values of that world, the values of Weber and Mann, but that world is no longer ours, and it hasn't been ours for a long time. Totalitarianisms, world wars and especially the mass media have generated a different world, one where the relationship between people and their public image, as well as the concept of 'privacy', has completely changed. Privacy is obviously the least of problems for those (over half of the world) who post content on social networks, and those (almost all the world) who consent to the use of cookies, eager to get on with it and access the given service. It is not a question of bourgeois confidentiality, of decorum, of minding one's own business with due discretion: it is a question of labour.

Similarly, the relationship with the truth has also changed. The fact that one is willing to accept the existence of 'alternative facts' is the result of multiple circumstances: ideological ones, like the postmodern critique of objectivity; sociological ones, like the formation of the 'society of the spectacle'; and above all technological ones, which have determined what I call 'documedia revolution'. The latter is the boom of recording that has determined an unprecedented multiplication of documents – the so-called 'big data' – and a horizontalization of the media through social networks. Now, instead of focusing on the phenomenon itself, I think it is important to look at its context and at what has made it possible.

The real problem, in the perspective I propose, is neither privacy nor truth, but the disproportion between the data available to the general users (the 'mobilised') and the companies that manage the web platforms (the 'mobilisers') which I define 'documedia surplus value'. As we carelessly give up our privacy and navigate in the waters of post-truth, we produce wealth. This, in my opinion, is the essential core and the preliminary condition to focus on, to gain a correct understanding of epiphenomena such as the transformations of privacy and post-truth. How much does an unemployed person care about their privacy? Consider the smartphone-owning beggars we see today: would they be happier if their privacy were protected, or if their mobilisation were recognised as work, and paid, recognising the documedia surplus value? Or think of those who view the web as a space to vent their dissatisfactions, most often motivated, but blamed on often imaginary causes: what do they care about post-truth?

Now, privacy is priceless, even in the sense that it does not necessarily matter to many, and it is not clear how it can be protected. The same applies to truth which is certainly a great good, but only for the few (usually scientists) who care about it, while for most of humanity post-truth (the current version of myth) works just fine. But the value produced by our mobilisation on the web which involves the renunciation of privacy as well as production and distribution of post-truth, has a price. It can be quantified and paid by platforms without impacting national budgets. This would decrease social discontent, and perhaps make politics more palatable, making it more honourable, feasible, and rewarding to serve less scared and angry people.

III. From the Superstructure to the Structure

With a move that Marx would have defined typical of bourgeois economics, the ongoing revolution debate concentrates on its superstructures, not its actual structure. In Europe, the United States and progressively around the world, daily acts that until a very recent past would have disappeared into thin air today are recorded and therefore capitalised upon. Note that China has a huge competitive advantage, its one billion and three hundred and seventy million inhabitants with one billion mobile phones. Social objects, those that would not exist without society such as money, titles, and status, require recording. That is, they follow the Object = Recorded Act rule. A social object is the result of a social act which involves at least two people, or a person and a delegated machine, or two delegated machines that can be recorded. The recording boom involves a proportional growth in social objects, thus generating the most ubiquitous and informed capital in history. Every byte, for those few with the means to interpret it (i.e., web platform managers and web analysts) is a bearer of knowledge and generates value.

Even assigning a very low value, for example a thousandth of a euro to every byte generated daily, the total value would be € 4 billion per day. Because of this enormous data production, our world is not liquid and elusive, as postmodernists claimed. It is perhaps the most financially stable world that history has ever known since everything is recorded, everything is considered, and everyone can be held accountable. Ultimately, everything is transferred to the Documedia Capital account, the heir of financial capital and industrial capital which replaced goods and finance with an abundant and more manageable asset-documents.

Documedia Capital does not provide the means of production, but the means of interpretation. It correlates and confers meaning from the data which it owns to resell or reuse. Today's workers are not subjected to monotonous or tiring tasks, unlike the industrial age, but they must pay for the means of production, i.e., the web terminals. Production is at the bottom, knowledge at the top, although obviously the mobilised can access knowledge (for example, books or encyclopaedias), except by doing so they produce further and much more precious knowledge about themselves that they cannot access. This unprecedented and largely unforeseen way of producing wealth through documents needs to be recognised and understood. This is necessary to establish a new social contract. In particular, in Europe and the United States where the advancement of populism triggered by a formal unemployment is as extensive as real mobilisation is capillary.

This gap in accessing data is key to understanding the present. In theory, the relationship between the mobiliser and the mobilised is fair: the first offers services, the second pays with information. However, it differs in practice. There is a crucial asymmetry between what the mobiliser gives and the actions of the mobilised which can also be represented in terms of truth and post-truth. While the mobilised have considerable post-truth, the mobiliser has substantial. 'Hyper-truth' refers to the quality of the knowledge that the mobiliser acquires about the mobilised. From this point of view, the difference between the data available to the mobiliser (who owns the platforms) and the mobilised (who simply have access to it) could not be more astounding.

From the point of view of the mobilised, documedia surplus value produces a monadisation of knowledge. Each of us is a monad in the sense that we see the world, the World Wide Web, from our own very personal perspective, determined by the coordinates that the web algorithms have attached to us. So, that World Wide Web becomes the description of our home, and universal communication becomes the interlocution with the unhappy few with whom we share prejudices and preferences. We all live in different worlds – as sleepwalkers, it would seem, if we follow Heraclitus, since 'The awake share a common world, but the asleep turn aside into private worlds'.[2]

The image of the world available to the mobilisers, the managers of the platforms, is completely different. If we follow the Kantian categorisation, in terms of quantity, the platform's data is enormous, while the mobilised

2 Diels/Kranz (1951) 12B89.

are comparatively poor. This is despite our impression of being inundated with information. In terms of quality, the platform's data is rich. This is because they are individual and entail very detailed profiling, while the data available to the mobilised is general-generic and refers not to individuals, but general notions. In terms of transparency, the mobilisers' data is secret, while the mobilised's data is blatant and in the public domain. Finally, in terms of modality, the mobilisers' data is real as it records actual behaviours on the net, while the data accessible to the mobilised is a combination of real information and fake news (Table 1).

	Mobilisers	Mobilised
Quantity	*Big data*	*Small data*
Quality	*Rich data*	*Poor data*
Relation	*Secret data*	*Public data*
Modality	*Real data*	*Virtual data*

Table 1: Quantity, Quality, Relation and Modality of Data for Mobilisers and Mobilised

So, let's proceed to an analysis of this disproportion to highlight the documedia surplus-value.

1. Quantity: big data

Let's start with quantity. For every bite of information on the mobilised there are several recordings on the part of the mobiliser. Google Translate has capitalised on all the existing texts on the web, and Tesla cars improve their software by collecting data through Autopilot, Tesla's semi-automatic driving system. While providing a service, you acquire information that is not found in the simple passive documentation of commodities. For example, a wine's label informs only us, while an online purchase informs us, and additionally others about us. The power of Google or Amazon lies in an innovative scheme based on the development of old things (the register, in the case of Google; the postal market, in the case of Amazon). However, in a new context this scheme has exponentially increased through the possibility of recording, and subsequently, so has capitalisation. It may not be immediately clear to what extent the accumulation of data, regardless

of the knowledge it provides,[3] constitutes capitalisation per se, but this will be perfectly evident if we consider that money itself is data.

If money is a commodity like any other, as economists remind us about, it is primarily because it is a document like any other such as a passport which also has complicated doodles and characteristic colours. With a passport, a state authorises a citizen to leave the country (as it was originally) and with a banknote it authorises him to buy things. Since there are many more citizens willing to buy than those wishing to leave, banknotes are more numerous than passports. Also, since money changes hands, banknotes are not nominal, and – since the exchanges are done quickly and may involve illiterate agents – to prevent misunderstandings about their value, in most States (albeit with the significant exception of the United States) banknotes have different sizes and colours. This allows money to be used as documents by illiterate persons. Moreover, regarding both passports and banknotes, the state did not invent anything new. It simply allowed paper to set services and quantify value, a practice that originates from our past and coincides with the evolution of human cultures.

Many economists have noted that money is a recordal system, although they often speak of 'information',[4] namely a low-cost means to keep track of previous resource allocations.[5] Further, that money is superfluous when agents have access to all their previous mutual interactions[6] because ultimately money is nothing but memory. This thesis has been developed in particular by American economist Narayana Kocherlakota.[7] The memory is an agent's knowledge of the acts of all the agents that he has had direct or indirect contact with previously. Money is an object that, unlike commodities, you cannot manufacture yourself and is available in fixed quantities. And yet, these amounts of money somehow form the limits of human memory and represent an artificial informational deposit which ultimately results in a form of primitive memory. Instead of noting a given or rendered service, a universally accepted document is created that sums up the annotation in an anonymous form which is particularly interesting for the 'narcos' and the mafia.

In an environment where memory replaces money, every social actor has an imaginary account. When an actor gives assets to another actor, his

3 This issue I will discuss in relation to quality (III.2).
4 Ostroy (1973).
5 Lucas (1980).
6 Aiyagari/Wallace (1991).
7 Kocherlakota (1996).

account increases, along with his future ability to receive assets. When an actor receives assets from another actor, her account decreases, and this decreases her ability to receive assets in the future. In an environment endowed with memory, an agent's account does not only depend on her transfers. If Tom gives something to Dick, and Dick's account is empty, Tom's account does not increase. So, Tom's account is not only based on his actions, but also on those of the actors he is in contact with and their contacts. This environment is the web. The environment in which money is replaced by memory also has the advantage of being able to account for finer transactions: favours, reputation, physical pleasures (intellectual assets, on the other hand, are an exception to this exchange system, in agreement with Franklyn's principle that sharing an idea does not mean losing it). At this point, big data is the absolute memory and the absolute currency, and the exchanges that take place on the web are exchanges in the strictest sense of the term. That is, they produce value by being recorded in the great worldwide calculation of give and take.

In fact, between traditional currency and documedia money – 'documoney' if you will – there is no match. The credit guarantee and the exchange can be implemented in a much more effective way through the collection of data. This informs the state of the market (not only economic, but political, demographic, etc.) incomparably better than currency can. In fact, the latter only provides economic information through a rough summary of the price of products. As for the value reserve, it is still left to currency, for now, though in the context of a growing marginalisation of banks, which are increasingly becoming value deposits and must renounce their consulting functions. The progress of cryptocurrencies suggests, however, that soon even the credit guarantee will cease to be a privilege of the banks and even, in the last instance, sovereign states. But here we are already moving from the realm of quantity to that of quality.

2. *Quality: rich data*

So, let's come to quality. Currency is a datum. But, more importantly, data is qualitatively much richer than money. Or, more accurately, the mobiliser's data is rich since it holds information regarding the individual's details. Conversely, the data available to the mobilised comprises general information, the kind available on the web, products labels, and price tags. The rise of data as knowledge of the individual is an event that has far greater social and political repercussions than those related to the mere protection of privacy. Though formally, our privacy is preserved by

big data collecting and collating everything about us, except our name. However, true transformations do not occur on the basis of privacy, but regarding industry and capital.

Under the profile of industry, rich data entails a decisive transformation.[8] A world that for centuries had believed that the individual was unknowable could only be captured via types, classes and species has now discovered that the individual is not ineffable and that the production of the individual is not unfeasible. On the one hand, we now know individuals including their heartbeats and musical preferences. Indeed, perhaps the only thing that remains unknown is their name: but what does it matter at this point? On the other hand, the production of individualised commodities is economically sustainable again as it was in pre-industrial times. This is true both in traditional industries and for digital artisans (makers) that produce items with 3D printers using individualised parameters. This relationship between production and knowledge of the individual, once again, makes documents much more powerful than money.

But above all, rich data entails a radical transformation of the economy. Traditionally, documents had commemorative value: they oversaw an agreement, maintained a social object in existence. But in the case of big data, the point of interest shifts from the past to the future. The value of documents is now predictive which can multiply as now machine learning methods not only use data to predict data, but to verify previous predictions, precisely by learning autonomously. The data that documents contain can provide general information on large sections of society and on the market, such as big data or specific information on individual consumer behaviour (who, it has to be noted, is also a producer), and this is the case with rich data.

In short, documents as commodities allow for unprecedented individual profiles, knowledge, and production – just think of the homepage of large online sites that cater to the consumer by providing individualised suggestions, decreeing the end of the standardised market. The phenomenon appears to be the opposite of the shadow economy. The shadow economy is a commodity production that secures a hidden profit to the producer and is not quantified in the nation's gross domestic product. Here, instead, we have a production of commodities that are even more profitable than money itself, that is – as we have seen when talking about big data – highly informative and individualised documents generated through mobilising web users. Though, this mobilisation does

8 Carpo (2017).

not bring economic benefits to the producer, whose activity is not even conceptualised as labour.

This process has a definite impact on the whole market. The classic industry has a pyramidal structure, and this makes it unsuitable to compete with the new internet giants. While these companies only have very few employees (since we are the ones who do the work), they are better positioned, when companies lose favour on the market, to wide-spread intermediation by the web. Traditional, but forward-looking industries such as Daimler in Germany, have realized this reality and integrate the hierarchical management pyramid with interdisciplinary and cross-functional groups. That is, transversal groups endowed with humanistic skills, will gradually form the new core of the company.[9] On the production side, which is more closely related to the passage from commodities to documents, a transition from company to market has occurred. The latter, in fact, constantly increases its self-awareness (whereas before it was short of information compared to companies), and therefore becomes increasingly efficient while companies must run after it.

3. Relation: secret data

Once again, the privacy violation appears as a secondary problem compared to a more general framework, which relates to the production of value rather than the protection of secrecy. This appears particularly evident precisely when one examines the category of the relation which more directly relates to privacy. From this perspective, the mobiliser has secret or at least exclusive data in the sense that only he has them, while the mobilised accesses data in the public domain, which from a strategic perspective is infinitely less relevant. Indeed, one can distinguish two levels of recording that account for the asymmetry of web exchanges in terms of secrecy.[10] On the one hand, the infrastructure recording is accessible to a hacker or to the police but also to the companies that manage web platforms. On the other hand, conversational recording is explicit and accessible to the mobilised.

The latter is therefore the only recording with respect to which the mobilised are aware of dealing with privacy issues, as it is the extension of classical communication contexts. But already at this level the mobilisers tend

9 Mayer-Schönberger/Ramge (2018).
10 Domenicucci (2018).

to underestimate the advantages that come from owning a continuous, centralised and always active archive. To make an example, an Austrian law student, resorting to a European law, has asked Facebook for all the material collected on him and received a CD with 1200 PDF pages, including the comments he had deleted. And even in the case of IM services[11] where the message disappears once read by the recipient, the content remains accessible to the company that manages the platform, clearly another obvious case of asymmetry between mobilisers and mobilised. Even in the competition between companies, digital technologies create a huge cognitive asymmetry that allows capital to first destroy existing forms of business and then manage entire sectors of the economy in a monopolistic way.

But it is infrastructural recording that provides the mobilisers with the greatest benefits. They accumulate data about the mobilised of which the latter are not even aware. This includes the brightness of the place they happen to be, not to mention all the bodily data that are recorded by devices like the Apple Watch which, again, is bought by the mobilised and has the obvious effect of giving a huge amount of free data to the mobilisers. Whether we are awake or asleep, the gigantic archive that we familiarly call the web is always growing and producing. If we assume that 90 per cent of all data currently stored in the world has been generated only in the last two years, it is already clear that the digital transformation's impact will soon be equivalent, if not superior, to the industrial revolution. In that case, the driving force was given by steam and mechanical devices. Here the revolution makes no noise: it leaves *traces* and creates *documents*.

These documents are secret in many ways, but in a different form from those involved in conversational recording. The latter, so to speak, were 'plain' secrets, expressed in natural language, whereas here we are dealing with secrets that are often unrecognisable and require tools to interpret them. Once again, this reality constitutes more than a privacy violation. Indeed, can privacy really be unknown to those directly involved? Of course, this does not correspond to the traditional concept of privacy, and most likely to no general concept of privacy at all. Rather than a violation of the private sphere, therefore, we are dealing with a new form of capitalisation (and labour) whose dimensions have not yet been defined.

11 'IM' refers to instant messaging.

4. Modality: real data

So, let's come to the last category, that of modality, which is the category most directly concerned with post-truth. From the perspective of modality, the mobiliser has real data because they reflect the actual behaviours of the mobilised. Obviously, you could create algorithms to confuse the results, and maybe you do, but quantitatively speaking most of the documents would remain truthful. On the other hand, the mobilised navigate in a sea of true, false or purely verisimilar information. This is the world of post-truth.

This suggests once again that the web is a document rather than an information context:[12] a docusphere rather than an infosphere. According to the theoreticians of the infosphere,[13] information is essentially made up of well-formed, true and meaningful data, so that false information is not really information. However, on the web there is also post-truth which is anything but true. Recording can explain it as it is a written act, although it refers to things that are not true,[14] and information cannot. So, even in this case we are dealing with a phenomenon that finds its condition of possibility in the unprecedented formation of Documedia Capital, and we must bear this in mind to understand the profound nature of post-truth.

Post-truth, in other words, is explained by the documedia revolution and is one of the side effects of the formation of Documedia Capital, just like the mobilisation on the web. As for the way it works, I propose to outline it once again using the Kantian categories, but this time – this being a communicative sphere – I will use them in the version offered by the four 'conversational maxims' enunciated forty years ago by English philosopher Paul Grice.[15]

The principle of quality says: be genuine and provide truthful information to the best of your knowledge. Trump says that Obama spied on him, but it is not true. A simpleton would say that Trump is a liar; a man of the world would say that what Trump expresses is an alternative truth. The term 'alternative truth' is the tribute that vice pays to virtue, but it is also a formally radical chic construct which raises the suspicion that the truth is fascist and dogmatic and claims to emancipate while deceiving. The man of the world might have learnt this trick in a good university

12 Ferraris (2013).
13 Floridi (2014).
14 Ferraris (2017).
15 Grice (1975).

where liberal and naive professors preach that truth should be farewelled in the name of justice like the professor of *The Blue Angel*. They impart that solidarity is more important than objectivity, and democracy, more important than truth. There are at least two weaknesses to this idealistic defence of democracy, or, if you will, two precious lessons that can be drawn from post-truth. The first is that the audience addressed by the philosophers is already trained to worship the truth but must be sensitised to respecting solidarity and otherness. The second is that, after having offered an involuntary ideological assist to populists and having deprived the intellectuals of their only weapon (the pride, if not the courage, of the truth), postmodernists did not consider that a democracy without truth is not a democracy, and likewise if solidarity prevails over objectivity. This produces an uncontrollable drift (after all, the mafia or amoral familism are notable examples of the prevalence of solidarity over objectivity).

Grice's maxim of quantity recites: Do not be reticent or redundant. Aware of the fact that the best reticence is redundancy, post-truth engages in the industrial production of nonsense. In terms of quantity, post-truth is favoured by technology. There is a ceaseless production of documents on the web and each receiver can become a transmitter and even, a re-transmitter (the nonsense reaches its critical mass thanks to the re-tweet, the forwarding that inaugurates virality). Is this production systematic and intentional as claimed by the Marxist doctrine of ideology, according to which those who control the means of production control the ideas? The answer is no: behind such nonsense there is no great puppeteer, no intelligent and strategic capital. What we inadequately call 'capital' is precisely a documedia system, that is, I repeat, the union between the constitutive power of documents ('documentality') and the mobilising power of the media, generating behaviours that are difficult to explain with age-old categories belonging to a different world. Hence, a second teaching of post-truth is the following: let's try to explain what happens with different criteria, in particular by seeing the convergence (very accidental and not very intelligent) between a technological organisation and a natural human weakness. We might understand something more about the world we live in.

The maxim of relation is: Be pertinent. But pertinence is a rare, burdensome and obnoxious quality, whereas the hoax is mediagenic and viral. It is gossip, heir of the fairy-tale, the fantastic, and the futurist words in freedom. But once again, postmodernism contributed too, by claiming that the world depends on our language and our conceptual schemes. Which, if said in a seminar, can make you smile or think (do dinosaurs really depend on the word 'dinosaur'?), but which outside of the classroom can justify the idea that

things are the docile subordinates of words. If you say that there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, then there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and if you say, on 1 May 2003, that the war in Iraq is over, then it's over. These hoaxes are much more demanding than the claim that a restaurant in Padua serves human flesh, but at the same time they manifest the human lordship over language that philosophers and non-philosophers were so passionate about in the twentieth century. Of course, now during the third teaching of post-truth, we recognise the vanity.

Finally, the maxim of modality is: 'Avoid ambiguity' and *fashionable nonsense*. However, people like nonsense – this is an unquestionable truth. It is neither true nor post-true that humans naturally seek knowledge, as Aristotle claimed. Rather they hate the potential consequences of their lack of knowledge which is a very different thing. Although the truth sooner or later comes out, the search for truth can hardly be carried out with bare hands and no cultural training. Augustine says so in his Confessions: I want to *do* the truth, not only in my heart, but also in writing and in front of many witnesses.[16] What does he mean? Can you do the truth like you do a sport? Again, the answer is no. I would propose we interpret this sentence as follows: truth is not granted and requires technical training as well as a good dose of goodwill and sometimes even personal courage. While post-truth can be constructed by means of nonsense and illogicality, the truth asks for more but also has much more to offer. If we really cannot give up post-truth and, for example, are too attached to the concept of 'bad hombre', it is better to acquiesce than perform minimal fact checking. As the challenging test proposed by William James states, "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot".[17]

5. *The unfair exchange*

Let's return to our general goal, to understand the determination of the documedia surplus value. As pre-Marxian economists discounted that workers were only paid for part of their work, today we tend to overlook that the mobilisation is paid only in part by the free services offered on the web. Here it is difficult not to grasp the asymmetry between give and take. The documents that the archives provide to the mobilised are general

16 Augustine, *Confessions*, X 1.1.
17 James (1907).

and accessible to everyone, by definition. Therefore, they do not offer competitive advantages. The information that the mobilised offer to the archives is individual and accessible only to the archives. Therefore, they offer enormous competitive advantages. Of this advantage I only receive the negative part, the one that pushes me to spend due to the probabilistic prediction of my habits. Additionally, as I recalled above, the mobilised also pay for the means of production, i.e., devices and internet provider subscriptions (not unlike what happens for the house in Airbnb or the car in Uber). Trying to draw a general law from the various categorisations proposed so far, I have obtained a law on the formation of documedia surplus value that can be formulated as follows:

Let's call the documedia value v, the amount of generic data received from the mobilised Q and the amount of specific data provided by the mobilised X.
(1) The way things appear to the mobilised: receiving a free amount of Q seems to coincide with the documedia value
$v^* = Q$
(2) What actually happens: the mobilised receives Q in exchange for X (whether they know it or not), therefore the true documedia profit is:
$v = Q - X$
(3) We can quantify X as quantitatively and qualitatively superior to Q, therefore expressed by the formula
$X = (1 + k)Q \quad (\text{with } k>0)$
Therefore the true documedia profit is
$v = Q - X = Q - (1 + k)Q = -kQ$
And consequently the surplus value obtained by the system (social network or else):
$p = X - Q = - v = kQ$
In particular, if we say that the mobilised receives 50 from the platform in generic data and gives 100, this is equivalent to saying $k = 1$, which means that $X = 2Q$
Therefore, the documedia profit is
$v = -Q$
And consequently the surplus value is
$p = - v = Q$
In short, we have $v = -Q = -v^*$, i.e., the mobilised person believes they have a documedia profit v^*, instead they face a documedia loss of the same value. On the contrary, the surplus value of the system is equal to the data that it has apparently given to the mobilised user.

As long as this law is not clear, I fear that we will continue to operate with inadequate categories and to nurture social hatred – which is the most serious problem of an age that, in many ways, is the richest and most evolved in human history.

IV. Epilogue: Objections and Answers

I will conclude by replying to two objections made respectively by a reviewer and by an article that appeared in *Wired*.

The reviewer, whom I thank, writes the following**:**

> "I would question certain assertions, such as that of consumers not benefitting from web services that exploit big data. For example, increased competition can drive down prices and increase consumer surplus: this leaves customers with more money in their pocket to spend elsewhere (and not just on more 'stuff', i.e., they could save for a child's education, for example). As such, there are a few assumptions I challenge. Further, I question whether large tech companies employ only a few people. Amazon, FB and Google all employ tens of thousands of employees each. It's perhaps then a question of whether the revenues per company employee are unusually large (?), e.g., FB's revenue per employee per year is circa $1.6m (Global turnover is circa $70bn, 45k employees).[18] Are retail banks today any different? They have large revenues, but increasingly few employees (as operations shift online and are automated). Are tech companies very different?".

My answer is that consumers obviously benefit from these services, otherwise they would not use them. And it is also true that the big Internet platforms hire tens of thousands of employees, though mainly in the United States (which is why they are reluctant to tax the web, unlike in Europe). However, these companies' profit margins compared to the number of their employees is unusually high, and this should make us think. The crux of the matter is that what these platforms do is profit from something that would otherwise go to waste, thus minimising the weight of human input and maximising their profit.

18 Van Romburg (2019).

Let me explain what I mean with an example given by a colleague, the philosopher Fausto Corbini:

> "I get my hair cut by a gentleman who (excuse the example) collects the hair he cuts and sells it to a company that makes insulating material out of it (or something like that, I don't really remember). Hair, like data, is a resource out of which I would not know how to get a penny, unlike the resources that are the object of classical capitalist accumulation. And that makes it pretty complicated to argue that my barber gets added value from my hair. In fact, he doesn't ask customers if they want to take their hair home, he just sells it. A similar argument could perhaps apply to data. As soon as I click 'accept' I'm deprived of something that has no economic value to me".

I object. There is no value if the barber didn't collect them and sell them. Since it's valuable to him, it's valuable to you too. Visit a different barber or ask for a discount, I'd say.

Now to *Wired*'s objection, which is not addressed to me, but to the idea that platforms should be taxed as data is the new oil.[19] I reply that it is a mistake to view data as the new oil. This, in turn, makes it very easy to challenge and state that there is no reason to demand payments of any kind from the tech companies since data are not easily monetised, and it is not clear how redistribution would occur. Though, what we are dealing with here is both a conceptual and political error.

The conceptual error consists in equating data with assets (in this case, resulting from the decomposition of organisms that died millions of years ago) rather than as the result of the mobilisation of living human organisms, without which the tech companies would collapse. There is therefore an excellent reason for Internet platforms to ensure the survival of users because without them, they would halt and lose any reason to exist.

Secondly, coming to the political error, data cannot be monetised by users. Though users are very much monetised by tech companies which form the sector that has earned the most for some years now. It makes no sense to imagine a system of modest wages for our mobilisation on the web, but it is sensible to imagine taxing the documedia surplus-value to favour a digital welfare system managed by governments, or even better, supranational entities like the EU.

In conclusion, I reiterate my thesis. At first glance the exchange between users and Internet platforms (including not only social networks which

19 García Martinez (2019).

are a marginal problem because no one forcibly uses them, but also small businesses, restaurants and artisans that without use would suffer a serious competitive disadvantage) is a fair exchange: the platform offers free information to users, and users provide free information to platforms.

However, I would also like to emphasize that such reasoning could also apply to the feudal mode of production, as the feudal lord grants a free field to the serf so long as the serf works in the lord's field for free. It also applies to the industrial mode of production where the capitalist offers free means of production and livelihood to workers who work for free, the salary corresponding to the capitalist's need to ensure the reproduction of the labour force. If we find this description of the feudal and the industrial modes of production grotesque and caricatured, then we must recognise that there is a documedia surplus value that is generated in the relationship between users and tech companies. I will only indicate the most obvious reasons for this.

Firstly, the data that users receive is in the public domain, while those that the platforms receive become (*de facto* or *de jure*, little changes) property of the platform. So, we are dealing with a primary accumulation of the capitalist type. That this accumulation is made possible by the platforms themselves (no one could have capitalised on, say, the number of steps we take every day prior to the introduction of pedometers) does not take away the fact that the primary accumulation takes place, and is profitable.

Secondly, the data that tech companies receive from a user can be compared by them to millions of other users' data which the single user cannot do. Data can be recorded and calculated with algorithms and computers that users do not have. And so, data can give rise to behavioural profiling which generates savings for users but much larger gains for tech companies. Data can give rise to the automation of production processes with the progressive reduction of the need for manpower (which is actually happening). It can be sold like any other asset, to other platforms, agencies, or to individuals who aspire to become the President of the United States or of Luxembourg (I think there is a price difference involved here).

Thirdly, in an entirely data-based economy – such as the one that will no doubt soon be implemented, because it guarantees enormous economic advantages and the reduction of human input in production and distribution – data will perform all the functions traditionally performed by money: value reserve, accounting unit, means of exchange. But, it should be noted, this is only true for tech companies, not for users, who do not have the advantages set out in the two previous points.

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