



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN
EDUCATIONAL FUTURES

Pedagogical Explorations in a Posthuman Age

Essays on Designer Capitalism,
Eco-Aestheticism, and Visual and
Popular Culture as West-East Meet

jan jagodzinski

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Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures

Series Editor

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The series Educational Futures would be a call on all aspects of education, not only specific subject specialist, but policy makers, religious education leaders, curriculum theorists, and those involved in shaping the educational imagination through its foundations and both psychoanalytical and psychological investments with youth to address this extraordinary precarity and anxiety that is continually rising as things do not get better but worsen. A global de-territorialization is taking place, and new voices and visions need to be seen and heard. The series would address the following questions and concerns. The three key signifiers of the book series title address this state of risk and emergency:

1. **The Anthropocene:** The ‘human world,’ the world-for-us is drifting toward a global situation where human extinction is not out of the question due to economic industrialization and overdevelopment, as well as the exponential growth of global population. How to we address this ecologically and educationally to still make a difference?
2. **Ecology:** What might be ways of re-thinking our relationships with the non-human forms of existence and in-human forms of artificial intelligence that have emerged? Are there possibilities to rework the ecological imagination educationally from its over-romanticized view of Nature, as many have argued: Nature and culture are no longer tenable separate signifiers. Can teachers and professors address the ideas that surmounted differentiated subjectivity where agency is no longer attributed to the ‘human’ alone?
3. **Aesthetic Imaginaries:** What are the creative responses that can fabricate aesthetic imaginaries that are viable in specific contexts where the emergent ideas, which are able to gather heterogeneous elements together to present projects that address the two former descriptors: the Anthropocene and the every changing modulating ecologies. Can educators drawn on these aesthetic imaginaries to offer exploratory hope for what is a changing globe that is in constant crisis?

The series Educational Futures: Anthropocene, Ecology, and Aesthetic Imaginaries attempts to secure manuscripts that are aware of the precarity that reverberates throughout all life, and attempts to explore and experiment to develop an educational imagination which, at the very least, makes conscious what is a dire situation.

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ISBN 978-3-030-48617-4

ISBN 978-3-030-48618-1 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48618-1>

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

This book is dedicated to Jeong-Ae Park

*Without her support,
this book would not have been possible.*

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박 교수님의 지원이 없었다면,
이 책은 세상에 나오지 못했을 것입니다.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have had the good fortune to be invited to Korea on a number of occasions to address art teachers and students who are part of the Korean Society for Education through Art (KoSEA). I have grown to appreciate Gongju's Geumgang park area where I could run and train in the cold of winter, as well as enjoy the many varied districts of Seoul. I owe Jeong-Ae Park, Professor of Art Education at Gongju National University of Education, my gratitude for her support over the many years for giving me this opportunity. Without her support, I would not have been able to write this book. She alone has introduced Korean art educators to the work of Deleuze and Guattari through our many exchanges. This good fortune to come to Korea also included one occasion to participate in the UNESCO's Second World Conference on Arts Education in Seoul in 2010. To prepare for my first visit, I was like the anthropologist from Mars who took every opportunity to see as many South Korean films, melodramas, art exhibitions, and music videos via YouTube as was possible to familiarize myself with Korean culture. An updated exploration and my understanding of Korean culture appear as Chapters 3 and 4 in this book, while older versions had appeared in *Journal of Research in Art Education*. Many essays in this book have been reworked and updated from the pages of this journal, and I am grateful to the editors and Jeong-Ae Park for their permission to allow me to publish these reworked essays that speak to the contemporary situation as I am able to grasp it in the areas of art, media, and education.

I have many friends in Korea that I feel thankful to have met. I recall vividly when I first came to Seoul. Ahn, In Kee (Chuncheon National University of Education) looked after me immediately and continued to do so on each return when he was free of his teaching post. Lee, Boo-Yun (Hanyang University, emeritus), the ex-president of KoSEA, was always gracious when welcoming me to KoSEA conferences. I thank her for her support and still possess a beautiful vase she made and gave me on one occasion. Kim Hyungsook (Seoul National University) and Mi-Nam Kim (Hanyang University) have always helped me with accommodations and finances without problems and hesitation. I also wish to thank Hong-Kyu Koh (Seoul National University of Education), who has supported me all these years at these conferences, and Jae-young Lee (Korea National University of Education), who continues the editorship of KoSEA's journal with equal passion and care. A very special thanks to my translator Okhee Choi whose abilities remain outstanding. I always appreciated her questions regarding 'difficult' concepts and her ability to elaborate them to the audience and students as to what I was trying to say. Without her help, I am sure that these presentations would have suffered the usual fates of translation. Their generosity and hospitality stay in my heart, and I feel close to them and their concerns and historical struggles.

I would also like to especially acknowledge Ji-Hye Yoon who has been a guide into the Korean culture over many years. She has always been gracious enough to listen and provide insights into what were often blunders in my (mis)understanding of Korean history. I admit no expertise here. My desire was to struggle with the Korean films and the extraordinary phenomenon of Hallyu in relation to my own love for cinema and popular culture. I was particularly caught by the filmography of Kim Ki-duk, which I developed in Chapter 5. My Korean friends would supply me with advanced CDs of his latest movies. Gift giving has always been such a warm and important tradition, and it is this impossible tension between tradition and contemporary global capitalist society which makes contemporary Korean culture so rich in its expressions. Hae-Ryung Yeu and Seung-Ryeol Lee have also given me support in the past, taking me to special places to see. I thank them both. I do hope my Korean friends, especially Jeong-Ae Park, will accept this book as a gift to them for their kindness over the many years, enabling me to have a better feel for their passions (*han*).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Paradoxes and Worries in Contemporary Times

What of this fourth information revolution: the other three being Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud that have decentered ‘Man’?

We are living through extraordinary times, a phrase that has been said often enough historically. Yet, it is difficult to not think otherwise. Some, like Yann Moulier Boutang (2011), have placed their own twist on this state of affairs following the lead of Foucault. He has called it ‘third capitalism’ or ‘cognitive capitalism’ that goes beyond mercantile, industrial, and financial capitalism. Boutang (50–56) provides fifteen separate descriptors, which succinctly map out this phase of capitalism. Such a society has come to be known as a ‘the knowledge society.’ Boutang follows Foucault when he says that such “capitalism produces knowledge and the living through the production of the population. This production of life can be called ‘bio-production.’ And the power that has, as its function, the control of this ‘bio-production’ is called ‘biopower’” (56). The full force of such ‘biopower’ is felt globally as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads hysterically around the globe as governments declare a ‘national emergency’ and close their borders to stop an invisible invader that has no boundaries; it’s a nonhuman agency capable of ‘stilling’ a capitalist economic system as the stock markets go into a freefall. Conspiracy theories abound as China is accused of bioengineering a synthetic virus in order to destroy global economies; its release in Wuhan was simply an accident! The irony of this global

event should not go unnoticed. What climate advocates desire, and those of us who argue against the inequalities of a capitalist system are being realized, at least during this special moment of the *event*: air and cruise ship travel is down, meaning less pollution filling our skies and oceans; dolphins have been spotted in Venice canals now that boat traffic has stopped; emission of toxic nitrogen dioxide drastically cut in Beijing has saved lives; the economy has tanked forcing governments to think in more ‘socialist’ terms, even in the United States where, with reluctance, those who must stay home and isolate because of the virus, or who have had their small businesses suspended as the service sector is placed on hold are to receive (reluctantly) monetary benefits of some kind, which will never be enough. Concerns for the aging and at-risk populations (homeless, disabilities, the unemployed, and the uninsured) have entered the public discourse via government spokespeople, if only by recognition. The Anthropocene era has its first ‘confirmed’ *global* case, so to speak. As numerous ecologists and environmentalists have shown, zoonotic diseases have increased due to the constant destruction of ecological niches and biodiversity (Vidal 2020). We now live in an era of chronic emergency and global bioinsecurity, an unprecedented turn from ‘business as usual,’ and an ontological turn that is only beginning to be recognized. The oeuvre of Bernhard Stiegler (2010, 2014, 2015, 2018) is crucial here as he maps out the capture of ‘tertiary memory’ via contemporary digital grammatization. COVID’s nonhuman agency, a ‘classical’ case of biopolitics infused with biopower (following Foucault), requires an account of “noopolitics of psychopower,” supplanting Foucault’s ‘care of the self’ (Heideggerian *Sorge*) with *soin* (the care of something or somebody) (Stiegler 2016, Webpage).

Unquestionably, the technological marvels of digitalization, the so-called third industrial revolution that is constantly ‘progressing’ in computer speed, the constant upgrading of smart technologies, and commodity capitalism since the 2018 economic crash in the United States (so many thought that this was the knell toll of capitalism!) were steadily recovering globally, but with COVID-19 the knell tolls once again, it seems. Trump gloated as his corporate tax cuts increased profits through right-wing conservative ‘trickle-down economics.’ The problem is that very little ‘trickles down.’ The top 1% simply become richer as they buy back their own stock with new profits. Financial capital reigns along with a state capitalism. Yet, a global recession is now at hand,

and markets are sent into a fever pitch; presidential hopefuls like Bernie Sanders present this uncomfortable truth to many Americans.

It seems technocratic governments are pervasive globally. With the ascendancy of Trump, with the help of Russian electoral interferences and Cambridge Analytica, there is no pretense left that this was not the case, and state and business have become One. Trump has begun to privatize government under his oligarchy; he has attorney general William Barr, an evangelical, in his pocket, along with Ivanka, Jarred, and his sons in tow. Trump has infused US politics with a sycophant GOP under his brand of bullying, temper tantrums, and above all a new means of communication for political advantage: the Twitter platform that targets his minions of followers and believers in the ‘cult of Trump.’ It’s a machinic assemblage capturing affect to divide and polarize their country: you are either a Trumper wearing your red hat and shouting ‘Make America Great Again’ at his rallies, or a non-Trumper or even a never-Trumper is in danger of being scorned by the president of the United States, maligned and then fired. Quite extraordinary.

Too many have pointed out the fascism of Trump and his White House with West Wing figures such as Steven Miller, a known xenophobe and white nationalist, advising him regarding immigration policy. But his train keeps rolling along. The experiment known as ‘democracy’ is slowly fading as the judicial branches in countries like the United States, Poland, and Hungary are usurped of power. Trump and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell continue to stack as many conservative judges as they can muster. The US Supreme Court as an impartial body for the people has lost its credibility with the appointments of Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. This was always a tenuous question ever since the Supreme Court, with the help of conservative judges, spearheaded by Antonin Scalia, and then joined by William Rehnquist and Clarence Thomas, sided with Bush against Al Gore in the 2000 US presidential election concerning the ‘hanging chads’ of punch cards in the Florida election, which eventually resulted in the country’s turn to conservatism, a turn away from climate reform and warmongering on Iraq that assured Bush Jr. a second term. Chief Justice John Roberts has favored the Trump administration, exempting Trump for his indiscretions to interfere with court trails (especially regarding the trial of Roger Stone), yet castigating Chuck Schumer, democrat senate minority leader, for questioning the political bias of the Supreme Court. Adam Cohen’s

(2020) book, *Supreme Injustice*, charts the history of the ups and downs of the Court's record.

According to Alain Badiou (2019), a mere “264 people have the same amount of money as a total of 7 billion other people” (15). Capitalist ethics and corporate responsibility, as Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2014) has long argued, come too late and too little as politics has been overshadowed by business management. Luciano Floridi, Director of the Digital Ethics Lab at the University of Oxford, provides a wide-ranging discussion on information ethics, concluding that AI is a force for the good when used responsibly via a ‘soft ethics.’ Floridi (2002) has been on the forefront on what has been called the philosophy of information (PI) (Floridi 2002). The turn is toward computational methods to shine new light on philosophical problems. Any philosophical question, he states, can be repositioned as being informational or computational. Information in this case is organized into three domains: first, information *as* reality; that is, information is *ontological* and corresponds to the philosophy of communication. Second, information is also *about* reality. This descriptive link addresses semantic information with actual objects and concepts. It covers the philosophy of the linguistic sciences. Third, there is information *for* reality. This last domain is pragmatic, which is operational in character where philosophy of computing science comes into play. Floridi's (2011) neologism for this PI paradigm is “demiurgology.” This is a comprehensive and ambitious philosophy that is to harness the powers of AI for human well-being. Floridi draws from the Greek word *demiourgos*, which literally refers to a ‘public worker,’ an artisan who practiced his (sic) craft or trade for public use. A *demiurge* is an artisan who extends ontic powers of control, creation, design, and so on over oneself through a variety of dimensions. Floridi has ethics, genetics, neurology, narratology, and physiology in mind. But, this is not all. This ontic power must be extended to society as a whole: culturally, politically, economically, and religiously. If that is not enough, Floridi also includes the domains of natural and artificial environments that require physical and informational care of humanity's use. Hence, the combination of these three forms of information is to provide for a comprehensive ethics informed by computing sciences. It is the ultimate anthropocentric dream of stewardship of the planet.

If only it was that easy! As if there will be no bad actors like Cambridge Analytica in the future! Despite Floridi's plea and vision for AI's use for a social good, ethics are breached daily by platform capitalism.

Machine intelligence is the new ‘means of production’ for capitalism. The trajected irony here appears complete: keep replacing workers with automated AI technologies until there is no more need for them. If there are no workers, then there is no longer the need for profit to be made. The success of this technological revolution leads to the very elimination of profit and accumulation. The capitalist machine will then ‘stop’ its relentless cycle of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization. Such a trajectory is but one claim by accelerationist theorists like Nick Land. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek (2014) state in their May 14, 2013, Manifesto in section 21: “We declare that only a *Promethean politics* of maximal mastery over society and its environment is capable of either dealing with global problems or achieving victory over capital.” Their idea is to revamp technology and develop an accelerationist politics for a post-capitalist society built on self-mastery and self-criticism that completes the Enlightenment project, a more rational society. Perhaps the nihilistic realism of Ray Brassier (2007) is the best example of such a philosophy. Such a scenario seems to be a farce and should generate skepticism. For instance, the fascist tendencies of twentieth-century Futurism with its celebration of technology are well known, as if technological control was possible (Noys 2014). Given the COVID-19 pandemic, where there are shortages of intensive care units (ICUs) and respirators in rich countries like the United States, the idea of generating a ‘rational’ society that will come together for the common good seems far-fetched as the panic buying of food and (of all things!) toilet paper, beach gatherings (rather than practicing isolation and distancing), and major airline carriers gouging passengers for seat prices to fly home seem to be impossible behaviors to outright stop. Significant global unity is an unrealizable goal. Sadly, nationalism increases only when an outside invader threatens borders. Perpetual war presents this paradox in countries like Israel where the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud-National Liberal Movement) has managed to enrich the country’s economy at the expense of its democratic ideals. But what if the invader is molecular, invisible, not burdened by identity politics, and knows no borders?

The capitalist perpetual machine is like the ‘glorious’ train in *Snowpiercer*; it seems to go on without end, yet it needs the children of the lumpenproletariat to run it; or as Karl Marx put it in *The Grundrisse* (The Divisions of Machines): [it is] “an automatic system of machinery ... set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself”

(1993, 692). The scene is not changed in contemporary times: the brightest young minds end up as programming engineers for platforms such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook, Hyundai, and Sony. Creon is ‘Eating his Children’ yet again, as I have argued in another context (jagodzinski 2008). Even the best hackers of the Free and Open Source Movement (Richard Stallman) or the Maker Movement are persuaded by wealth and the good life, and are drawn into the corporate world once their wares have been recognized and their ‘startups’ lucratively bought up. A television series like *Mr. Robot* is an exception in this case, giving the hacker a paranoid profile, flawed by schizophrenia; or in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) terms, a schizophrenic who has insight into the capitalist system itself (jagodzinski 2016). Gregory Ulmer (2005, 2012) developed a neologism for such changes: electracy, and Jan Holmevik (2012) brilliantly shows how a “hacker noir” is possible. Of course, there are many dystopian sci-fi movies where the revolutionary underground must work with an undetected networked communication system that flies under the radar of state surveillance, as in *Blade Runner 2049*. Such is the projection of globalized and monopolized capitalism with the Tyrells of the World sitting on top of their pyramidal and ziggurat-like buildings of the future as in what has become a ‘Blade Runner World.’ Or, better still, living in floating cities in the clouds above the earth as in the Netflix sci-fi series *Altered Carbon*. But what of the Replicants? and the Terminators? Is there a clamor that goes unheard? Of course, all of this can be viewed as a farce. Workers will not be eliminated just yet, merely constantly enhanced and supplanted with economically viable AI; the auto industry via the ‘Toyotism’ of Taiich Ohno already provides the paradigmatic model. But more to the point, as discussed below, we all have already been harnessed into a ‘Matrix World’ to keep the supercomputer operating, supplying it with the battery power it needs to keep running.

South Korea, Asia’s fourth largest economy and twelfth largest in the world, a country that I draw on throughout this book, is dominated by family-owned conglomerates—the chaebols, who shape the country’s economy and have their hand steering the country’s political elections, as well as its industries. Both Hyundai and Samsung CEOs have been involved in scandals to bring down President Park Geun-hye. This is but one incident of many around the world. The nation-state is constantly weakening, unable to provide the social services to its electorate. Designer capitalism, as I have called it elsewhere (jagodzinski 2010),

has the uncanny ability to target and cater to select populations' desires, needs, and wants, using Big Data, the 'new' oil, that is able to mobilize algorithms with greater and greater specificity. The oxymoronic term, spoken in complete irony as 'mass customization,' sees to it that 'prosumer society' sustains itself by cybernetic feedback loops that prevent the horizon line for the next cycle of goods to be sold from ever closing. It is a perpetual machine: everything now becomes 'smart' or 'personalized' with 'digital assistants' to help manage the increasing complexity of social life. Amazon's delivery system of goods and Wal-Mart's innovations in supply chain logistics pretty much assure that the commodification of goods will be sustained via on-time deliveries. As Jeremy Rifkin wrote in 2014, this is an Age of Access, but access limited to a privileged population globally, and even within this privileged group, the access divide to technology is obvious as to who is 'wired.' We are our own oppressors, as Maurizio Lazzarato (2015) reminds us, as debt and credit climbs.

Platform capitalism, as Nick Srnicek (2017) aptly maps out, comes in many forms: advertising platforms (Google, Facebook), cloud platforms (to rent out hardware and software), industrial platforms (converting traditional manufacturing into Internet connections), product platforms (transforming traditional goods into services—like Spotify), and lean platforms (these are businesses that require minimal ownership such as Airbnb and Uber). Together, they are able to cater to a broad cross-section of users: "customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects" ... (43). As intermediary digital infrastructures, they further empower this range of users "with a series of tools that enable to build their own products, services, and market-places" (ibid.). To increase network activity and generate more data, free products and services are offered. Through cross-subsidization, platforms expand their reach, and in this way, a 24/7 platform is able to constantly garner users and dredge up data, a perpetual machine that never sleeps.

What Srnicek did not elaborate in his short book has been brilliantly explored earlier by Benjamin Bratton's (2016) *The Stack*, subtitled "on software and sovereignty." Bratton provides a comprehensive grasp of the contemporary computerized global situation as a megastructure (the titular stack) through six layers: Earth, Cloud, City, Address, Interface, and User. From the Earth, the geological demands for computing are harnessed through materials. The Cloud layer names the

sovereignty of platform capitalism such as Google and Facebook, whereas the City layer is the lived experience of cloud-computerized daily life, as explored, for instance, by Simon Gottschalk's (2018) concept of the 'terminal self.' With the Address layer, Bratton tackles identification as a form of management and control, with the Interface layer coupling users to computers. Finally, User layer refers to human and nonhuman [I prefer *inhuman* as we shall see] agents that also interact with computational machines. The *dispositif* Bratton maps out is the new form of governance and sovereignty that has blanketed the globe with dire political consequences, "a possible new nomos of the earth linking technology, nature and the human" (Bratton, in Terranova 2014b: 390). Bratton presents a form of Accelerationism as well. There is some hope for a 'Red Stack,' as Tiziana Terranova (2014a) presents it, which would require the reappropriation of fixed capital in the age of the networked society, based on the use of technology for a Commons, thereby overturning this capitalist nightmare through a new currency (such as bitcoin), social networks that increase participation and education, and via bio-hypermedia that try to refigure subsumption of the human body made possible by a myriad of wearable smart devices so as to generate a new breed of imaginary apps via Maker Movements and artistic movements like Electronic Disturbance Theatre who develop hacker apps to skirt border controls (Dardot and Laval 2019). The question emerges as to how a nonhuman other, like the current pandemic virus, so easily disrupts and puts to flight this established *dispositif* of capitalism to such an extent that it begins to collapse? A Red Stack would have to rethink the established assemblages by recognizing the nonhuman and inhuman (AI) emergent *interactions* for any future hope for a Commons to be imagined.

BIG OTHER

The implications of Bratton's 'Stack' are alarming. It is remarkable that Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) seven-hundred-page book on 'surveillance capitalism,' which works out the politics of 'The Stack,' yet makes no mention of Bratton's extraordinary achievement! If Bratton's analysis is dense and theoretically difficult, Zuboff's makes what's afoot more accessible. From my point of view, Zuboff analyzes how designer capitalism has now morphed into 'surveillance capitalism' (or cognitive capitalism) via the pervasive influx of algorithmic platforms. Zuboff

offers this as a shift in emphasis given the capitalist digital platform's emphasis on Big Data that changes the capitalist 'game' ever since the dot-com bubble burst took place at the turn of the twenty-first century. "Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. Although some of these data are applied to product or service improvement, the rest are declared as a proprietary *behavioral surplus*, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as 'machine intelligence,' and fabricated into *prediction products* that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace for behavioral predictions that I call *behavioral futures markets*" (2019: 14, original emphasis). This dependency on platform mediation is addictive. When Facebook crashed in the Los Angeles County and in other US cities for a few hours in the summer of 2014, many Americans called their local emergency services at 911! (Mosendz 2014).

And what of love when it comes to platform capitalism? I am reminded of Anna Longo's (2019) study of algorithmic dating online to find the perfect partner and the risks involved. I quote her first paragraph in length as it captures so well as to what is at stake in contemporary postmodern order.

Once, the purpose of knowledge was to give form to reality; then its aim became the production of possibilities; now it has become nothing but a risk manager. Once, we were producers; then we became consumers; now we are products. Once, the body's strength was exploited to produce goods; then the energy of desire was exploited to consume goods; now one's creativity is exploited to produce the self as a commodity. Once, we had children; then we desired children; now we have become children. Once, love was a pact of mutual support; then it was a desire; now it is the price at which we sell ourselves. Once, machines were a means to our ends; then they were the ends for which we were the means; now they are oracles that interpret signs and whose prophecies we interpret. Once, we were in a disciplinary society; then we were in a society of control; now we are in a risk society. (Longo, online)

We search Google only to have Google searching us; we naively thought that digital services were free, but it is us who are 'free' to be used by capitalist platforms. Digital surveillance capitalism is a perfect form of 'algorithmic governmentality' with a surprising inflection of pastoralism (Cooper 2020). The focus is on populations

shaped by well-defined signifiers according to the usual sociological litany: age, gender, sex, race, religion, district, state, and so on. This way cities can be surveilled and gerrymandered, even entire societies evaluated by intergovernmental agencies like the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Developments (OECD) and World Bank to assess loan risk, and so on. With COVID-19 amongst us, now it becomes even more worrisome as an invisible enemy is evoked, national emergency declared, and ‘war’ measures are talked about. Trump even bloats himself as becoming the new ‘FDR’ to politicize the pandemic. Recession and depression are on the horizon as the Trump administration continues to use ‘disaster capitalism’ (Klein 2007) to benefit the corporations (especially travel, entertainment, and pharmaceutical sectors) at the expense of the working poor (less than 20% of American workers will receive assurances of paid sick leave), an economic play that has repeated itself often enough despite alternative economic visions as generated by the most left progressive voices (like US presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders), and even the more moderate ones who advocate for ‘progressive capitalist’ policies like Nobel laureate recipient in economics, Joseph Stiglitz (2019).

Zuboff, in effect, presents us with an inverse panopticon model of the discipline society and a better mapping of Foucault’s biopower that Deleuze continued to articulate as a ‘society of control’ with its refinement of the third phase of social cybernetics (Deleuze 1995: 180). Surveillance also applies to the entertainment industry in such an account (Andrejevic 2007). Only a very few are elevated to be read, watched on screens, and heard: actors, singers, writers (mostly popular fiction writers, not academics who form a very small and (perhaps) insignificant voice in the larger picture), politicians, newscasters, and talk show radio hosts. State surveillance and its capitalist platform counterpart divide society into those who are watched and those who are the watchers (sitting behind the scenes). The entertainment factor must not be forgotten as ‘work becomes play.’ Trump’s success cannot be imagined without the performative aspects of his rally speeches (recall Hitler practicing his facial expressions in the mirror, and the passion and vigor of his speeches). Affect (as emotion) has been captured through our screen cultures. Nature seems to have become culture or second nature as some critics have put it, like the fable of the King, or usually his daughter, who lives in a golden cage. She must disguise herself and go out among the peasants to experience ‘true’ nature and

‘real’ life. But, in the contemporary scenario, the virtual and actual have already collapsed into one large infosphere so brilliantly captured by sci-fi films such as *eXistenZ* and *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*. Google-incubated Pokémon Go, an interactive mobile game, uses a smart phone’s GPS data and location tracking that sets kids chasing and capturing these ‘creatures’ electronically. Jason Wallin (2018) persuasively argues that the experience of ‘real’ animals has taken a back seat to these virtual imaginary ones. Well-documented scientific studies now on ‘emotional contagion’ (Kramer et al. 2014) show how Facebook is the perfect platform to manipulate emotion. Long-lasting moods like depression as well as happiness can be transferred through networks. What is unnerving is that such emotional contagion occurs without direct interaction between people and with the complete absence of nonverbal clues. The amazing BBC television series *Black Mirror* is perhaps as good as it gets to show these near-future technologies that plunge us into dystopian worlds that are being shaped at the unconscious bodily levels through the ecological assemblages shaped by desire as the intra-actions of human, nonhuman, and inhuman agencies. COVID-19, for example, is an intra-action of the virus with the human, discourses on China (especially conspiracy theories of them inventing a synthetic virus to ruin the global economy), role of politics, news channels, fear, and so on. COVID-19 is not ‘just’ a virus but an emergent dispositif of intra-actions that shape the global noosphere. Nature (nonhuman), culture (human), and technology (inhuman) as an assemblage shape an array of differences that structure those who are most vulnerable to those least, including which animals are to be consumed according to ‘westernized’ standards. So, ‘wet markets’ that serve the poor for much of Africa and Asia that include pangolins, live wolf pups, scorpions, civets, salamanders, crocodiles, and so on, are now prohibited or perceived as the next source of a pandemic.

One of the contributions Zuboff makes in her book, which parallels such theorists as Bernhard Stiegler’s (2010) concern over the transmittance of ‘tertiary memory’ or mnemotechnics via media technologies, is the “industrialization of memory” in terms of the “division of learning in society” (176) that is produced. Knowledge is shaped by Google and company by reducing it to its lowest common denominator: as information, or as ‘facts’ within well-defined narratives that can be ‘communicated.’ These narratives are then deeply politicized. Controlling and steering the ‘narrative’ shape public opinion and affect. Narratology as

a scholarly pursuit has exploded, as each group and culture enlist the repertoire of its storytelling to establish its identity. Who distributes such knowledge, who decides which information is distributed, and who ultimately decides which knowledge is to be made available become the contested questions. Knowledge distribution, authority, and power triangulate to determine what screen-platform technologies are able to shape a consuming public. Such public experience is easily shaped and manipulated as we have seen in countries like the United States and Italy who have networks to spread their ideology as ‘opinion’ rather than news: Trump’s The Fox Network, or Silvio Berlusconi’s Media S.p.A (Gruppo Mediaset); his family still owns more than a third share of Italy’s largest commercial broadcaster. As Bratton (2016) puts it, these ‘social bubbles’ generate new forms of “doctrinal cognitive fundamentalisms” (239). And, Rifkin (2014) notes on the ‘end of the nation states’: “The deregulation and commercialization of the world’s telecommunications and broadcasting systems is stripping nation-states of their ability to oversee and control communications within their borders. Global media companies are establishing a worldwide network of communications that bypasses political boundaries altogether and, in the process, changing the fundamental character of political life on earth” (223). Such is the state of affairs in ‘democratic’ countries where media shapes thought and behavior below the level of consciousness—at the level of affects, feelings, and emotions.

In Deleuze (1992) terms—we are now reduced to ‘dividuals’—or ‘digital subjects’ (Goriunova 2019), where behavior patterns crunched by the algorithms provide insights as to what desires and needs are so as to both stabilize and hedge a futures market, a form of divination as Joshua Ramey (2018) argues. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) *Body without Organs* (BwO) is now read as so many data points. They become “values, dynamically re-instantiated correlations, rules and models, shreds of actions, identities, interests, and engagements, which are put into relation with each other, disaggregated, categorized, classified, clustered, modelled, projected onto, speculated upon, and made predictions about” (Goriunova 2019: 133). The BwO now becomes the ‘digital subject’ as mediated by AI technologies. “Digital subjects are future orientated. Computationally, they span different spatio-temporal scales; they can differ in length of alphanumeric strings, in complexity, in forms of composition and proposition, in proximity of evaluated parameters, in number of units, in frequency of

occurrence, and in types of future they propose” (133). A digital subject never corresponds to a classically constituted individual: “*it is always more and less than a human*” (133, original italic); that is, inhuman. They are “pulled together in plastic aggregates of subjects, which are sets of associations, propositions, and probabilities” (134). The picture that emerges is like Star Trek’s transporter system: as if an individual (as a bundle of big data) could potentially be totally deconstituted into ‘bits,’ which could then be reconstituted in another place via a computational infrastructure; although impossible now, the principle is the same as this now happens in ‘real’ time via FaceTime, Skype, and many other forms of tele-imaging.

Zuboff (2015) offers yet another frightening scenario to what is already a dark picture, which she calls the Big Other. “Surveillance capitalism thus qualifies as a new logic of accumulation with a new politics and social relations that replaces contracts, the rule of law, and social trust with the sovereignty of Big Other. It imposes a privately administered compliance regime of rewards and punishments that is substituted by a unilateral redistribution of rights. Big Other exists in absence of legitimate authority and is largely free from detection or sanction. Big Other may be described as an automated coup from above: not a *coup d’état* but rather a *coup des gens*” (83). In this scenario, *AI Is now running us*. “Unlike the centralized power of mass society, there is no escape from Big Other. There is no place where the Other is not” (82).

This inhuman Big Other is not the symbolic Big Other of psychoanalysis popularized by Slavoj Žižek (1989). In my terms, it is inhuman rather than nonhuman. As Bratton (2016) warns, Google’s famous mission statement to organize the world’s information has dire consequences. It “changes meaning when the world itself is seen as being information, such that to organize all the information is to organize all the world” (87). Such an apparatus of planetary-scale computing enables a “full-spectrum governmentality” (101). Google is basically building a contemporary Tower of Babel. Besides scanning every possible book that Google could get its hands on (with or without copyright), their project is one of universal translatability. Google Translate attempts to make this a reality—to smoothly translate any language into any other, where all surviving languages form a *lingua franca*. This is now superseded by Babel Fish in their attempt to link all their communication platforms together: Google Talk, Hangout, Google Plus Messenger, and other communication tools. This is again a crass form of knowledge

translation, hardly poetic, but certainly useful on certain pragmatic levels. It shows, however, the gap between algorithmic AI and a human translator who must grasp structures of feeling and thought in another tongue, something AI is far from doing. Google's PageRank sorts the results of search queries, while Facebook EdgeRank automatically decides in which order users get their news feeds; there are a host of other programs whose functions are equally specific: Appinions, Klout, Hummingbird, PKC, Perlin noise, Cinematch, and KDP Select. John Durham Peters (2015) sums Google up in his chapter, 'God and Google': "Google inherits the narrative of the priestly class that discerns the universe, renders order out of chaos, answers our entreaties, and invites us to take part in manic arts of divination. ... Google is a clergy defined by its control over the means of inscription and retrieval – as clergies and priesthoods always have been" (333–334). Basically, Google has become the Big Other of surveillance capitalism, materializing, reifying, and concretizing Žižek's symbolic Lacanian Big Other.

THE NEUROLOGICAL FRONTIER

Mark Andrejevic's (2013) 'Infoglut' provides a review to show how the market forces see the 'brain' as the frontier to be mined so that its advertising engineers can write the music and make us dance accordingly; the 'emotional' brain, which is habitually structured and easily manipulated shows a plasticity for constant change. Giorgio Griziotti (2019) maps this out in 'neurocapitalism,' in a section "what Foucault could not predict" (166–170) has become standard fare now. Through neurosciences, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence and robotics, the dichotomies (separation) between humans and machines, nature and cultures have become a continuum, with 'genetic capitalism' around the corner as "the perfect complement to the qualitative ranking algorithms" (171), closing the circle of "political, social and biological domination over the whole of society" (ibid.). The COVID-19 vaccine, estimated to be 18 months away at the time of this writing, will prove to be a test as to whether the pharmaceutical sector will score unprecedented profit.

Neuroplasticity leads to 'brain-hacking.' It sets the tone for experimentation; millions of dollars are spent on negative political adds in the United States because they are effective. It is no longer a question of 'facts' (if there ever were naked facts), but manipulating the

narrative, reaching the next level of ‘spin’ doctoring. Colin J. Bennett (2015) has pretty much mapped out how such micro-targeting works in the way affect is channeled. So much for the self-determination of the people’s Will in a democracy, a tentative experimental myth that never was, but has now become obviously apparent, and no longer hiding in the shadows. All this is done without direct coercion, entirely self-authorized. It addresses as to how and why Deleuze and Guattari (1987) maintained that the masses are always subject to oppressing themselves, transferring their hopes, fears to dictators, cult figures, and priests to their own detriment. Desire, which itself is revolutionary, can easily lead to fascism—that is, desire turning on itself when its revolutionary trajectory becomes blocked. We see this phenomenon over and over again; yet it seems today especially pernicious in countries like the United States and Britain. The utopian impulse of ‘make America Great Again’ and Brexit is bringing back the mythic glory days of US leadership and UK’s colonial rule and self-sufficiency. These populist movements become a way to mobilize repressed desire by the working classes in both countries. Some, however, claim that such movements are not entirely negative, presenting the promise of a renewed democracy (Eklundh and Knott 2020). Hillary Clinton and Jeremy Corbyn become despised for blocking their utopian ideal—that is, their desire which escapes their social conditions. Fascism signifies the blocking off desire. Coming from ‘below’ it turns into a love for the state by its supporters for the form of power the state creates (Trump is a ‘businessman’ not a Washington politician. He is draining the ‘swamp’ and so on). In this way, 40% of the country that are his ‘base’ supporters ignore his pathology. Boris Johnson’s performative rants and acting out were also dismissed by 40% of the population that voted in the conservatives to ensure Brexit. As Deleuze and Guattari (1983: 367, 380) maintain, fascism reveals both sides of desire: both its revolutionary form and its self-destructive suicidal one as they can no longer be distinguished. The GOP now blindly follow Trump as do the conservatives blindly follow Johnson as each leader makes the necessary purges for those not following party policy and loyalty. Alain Badiou (2019) calls this new development, ‘democratic fascism.’ Both leaders have been severely criticized for their mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both are politicizing the pandemic for their own gains. Trump, for example, attempted to secure a future vaccine development by the German pharmaceutical firm CureVac exclusively for the United States, as reported by *Die Welt*.

Big Data is some sort of Big Other where a flat ontology emerges—where everything is harvested (extracted), including ‘data exhaust,’ seemingly inconsequential data that then is crunched to see if it reveals new unseen useful correlations. The Big Other as “a ubiquitous networked institutional regime that records modifies and commodifies everyday experience from coasters to bodies, communication to thought, all with a view to establishing a view to establishing new pathways to monetization and profit” (Zuboff 2015: 81). It appears that Object-Oriented Ontologies (OOO), like that of Graham Harman (2018), seem perfectly suited to surveillance capitalism (and its cognates: designer capitalism, neurocapitalism, cognitive capitalism) with its parade of never-ending objects as infinite data information along its flat ontology. I am reminded here of Alexander R. Galloway’s (2013) explicit critique as to how such theory supports the spirit of post-Fordist capitalism. While it may have brought on the ire of some, the question remains as to why there is such a close connection, if not a mirroring between object-orientated computer languages such as Java or C++ and philosophies of speculative realism such as Bruno Latour, Quentin Meillassoux, and Alain Badiou’s numerology (existing outside of history), and more to the point, especially Graham Harman focus on non-relationality. Bratton (2016) for one is not so convinced: “Flatness here refers not to ontology or the withdrawal of objects, but their functional communication and their mechanically withdrawn relations” (205). Yet, Harman’s ‘aesthetics of allure,’ which posits the transference of communication at a distance, seems to suggest otherwise, quite different than Bratton’s recognition that “relationality between things ... exceeds the relations they might already possess as natural objects” (ibid.).

This last claim is consistent with theorist of assemblage theory like Deleuze and Guattari. In this sense, there would be a distancing from Ian Bogost’s (2012) ‘alien phenomenology’ with his flat ontology maxim: “all things equally exist, yet they do not exist equally” (11). Zuboff’s Big Other is also a ‘realist notion.’ She maintains an external world exists independently of ourselves and our languages, thoughts, and beliefs. As Zuboff (2015) puts it: “Big Other is the sovereign power of a near future that annihilates the freedom achieved by the rule of the law. It is a new regime of independent and independently controlled facts that supplants the need for contracts governance, and the dynamism of market democracy. Big Other is the 21st century incarnation of the electronic text that aspires to encompass

and reveal the comprehensive immanent facts of market, social, physical, and biological behaviors” (81). AI becomes the new God that divines reality.

Can it get any gloomier? Yes, it can! Paul B. Preciado (2013) outlines what she calls the *pharmaco-pornographic era*, which builds on Foucault’s analysis of biopower as the introduction of new chemical, pharmacological, prosthetic, media, and electronic surveillance techniques for controlling gender and sexual reproduction. In her scenario, we find ourselves in the strange landscape of the opiate barons of the dystopian film series, *Into the Badlands*. I am exaggerating, of course, but we are taken to extraordinary ‘architectures’ of the medical professions where cybernetics meets the neurosciences, meets the genetic sciences, meets the biosciences, and so on. In the twenty-first century, analytic companies such as GNS Healthcare amass data from genomics, medical records, lab data results, mobile health devices to provide information about users to health insurance companies. It then becomes a question of manipulating the costs of health insurance given the different categories of applicants. Data collected about one’s emotional stability, happiness, and the likelihood of having a baby influences the job market in terms of hiring, being retained or promoted. Perhaps one of the most frightening figures of such machinic production is Oracle, the largest consumer data broker acquiring any number of data companies: Datalogix, BlueKai, AddThis, and CrossWise. It lists 100 data providers in its directory, providing some 300,000 different data categories that may be assigned to consumers. The Oracle data cloud provides information to Visa and MasterCard (Christl 2017). It is a social hyperobject that can’t be fathomed and would seem to satisfy Zuboff’s description as an instance of the AI Big Other, raising the anxieties of control, a narrative that is repeated in the *Terminator* film franchise and the television series *Star Trek: Picard*.

THE RETURN OF NATURE? THE ANTHROPOCENE AND NONLIFE

I end this brief review of the state of global capitalism by turning to the question of the Anthropocene, as some of the essays that follow directly draw on this state of ecological worry, COVID-19 pandemic being yet another symptom of the anthropogenic devastation of the Earth by Man. Designer, cognitive, platform, and neurocapitalism draw

on the biosciences of engineering in two set directions. On one side, bioengineering exploits the life of the nonhuman world of organic nature through various sciences that are covered by the signifying term: biominesis. The designing ‘with’ Nature is said to be the new direction for the continued ‘greening’ of capitalism. In this scenario, we have the emergence of the ‘good’ Anthropocene under the rubric of ‘ecomodernism’ complete with a manifesto signed by eighteen scientists and entrepreneurs (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015). This manifesto states that technological imagination will fix the problem of ‘climate change’ as the next phase of the Earth continues, what is often called the ‘god-complex’ of our species (Lynas 2011). The idea is to make this a planet for us and only in our interests by harnessing AI at the expense of all other species. The ‘us’ here is generally confined to a small population who have the wealth and resources mentioned earlier. If that fails to materialize, the terraforming of Mars awaits. This is already being prepared for as a billionaires’ space race: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Richard Branson, and Yuri Milner.

On the other side of the ledger is the ‘life’ of inorganic matter that is being put to use for the development of AI: lithium and silicon being especially important minerals, but all kinds of rare minerals as well are required for the production of smart technologies. Jussi Parikka (2015) has called this development the ‘Anthrobscene’ as technological waste accumulates. He shows how closely media is wedded to nature. Natureculture has now become a common trope to be used when dealing with the new phase the Earth is entering given the added global input of anthropogenic labor by our species. As AI slowly pushes into the realm of wetware and, as developed above, smart technologies are continually used to harness life of the human species for capitalist ends on the grounds that this offers a ‘better’ life, the distinctions between ‘life’ and machine have effectively disappeared. Gilbert Simondon’s basic insights overcoming hylomorphism, and his notions of individuation and creative invention that link technology, culture, and organization, as furthered by the numerous writings of Luciana Parisi (2013, 2017), lead to a machinic understanding already nascently developed by Deleuze and Guattari in the 1970s. What the human ‘becomes’ is shaped by these forces—both organic and inorganic as harnessed in various capitalist assemblages. The category ‘human’ has had a long history of exclusions and what is being prepared for in the future is no exception as transhumanism dovetails with the current modes of global capitalism.