

Data Colonialism Revisited: The Violent Side of the Politics of Information

Thursday, February 9
12:30–2:00 p.m. (CST)

Despite producing inequalities and posing risks to democracy and fundamental rights, the contemporary politics of information is usually seen as non-violent. We often consider current surveillance practices in post-panoptic terms and the emerging new power regime, in contrast to the totalitarianism of the early 20th century, as a soft power, that is, a supposedly harmless, efficient, and simple politics that does not touch, does not force, and is based on data, acting in real-time. I believe that this has been the dimension emphasized by a large part of the thinkers of our time (for example, Shoshana Zuboff when dealing with instrumentarian power, David Lyon when analyzing the surveillance culture, Bernard Harcourt when describing the new expository society, Thomas Berns when reflecting on the new government of relations, Byung-Chul Han when presenting psychopolitics, or Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias when addressing the new data colonialism). In short, it is argued that power tends to function in contemporary times in a non-imposing way, without the need to say no, without explicit prohibitions, employing a more insidious governing strategy, which shapes environments and directs our behaviors in ways we are unable to perceive or resist. I believe it is essential to look more closely at the overtly repressive or negative dimension of the contemporary mode of power operation. I would like to direct my attention to the marginal experiences, on the other side of data colonialism. So I understand that an authoritarian drift is strongly felt in the Global South, where a colonial logic is reactivated, dehumanizing those who are deviant or unproductive.

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