

# Creating Worlds that Create Audiences: Theorising Personal Data Markets in the Age of Communicative Capitalism

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**Abstract:** In this article, we draw on theories of biopolitical marketing to explore claims that personal data markets are contextualised by what Shoshana Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism” and Jodi Dean calls “communicative capitalism”. Surveillance and communicative capitalism are characterised by a logic of accumulation based on networked captures of life that enable complex and incomprehensible processes of extraction, commodification, and control. Echoing recent theorisations of data (as) derivatives, Zuboff’s key claim about surveillance capitalism is that data representations open up opportunities for the enhanced market control of life through the algorithmic monitoring, prediction and modification of human behaviour. A Marxist critique, focusing largely on the exploitative nature of corporate data capitalism, has already been articulated. In this article, we focus on the increasingly popular market-libertarian critique that proposes individual control, ownership, and ability to commodify one’s personal data as an answer to corporate data extraction, derivation and exploitation schemes. We critique the claims that personal data markets counterbalance corporate digital capitalism on two grounds. First, these markets do not work economically and therefore are unable to address the exploitative aspect of surveillance capitalism. Second, the notion of personal data markets functions ideologically because it reduces the critique of surveillance capitalism to the exploitation of consumers and conceals the real objective of data capitalists such as Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple to not (just) exploit audiences but *to create worlds that create audiences*.

**Keywords:** personal data markets, biopolitical marketing, communicative capitalism, surveillance capitalism, datafication, commodification

## 1. Introduction

People generate data constantly. From purchasing online to using social media platforms, from ubiquitous smartphones to self-tracking devices that record physical and mental activity, large chunks of our lives are captured and transformed into data. It is the appropriation and commodification of this data that fuels digital capitalism as corporations exploit user-generated data, while the users who produce the data receive no financial compensation. Interestingly, this arrangement is criticised as exploitative by a heterogeneous set of actors, from producers of data who want a fair share (Ptak 2013; Jung 2014) to critical scholars highlighting the exploitation of users’ digital labour (Fuchs 2010; Scholz 2013). Berners-Lee (2017), inventor of the World Wide Web, acknowledges the loss of control of personal data as a main pitfall of the current digital environment. For virtual reality pioneer Jaron Lanier (2013), digital privacy is a commercial rights issue: he envisions a new digital economy based on a nanopayment system to compensate individuals for personal information. Inspired by

such argumentation, businesses adopt similar approaches and see corporate appropriation of user data without compensation as an opportunity. While the various actors differ in their analyses and interests, they agree that wholesale appropriation of user data without any redress to the actual producers equals exploitation.

Users' growing scepticism towards corporations that reap rewards from selling data is manifested in various ways. Initiatives like Wages for Facebook and Pay Me Facebook highlight the exploitation of users' data by social media companies and demand a share of the profits. Some individuals sell their data to pre-empt corporate commodification of their data. In 2013, for example, graduate student Federico Zannier created a campaign on the crowdsourcing platform Kickstarter called "A bit(e) of me" for which he recorded his online activity and offered the accumulated data for sale. For two dollars, customers could buy a day's worth of Federico's data, and for \$200, the entire data archive. Zannier (2013) was motivated by his discontent with corporations' use of his data to generate revenues without offering any compensation. He attracted the interest of 213 people who together pledged \$2,733 for his data. Artist Jennifer Lyn Morone (2014), in an attempt to regain control of her data, went further and became a human corporation, trademarking herself as Jennifer Lyn Morone™ Inc. Enacting what Frank (2000) calls "extreme capitalism", she refused to become a "data slave" by turning herself into a data commodity to be traded.

Sensing opportunity, businesses have created platforms that offer rewards to users for their data. These platforms market their services in opposition to the corporate data appropriators by offering individuals the ability to commodify personal data and so empower users against corporate data exploitation. We examine claims that personal data markets counterbalance Google-style surveillance capitalism that exploits user data. Drawing on discussions about surveillance, communicative capitalism, immaterial labour and neoliberal governmentality, we critique personal data markets on two related grounds. We argue that firstly, these markets do not work economically and are unable to address exploitative aspects of surveillance capitalism; and secondly, that they function ideologically by concealing the real objective of data capitalists like Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple to not (just) control consumers and exploit audiences but *to create worlds that create audiences* (see also Lazzarato 2004; Zuboff 2015). We suggest that market-liberal responses to corporate (big) data surveillance and exploitation schemes is biopolitical marketing (see Zwick and Bradshaw 2016; Charitsis et al. 2018) because the logic of this mode of marketing is to conduct consumer communication, affect and sociality, in essence "the production of social life itself" (Hardt and Negri 2000, xiii), while appearing to do no such thing.

Below we elaborate on the rise of surveillance and communicative capitalism before exploring the emergence and positioning of personal data markets as reactions to corporate surveillance capitalism. Then we demonstrate that personal data markets do not function economically but ideologically, concealing the surveillance capitalist goal of owning reality (Zuboff 2015). We suggest that in surveillance and communicative capitalism, biopolitical marketing is charged with reprogramming relationships between marketers and consumers as symbiotic and collaborative, while simultaneously intensifying consumer exploitation and control. We conclude with some thoughts on what can be done to create a more equitable relationship between producers, commodifiers, and consumers of data value.

## 2. The Rise of Data Capitalism

Capitalism is based on the appropriation of surplus value through transforming labour into commodity. Traditionally, the amount of labour capitalists extract from workers is

connected to the working day and two limiting factors: physical limitations of labour power and moral limitations on labour extraction (e.g., child labour, sick labour, overtime, and so on) (Marx 1976). Capital aims to totally subsume labour by extending productive labour into leisure time. Through the Internet, and other technological advancements, capital moves towards fulfilling this aim in what Schiller (1999, 14) calls “digital capitalism”, where “networks are directly generalizing the social and cultural range of the capitalist economy as never before”. For Dean (2016b), the main characteristic of communicative capitalism is to pull web-users into the “circuit of exploitation”, in which we all become cybertariat. As Dean (2016b, 17-18) puts it, “under communicative capitalism most of us can’t avoid producing for capitalism. Our basic communicative activities are enclosed in circuits as raw materials for capital accumulation”. Zuboff (2015) focuses on the pervasiveness and role of surveillance in contemporary capitalism, arguing that in “surveillance capitalism”, commercial surveillance conducted by companies like Google and Facebook represent capital’s totalising aspiration to not just know reality, but to “make” and “own” reality (see also Pridmore and Zwick 2011). For Zuboff, the template for understanding surveillance capitalism is Google’s business model. According to Google’s chief economist Hal Varian, the central elements for Google’s success are ever more data extraction and analysis, the individualisation of every contractual and commercial relationship, and personalised services and experimental marketing. Zuboff deduces from Google’s business model that the goal is to capture as much information about users as possible and then repackage and commodify this information for a buyer. From the perspective of consumers, surveillance capitalism aspires to radical individualisation of products and services, even of those that used to be based on collective social relations (insurance, health, pensions, mail service, school service, and so on) into private, individual relations, continuously assessed and purely based on one’s performance (see also Lazzarato 2009). Individualisation is based on data profiles, which are configured and owned by Google, even though the data is produced by the individual.

The data profile, this aspect of contemporary existence that enables “people’s lives [...to be] seen as singularities” (Featherstone 2006, 592), thus becomes the cell form of surveillance capitalism, allowing for, according to Varian, previously-undeveloped forms of marketing (such as experimental product launches, highly personalised services and direct-to-consumer marketing<sup>1</sup>). Continual experimentation with more personalisation and customisation is required to *really* understand why a consumer prefers one thing over another. Therefore the vision of Varian is that, equipped with the perfect data profiles, marketers can finally understand cause and effect relationships – market research’s holy grail! Zuboff sees in the continuous experimental interventions into the behaviour and configuration of data profiles the risk of “reality mining”; that with the ownership of data profiles and the ability to conduct marketing experiments, businesses can know what people do at all times, but also intervene and alter behaviour so that what is real and what is the outcome of real-time techno-cybernetic manipulation becomes indistinguishable<sup>2</sup>. Communicative and surveillance capitalism, then, is not simply about capturing behaviour in all its communicative and affective expressions, but also about creating a reality.

Thus, just as industrial capitalism relied on appropriating physical labour, digital, communicative or surveillance capitalism thrives on appropriating users’ digital labour.

<sup>1</sup> Consider the success of so-called ‘direct to consumer’ brands such as Glossier, Stowaway and Urban Decay that have been building a brand based solely on digital marketing.

<sup>2</sup> The notion of reality mining has clear affinities with what we call biopolitical marketing and we will discuss both in more detail below.

Digital labour is, largely, immaterial labour “that produces immaterial products, such as information, knowledge, ideas, images, relationships, and affects” (Hardt and Negri 2004, 65). More importantly, it generates data that can be automatically captured and valorised. Networks of digital capitalism rely on appropriating users’ digital labour, which produces value through generating profile data, social network data, and browsing behaviour data, all of which is commodified for advertising purposes (Fuchs 2014a). The growing popularity of self-tracking sensor technologies expands the scope of digital labour, as it allows the generation and appropriation of data for almost every aspect of our lives (Charitsis 2016). As Dean (2016a, 4) contends, “the multiple small ubiquitous sensors in what is called the Internet of things enclose every aspect of our life into the data form”. This renders the distinction between work and leisure obsolete, as people’s whole lives are captured, converted into data, and commodified (Fuchs 2013; Till 2014; Charitsis 2016) while data becomes the oil fuelling capitalism (Palmer 2006). Thus, data capitalism is based precisely on the premise of putting life, valorised into the form of data, to work (Morini and Fumagalli 2010) and through processes that Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession” to colonise and commodify aspects of everyday life in unprecedented manners (Thatcher et al. 2016).

Following Harvey’s analysis of capitalist accumulation as dispossession, Thatcher et al. (2016, 17) argue that “sensors and communication technologies have “colonized” the lifeworld [and] they have done so as a means of extracting value by dispossessing individuals of their data”. Accumulation by dispossession based on making certain assets available at minimal or zero cost is a central feature in the recent unrelenting expansion of neoliberal capitalism (Harvey 2003). The usurping of these assets amplifies inequalities and triggers opposition. In the case of data dispossession and commodification, Dean (2016b, 16) contends that this becomes a front in “global communicative capitalism’s class war” and hence produces the possibility of “revolts of those whose communicative activities generate value that is expropriated from them”. To pre-empt revolts and curtail opposition, there is a need to, at least ostensibly, ameliorate user exploitation, and channel user activity back to “digital enclosures” (Andrejevic 2007) of never-ending loops of surveillance and monitored production. As briefly mentioned above, the market-libertarian response to this crisis of surveillance capitalism is gaining momentum in the popular imagination and it is this response that we explore. In Foucault’s lectures on biopolitics (2008), the neoliberal response to crisis is further intensification of the totalising logic of economisation. Consequently, the critique of Google and Facebook-style data appropriation and reality mining generates new markets, specifically personal data markets, promising emancipation and empowerment.

### **3. Models of Personal Data Markets**

As consumers become aware of their data’s value and unhappy about companies using this data to make money, calls for compensation grow. Partly in response, recent studies develop models of personal data markets, suggesting that markets could offer compensation to users while addressing privacy concerns (e.g. Aperjis and Huberman 2012; Li et al. 2013; Riederer et al. 2011). These studies assume that consumer empowerment, minimising exploitation, and managing privacy is best achieved by allowing everyone to share the fruit of their digital labour data as free market agents. As Li et al. (2013, 1) state, “the idea of monetizing private data can improve over the narrower view of hiding private data, since it empowers individuals to control their data through financial means”.

Businesses have sprung up providing platforms for users to trade data for compensation. Although these businesses each provide compensation for personal data, their approaches are diverse. For example, some start-ups offer financial and other rewards for specific data (mainly self-tracked data that correspond to specific behaviours, usually associated with healthy lifestyles), while others attempt to develop comprehensive personal data markets where users can gather and sell almost the entirety of their data.

We here explore personal data markets and related platforms and programmes. Our list is indicative, not exhaustive, of novel attempts to provide monetary and other compensation for personal data. Examples of companies that developed programmes offering rewards for self-tracked data include health insurance provider Oscar Health, Qantas Airways, Walgreens pharmacy, Alpha Bank, KrowdFit and Leap4Life. Oscar Health aims at “revolutionizing health insurance through technology, data, and design”. Members get a free activity tracker and are rewarded up to \$1 per day (with an annual limit of \$240) for reaching daily fitness goals which redeem for Amazon vouchers. This reward model represents a step towards Varian’s vision of completely individualised and personalised contract relations based on predictive analytics (see Zuboff 2015). Similarly, Qantas introduced the Qantas Assure health insurance programme, giving frequent flyer points to users who track their activities. Car insurance companies like Progressive in Canada offer cash discounts in return for careful driving; the driver exchanges comprehensive data (location, time, speed, braking habits, etc.) for money. Similarly, Agero, a roadside assistance services company, developed the MileUp app that rewards users for every mile they drive. The Walgreens Balance rewards programme gives customers points for every tracked mile walked, run or cycled. Participants redeem points for coupons for the chain’s shops. A Russian bank, Alfa Bank, introduced a savings account that rewards physically active customers with higher interest rates. KrowdFit is a subscription-based wellness reward programme that focuses on rewarding the “effort our members make to live a healthy, active lifestyle”. KrowdFit’s slogan, “You Sweat...We Pay!” refers to winning goods and services in sweepstakes in exchange for reaching specific fitness targets. Another platform, Leap4Life, promises to provide financial compensation and other rewards to users who lead healthy lifestyles because “it pays to be healthy”. Users sign up and earn points for self-tracked data and for joining other users in various events and challenges. Users redeem these points for rewards offered by various health and fitness brands, or exchange points for cash. Leap4Life claims that its data collection business benefits both the company and the data producers because customers of the service become healthier and the company is able to use the data to sell precisely segmented audiences to brands.

In addition to these businesses that compensate for behavioural data, there are companies like Datacoup, Datum, DataWallet and Powr of You that allow users to amass data from different sources and receive compensation. Datacoup, for example, promotes itself as the world’s first personal data marketplace that helps users “unlock the value of their personal data”. The company provides a “meta platform” where users link social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on), debit and credit cards and, in future, Fitbit self-tracking devices. As Datacoup aggregates data from these sources into user accounts, the company offers money for the data or facilitates exchanges between the account holders and third-party data buyers. According to their website “You (the user) deserve more for your data” and proclaims that “[I]t’s about time you earned more than a “free service” for your data.”

Datum is a decentralised personal data market based on blockchain technology. Users store data from social media, wearables and other sensor devices and share or sell the data. The exchange of data is enabled and controlled by a smart token that allows users to store and set rules for the use of their data. According to a white paper published by the Datum team, this network model aspires to provide a basic income for everyone by enabling the monetisation of users' anonymised data. DataWallet is an app that, according to the company's promotional material, "allows you to take control and reclaim the profits made with your data for yourself" by linking users to data buyers. On DataWallet, the time people spend online is translated into money. Thus, data "is gold just sitting in your pocket". Users can link their social media accounts (and accounts from platforms like Amazon, Uber, Airbnb etc.) to the app and connect with data buyers from different industries to sell their data. Similarly, Powr of You gives users the "power to earn" and get value from data as they link their social media accounts and other apps and get insights about their online presence and their "personal brand". The company's website promises users that "you can now earn from your digital life while browsing online, using your mobile phone, and social media". When Powr of You sells the anonymised and aggregated data to companies, it shares the revenues with users.

As these examples show, the data deluge that comes with the big data revolution (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier 2013) is framed by personal data markets and data-collecting businesses as available for everyone, not just big businesses. As awareness about the potential value of personal data increases and the realisation spreads that the riches of companies like Facebook and Google depend on appropriating everybody's data, companies like Datacoup position themselves in opposition to the big, anonymous information corporations – now framed as data thieves that take, but don't return – offering consumers instead an escape from blatant exploitation and a chance to benefit from the fruit of their 'labour'.

#### **4. Personal Data Markets as Ideology**

The Internet and social media are often framed as sites of user empowerment and lived democracy. The advent of the Internet was supposed to herald a new era that would emancipate and empower individuals, limit the power of corporations, strengthen democratic processes, and minimise inequalities and exploitation (Castells 2001; Benkler 2006). These promises have failed to materialise, as the commercial development of the Internet has turned it into a consumption and entertainment dreamland where user activity becomes reduced to meaningless communication and participation (Dean 2009; see also Brown 2015). Dean, in particular, presents a pessimistic account of communicative capitalism with respect to the possibility for any radical politics, despite claims of the role of social media in the Arab Spring (see e.g. Rosen 2011). Whatever the Internet's potential for intervening in politics, the Internet poses its own ideological tensions. As Dyer-Witheford (1999) argues, in Silicon Valley an ideology emerges from contradictory pathways within the industry; the "hacker section" associated with Julian Assange, grounded in libertarian and utopian visions of life organised by grassroots techno-politics rather than centralised bureaucratic state surveillance structures, and corporate empire-building associated with Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. The "metamorphosis" of these two positions into so-called California Ideology produced an economic and social politics "ostensibly laid-back but actually highly aggressive anti-regulatory free enterprise that narcissistically identified its own lucrative technological success as socially liberatory" (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 64). As Dyer-Witheford argues, the Silicon Valley model is built by increasingly

disposable workers, whom he terms “cyber-proletariat”, whose working conditions are a form of “bloody Taylorism”. For example, consider the vulnerability of workers to violence in Ciudad Juarez and the exposure of Californian factory workers to toxic chemicals which often leaves them with “headaches, skin rashes, dizziness, respiratory problems, and a particular threat for a largely female workforce, miscarriages and birth defects” (Dyer-Witthford 1999, 64). Californian Ideology, therefore, is a contradictory political position that touts liberatory discourse associated with freedom of expression and freedom to consume but shows, at best, indifference to the brutal working conditions of workers who build communicative capitalism’s material reality (see also Terranova 2000; Fuchs 2013).

Communicative capitalism’s ideology is therefore concerned with consumption rather than production because consumption emphasises the market as a locus of social and political organisation. The market, in neoliberal capitalism, is conceived as a “natural reality” (Dardot and Laval 2014), an “inexorable state of mankind” (Mirowski 2013), through which all social (not just economic) relations should be governed. Under neoliberalism, the market becomes the blueprint for political rationality, producing new kinds of subjects and subjectivities. The neoliberal subject embraces the market as a site of veridiction; in Foucault’s words, an all-encompassing “reality principle” that orchestrates new ways of being together and that economises every single human activity even in previously non-monetary domains (Brown 2015). Thus, if the market constitutes truth and makes reality, then, for neoliberals, the way to change reality is via the market. Put succinctly: changing reality means changing the market (Brown 2015).

When there is nothing – neither human relationships, nor education, nor health, nor anything else – outside of the economic rationality of the market, one’s conduct must be treated as an investment governed by permanent cost-benefit analysis (Read 2009). This rationality forms the basis of the neoliberal subject as entrepreneur of the self. Everyone is exhorted to act like a business, think as *homo economicus* and sell one’s labour. In the age of communicative capitalism, with data and communication becoming valuable by-products of living in digital worlds, acting like an entrepreneur thus ought to include treating personal data as assets for trading.

The reality principle of neoliberal rationality holds that the solution to failing markets is new markets (Mirowski 2013). This perspective is promoted in the conception of personal data markets. While proponents claim that these markets empower consumers, redistribute wealth and produce competition and thus fairness and transparency, Marxist critics point out that just like any other market, personal data markets conceal the real processes of production and therefore the extraction of surplus value from labour that generates this value (Hardt and Negri 2000; Read 2001; Fuchs 2013; Hietanen et al. 2018). Thus, for Marxists, the manifest economic world of commodity circulation – markets – is the surface, concealing data capitalism’s essence, wage labour, employed by private owners of the means of production. This exploitative reality cannot be remedied by creating another market that offers the appearance of free exchange of goods and services by formally free and autonomous economic agents. This argument is familiar and we shall not dwell on it in this article. Rather, we wish to pursue the liberal alternative vision for corporate surveillance capitalism.

#### 4.1. Can More Markets Fix the Market?

Examining the emergence of personal data markets as a way of addressing inequalities requires us to look at data’s actual market value. We find that the value of

data, divided by the amount of users, is insubstantial. For instance, it is estimated that the data of the average individual user of Facebook is worth less than \$4 per quarter (Gibbs 2016) while basic informational data (including age, gender and location) is worth almost nothing (\$0.0005 per person) (Steel et al. 2013). Thus, contrary to the marketing hype of data market platforms, it is difficult to envisage receiving substantial payment for data. It appears that these personal data markets are mostly an 'interesting idea' to make users become more loyal customers of platforms. A cynical reading would posit that data markets constitute merely a symbolic gesture that, as we shall discuss, does not contest but legitimise digital capitalism's exploitative logic.

The issue of personal data value is further complicated by any attempt to individuate the value of online data that runs up against the logic of the data itself, whose real value lies in connectivity, abstraction, and derivation (Turow 2011; Helmond 2015; Arvidsson 2016). Our data is the result of our engagement with technological infrastructures (Zuboff 2015), but data is also produced through interaction with other users, participation in groups and networks and, importantly, by the computational work of the platforms, deconstructing and reconstructing individual data into meaningful entities. As Arvidsson (2016) explains, Facebook draws massive amounts of heterogeneous data to develop derivative information as, for example, data profiles, which can then be used to develop algorithmic power (Beer 2009) aimed at predicting the likelihood of future acts (purchases, clicks, utterances, etc.). Algorithmic power is generated by the aggregation of millions and billions of data points rather than the deep understanding of any one person. Similarly, the power of the data derivative derives from disregarding the 'underlying' object, in this case the platform user. It is precisely this abstraction of data from the person, and doing so *en masse*, that permits constructing a "virtual reality of relations and connections" (Arvidsson 2016, 5) that can be packaged, to paraphrase Smythe (2006/1981), as a digital audience commodity (Zwick and Bradshaw 2014). The value of the data commodity is not "based on ways in which such qualities and people are related in actual life processes, but on how they are related in abstract data space" (Arvidsson 2016, 9).

Hence, to say that Facebook's value creation is based on understanding deeply the particularities of individual consumers would be to mistake how platforms create and monetise users (Helmond 2015). The same is true for any other platform which understands that rapid expansion requires interfacing not just with end-users and marketers but also with app developers, content publishers, affiliate marketing partners and advertisers. Platforms like Facebook aspire to touch virtually all data flowing in and around the open web and also, of course, mobile platforms and applications. In other words, platforms use computational algorithms to encapsulate, if possible, all data flows in what Helmond (2015) calls the double logic of platformisation; a process that requires the simultaneous decentralisation of platform features across the open web and mobile universe and recentralisation of platform-ready data. The logic of platformisation renders visible a key contradiction at the heart of information capitalism: platforms need everybody to continuously produce and circulate personal data, yet each individual data flow has a value of almost zero as it is the computational work of the platform algorithm that renders users valuable as data doubles, or as Lyon (2007, 4) puts it, "software selves".

Of interest to Facebook are the so-called 'edges', the interactions between users that indicate affective distances between objects. Therefore, it would be too simplistic to imagine a straightforward relationship between users' data generation, Facebook's capturing and packaging of this data, and advertisers paying for a specific consumer. It would be more accurate to say that at the end of this process of audience

commodification, the actual consumer has been algorithmically abstracted and turned into a derivative and that it is this data facsimile of a consumer that advertisers are ultimately buying (Arvidsson 2016). Thatcher et al. (2016) further explicate that the individual datum that a single user produces has little meaning or value until it can be linked to the user's additional data and, most importantly, to other users' data. In other words, Thatcher et al. (2016) show that big data emerges as a valuable commodity only when millions of data points are aggregated (McAfee and Brynjolfsson 2012). Drawing attention to the spatial nature of data, Dalton et al. (2016) point out that data is relational to the place where it is generated, as while the available infrastructure enables (or hinders) the generation of data, existing supplementary data available about a place also allows for specific readings of the data. Even meanings ascribed to data generated by an ostensibly highly individualistic practice like self-tracking are socially and culturally negotiated (Lupton 2014). In other words, digital selves are embedded into the social fabric of the digital world, and therefore someone's individual data may be unique but of limited value unless connected to others' data.

Focusing on the sharing economy, Smichowski (2016) develops a similar argument: new markets for personal data would be a dead end; they would prove unfeasible for two main reasons, one economic and one practical. The economic reason has to do with the limited value of pieces of personal data, while data becomes valuable to platforms only in huge volumes that require considerable costs for purchasing, collecting, and storing. The practical reason refers to the previously explained relationality of data, as data becomes meaningful and useful only when entries from different sources (users) are combined and analysed jointly. This means that all involved parties of a data network must consent and sell their data to the same platform in order for the dataset to be valuable (Smichowski 2016). Personal data markets therefore cannot offer a viable response to the enclosure and appropriation of user data value by corporations because, in the final analysis, the means of production of data capital does not rest with the individual after all.

#### 4.2. Markets as Illusion

If personal data markets do not work, what might we make of so many options offering to monetise our data? Why do they exist? We suggest that their function is ideological because the purpose is to further normalise and diffuse the practice of data production while at the same time appearing to offer control and autonomy to data producers. Exploring personal data markets as an ideological figure means asking what this figure allows companies like Facebook and Google to do (see also Zuboff 2015). To be sure, by understanding ideology functionally we are not drawing on the Marxian notion of ideology as cognitive distortions that conceal contradictions and present an illusory picture of the social world (Larrain 1983; Eagleton 1991). Instead, for the purpose of this paper, we rely on the way Zwick and Bradshaw (2016) brought together a Žižekian notion of ideology as fantasy structuring reality and Foucault's concept of biopolitics to develop the notion of biopolitical marketing, which refers to any marketing technique that aims to mobilise and extract value from the production of consumer communication, lifestyles, and subjectivities. It is a vision of marketing that replaces the conventional ethos of consumer discipline and control with an ethos of the network, emphasising openness and non-hierarchical collaboration, autonomy, and harmonious social co-production. Biopolitical marketing rejects any clear distinction between marketer and consumer, seeing marketing as deeply inserted into, and increasingly indistinguishable from, the fabric of everyday life. Zwick and Denegri-Knott (2018) argue that any technology employed by marketing today becomes a technology of

enclosure (even if never completely successful), which hopes to bring about modes of behaviour that appear empowering and voluntaristic but are ultimately governed by marketing practice. That is why marketing (and capital more generally (see Lazzarato 2004)) today is biopolitical; it wants to govern life while appearing not to govern at all.

Google and Facebook are arguably the closest to this kind of perfect enclosure, as they build structures (search engines, apps, platforms, etc.) that capture our data production. As Zuboff makes clear, this is a dystopian vision of corporate power and ability to conduct our lives.

In light of this comprehensive vision of surveillance and reality mining, a focus on personal data markets reduces the issue to data exploitation and economic justice. That is to say, the presence of such markets and the injunction to reject the exploitation of the corporate “Big Other” (Zuboff 2015) reduce the conversation to economic justice and exploitation when what surveillance capitalists really want is to do is what Zuboff calls “reality mining” and what Lazzarato (2004) calls the creation of worlds. It is the role of marketing in communicative capitalism to create these worlds that allow marketers simultaneously to govern and control consumers and to empower and liberate consumers. Biopolitical marketing is the technique of communicative and surveillance capitalism because, as social media and digital marketing gurus (e.g. Weinberg 2009; Solis 2010) remind us, in the self-created spaces of the digital social, consumer cynicism towards traditional forms of marketing is culturally embedded; corporate top-down marketing no longer works. As biopolitical markers such as Ashton Kutcher (and his digital marketing consulting company Konnect) declare (in Solis 2010), the task of marketing is no longer to talk to consumers but to listen, no longer to sell but to suggest, no longer to make but to co-create, no longer to brand but to be branded. In other words, marketing today wants to mobilise consumers to do all the marketing that needs to be done. Thus, marketers must do un-marketing, which means making worlds that produce forms of social communication, interactivity and affective expressions that produce data that have value for marketers. For Facebook the real aspiration is not simply to grab consumer data and sell it to the highest bidder. If it was, the users of Facebook would likely have already gone to the barricades. Facebook wants to create worlds that create audiences, and how far Facebook is willing to go can be gleaned from the now infamous “mood experiment” (Booth 2014), where Facebook quite literally created different worlds to learn about audience reactions. In addition, algorithms like Facebook’s Edge Rank not only shape reality by fostering specific kinds of participation and interaction and obscuring others (Bucher 2012) but also by mobilising users’ “algorithmic imaginary”, their perceptions about how algorithms operate, which influences and guides their online conduct (Bucher 2017). Exploring the algorithmic governance of cities, Kitchin et al. (2015) make a similar claim as they maintain that urban indicators, benchmarking projects and dashboard initiatives employed by cities constitute data assemblages whose role is not merely to represent urban systems but to actively shape and create city life.

Personal data markets do nothing to challenge this comprehensive aspiration of owning reality. In fact, accepting that the name of the game is data and merely challenging how data is exchanged reaffirms the legitimacy of surveillance capitalism. This is also signified by the fact that most of these attempts to provide monetary and other rewards for users’ data have adopted a start-up business model, once more embracing and not contesting the tenets of surveillance capitalism. Considering also, as has been explicated, that the feasibility of these projects is questionable, it seems more likely that the most successful of these endeavours will be actually acquired by some of the digital powerhouses and become incorporated in their business model as

an incentive to further contain users within the worlds they create. Therefore, far from mounting a theoretical or formal challenge to corporate visions of surveillance, extraction, and monetisation of all data, personal data markets end up becoming a *pharmakon* for aggrieved consumers, who want to resist surveillance capitalism but find themselves accepting its fundamental logic.

## 5. Conclusion

This article examined different market-based approaches to the personal data economy. These approaches vary significantly; some are blatant marketing schemes that offer incentives in order to attract users' data, while others provide comprehensive plans that strive to provide users with greater control of their data in order to enable them to receive remuneration. Getting control over the data that we, the users, generate is indeed a major issue (Berners-Lee 2017) which becomes even more pressing with the introduction of new regulation that further disregards users' privacy rights and allows Internet service providers to sell users' data (Hatmaker 2017; Solon 2017). Still, we have argued that market-based interventions, even ones that profess to shift the power balance in favour of individuals, cannot provide a real answer to the commodification and exploitation of users, as they provide a "dead end solution" (Smichowski 2016), though they do function ideologically.

When Dallas Smythe (2006/1981) suggested that audiences constitute the commodity bought and sold in capitalist mass media communications, he was not aspiring to propel remuneration for audiences. He desired an alternative social configuration that does not commodify human communication, a model not founded on market values, a system not based on alienation and exploitation (McGuigan 2014). For Bookchin (1989) any resistance to the economisation of life becomes futile unless it develops the necessary consciousness to oppose commodification. Thus, any radical intervention not only requires a re-imagination and re-configuration of the digital environment as a public sphere based on the logic of the commons (Fuchs 2014b) but an underscoring that the commons, like neoliberal markets, do not just emerge but need to be actively produced. Since the digital commons can be enclosed and appropriated for profit, they need to be developed aggressively as transformative alternatives and safeguarded against capitalist co-optation (Caffentzis and Federici 2014). At the same time, they need to safeguard individuals' rights and protect their privacy. For cyborg rights activist Aral Balkan (2017) this means that digital technologies must be based both on a healthy distributed commons and on individual sovereignty. A decentralised and democratic social control of aggregated informational data that does not allow states and corporations to monopolise or misuse data but maximises social and environmental welfare is one of the key principles of Paul Mason's (2015) vision for a postcapitalist future. The solution therefore to data appropriation and commodification cannot and will not be found in individualistic approaches that provide miniscule compensation or other marketing rewards, but in commons-based approaches to data use and governance.

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