

*Editors' Note*

# Information/Control – Control in the Age of Post-Truth: An Introduction

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[Philippe Petit] I think that storing information is an ideology in itself.

[Julia Kristeva] It is precisely a technocratic ideology that is supposed to abolish anxiety. But what I am saying is the opposite: anxiety, repulsion, nothingness are essential aspects of freedom. That's what revolt is. When one abolishes revolt that is linked to anxiety and rejection, there is no reason to change. You store things and keep storing. It's a blanket idea, not an idea of a rebel, which spreads this technocratic ideology.<sup>1</sup>

This conversation between Julia Kristeva and Philippe Petit pre-dates what we consider the current sociopolitical crisis of information, where storing information no longer appears to abolish anxiety, data no longer offers security, and factuality is no longer a basis for informed discussion or action. Though both disinformation and misinformation's political uses are well-known and historical, their current manifestations are novel, appearing as the deprecation of expertise and common understandings of authenticity and authority in information. The present post-truth paradigm is carnivalesque in its contestations and denials, simultaneously scorning and celebrating emergent information and communication technologies and practices. It is, in fact and by design, never satisfied by information.

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva and Philippe Petit, *Revolt, She Said*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Brian O'Keeffe (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2002): 101.

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Now, information's part in political and social control no longer resembles the encyclopedic aggregation and storage of data familiar to the societies of discipline: the technocratic ideology that abolishes anxiety. In his 1992 "Postscript on the Societies of Control," Gilles Deleuze diagnosed our society in terms of control.<sup>2</sup> He argued that the closure and containment that characterized the subject and the state was giving way to a much more complex set of sociotechnical configurations that blurred the boundaries and limits of control.

Since Deleuze's diagnosis, contemporary information systems and technologies have enabled unprecedented forms of control to permeate life at multiple levels, from the molecular to the global: From the manipulation of bioinformatic elements through gene sequencing to mass data collection policies and technologies, the relationship between information and control is increasingly entangled in and through our personal, professional, and public lives. Yet, as forms and mechanisms of control become more granular, the traditional modes of information control are challenged and the figure of the "gatekeeper" recedes. New evidential paradigms signified by the diagnostic of "post-truth," new forms of consensus-building via algorithmic logic, and a breakdown of the (disciplinary) boundaries of information literacy all signify challenges to traditional understandings of information control.

Within the context of information studies, the concept of control has its own particular legacies. Posed as the cure to a natural chaos, the discipline's pursuit of authority control, bibliographic control, and controlled vocabularies represent a field epistemologically invested in order. For this issue of JCLIS, we invited contributions that consider the relationship between information and control in the post-truth era. Together, these essays consider how information studies might respond to a sociopolitical turn to arbitrariness and falsification, where aspersion and denial in public rhetoric come up against long-established practices for information control. By foregrounding the mechanisms, intended purposes, and unintended effects of the relationship between control and information, this special issue of JCLIS provides a forum to explore and critically engage with the notion of "post-truth." Each of the pieces in this issue tackles the shifting ground upon which theoretical and practical information work is taking place, documenting and analyzing some of the contours and effects of the intersection of information and control today. As technologies, structures, access, and expectations reconfigure, both liberatory and oppressive possibilities present themselves.

Amelia Acker's paper uses a Life Event post from Facebook as a means for exploring how social media metadata informs digital cultural memory in addition to serving a disciplinary function with respect to data subjects. In utilizing critical data studies to juxtapose state actor-authored social media content with user-generated metadata, Acker examines the possibilities at the intersection of established forms of information control within networked information technologies. The representation of

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<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992): 3–7.

both rhetorical and actual state-sanctioned violence and death through social media platforms prompts challenging and urgent questions about time, context, and memory in digital archives.

Increasingly, social media use by politicians and elected officials is an expected means of communicating with the public. The complex and often messy relationships between institutional accounts and personal accounts affect our understandings of and our legal structures around public records, authenticity and collective memory. Kathleen Brennan confronts these issues in her article about the social media use of US president Donald J. Trump (and by extension, members of the Trump Administration) by thinking through current best practices and theory in managing and preserving social media records against the backdrop of rapidly shifting expectations for presidential public communication.

Data at the fuzzy edges of the state also figures in Edd Mustill's piece, in which he explicates a set of problems inherent in the increasingly inseparable infrastructural entanglements between private business and government information practices. Instead of proprietary platforms, Mustill takes on open government data, which involves the proactive and regular release of government data, in the form of downloadable records, for use and re-use by anyone. Mustill uses Marxist labor theory to confront the irony of the enclosure of open government data by examining the ways in which private enterprises monetize public data through analytics and exclusionary redistribution.

Exclusion from or participation in information flows and networked technologies is often framed as a series of tradeoffs. In particular, rhetorics around privacy are individualized and speak the language of consumer choice, a choice that balances security and agency, a choice that does nothing to interrogate or examine asymmetrical power relations enacted through various forms of engagement. This is the purpose of Rachel Melis' article, which argues for anonymity as a form of resistance against dataveillance. Importantly, Melis argues for a shift away from privacy as a neoliberal right over data, towards anonymity that is socialized and normalized.

Kathy Carbone contributes a photo essay that surfaces the materiality of surveillance, presenting images and commentary on the work of two artists, Kaia Sand and Garrick Imatani. During their 2013-2015 artist residencies at the Portland Archives and Records Center (PARC), Sand and Imatani took as their source material the records of covert police surveillance conducted by the Criminal Intelligence Unit of the Portland Police Bureau in the state of Oregon between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s. Their works respond to and subvert the power relations implicit in state surveillance by recasting and reinterpreting the residual traces of police control practices. They illustrate that the supposedly neutral narratives—the “objective” and “truthful” recording of actions and speech—captured by the Portland Police Bureau become multiple and complex stories of lives only partially observed. Sand and Imatani's works of archival interpretation and reuse hold authority to account by bringing “the watchers” of state surveillance into the frame, to be seen in the present.

Alongside the need to understand the tension between information and control as a historical phenomenon, is the need to understand recordkeeping practices in the present and their impacts on the future uses of the record. Mia Bruner's perspective essay analyzes appraisal policies and records retention schedules announced in 2017 for the US Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE), a federal agency in the Department of Homeland Security that "focuses on smart immigration enforcement, preventing terrorism and combating the illegal movement of people and trade."<sup>3</sup> Bruner investigates three claims made in the US National Archives and Records Administration's approval of these schedules, unpacking the ways in which rubrics used to classify records worthy of retention belie a privileging of research over accountability, as well as a privileging of institutional policy over those affected by the records and their destruction. Bruner's essay gestures toward the extent to which future pursuits of accountability—in this case, as it relates to migrant detention and death under the agency's watch—are often contingent upon records retention policies and practices in the present and the values they operationalize.

In his analysis of the Population Registration Act of Apartheid South Africa and the possible Muslim registry proposed by US President Donald Trump in November 2015, Marc Koscijew illuminates the disciplinary function of registration along lines of identity categories ascribed by the state. Koscijew surfaces the project of biopolitical control at work in both regimes and points to the survival of these categories in the official mind and the survival of registration datasets in current information systems. Once a way of seeing the world through data is established in systems and processes of data capture and bureaucratic classification, it can be difficult to correct—even to recognize—those schemas and their epistemologies and original purposes.

Information/control are also held in productive tension outside of the governmental context. In their article, Cal Murgu and Krisandra Ivings address the utopian claims of Wikipedia's open informational platform with its complex policies on verifiability. Initiatives like Wikipedia are an interface between a social environment where free and easy access to information is a common expectation, and a socioeconomic system of knowledge production embedded in intellectual property rights and the ownership of the means of knowledge production. In the post-truth context, where claims should require bases in evidence, open information that cites sources behind paywalls represents the collision of open and closed environments that have been shaped by ideology and economy.

These articles and perspectives represent a sample of the myriad ways in which information and control are interacting in the post-truth paradigm. They show us that what Kristeva called a technocratic ideology of information storage is an ideology of the past. As control becomes increasingly continuous and pervasive, revolt can also be

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<sup>3</sup> US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "What We Do," accessed June 9, 2019, <https://www.ice.gov/>.

technocratic. As seen in open information platforms, registration systems, repurposed archives, social media accounts and user-generated data, and open government datasets, control and resistance both play out in information systems and objects.

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