

Session 4: Centralisation

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Leading:

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Scenario:

Centralisation and totalization of knowledge by
governments / institutions / transnational companies;
Monopoly of knowledge, monopoly of skill, neo-colonization.

Provocation:

I do what I want. I talk to whomever I want. I go wherever I want. I read whatever I want. But there are so many people, so many places, so many books. If only someone could help me choose. Someone who knew me. Someone who could suggest what I might want to read, or suggest who I might want to talk to. I wouldn't have to take their suggestions, of course. I would still be free. But their suggestions might help. And the better they knew me, the better their suggestions would be. Until they would just make the suggestions that I would have made, if only I knew myself as well as they did. Then I could do what I truly would have wanted!

But who could help me choose? My friends do not know me well enough; they cannot know me well enough. I would need someone with enough resources to get into every area of my life. Maybe there would be a company with enough resources. But I am not sure I would trust a company that was out to make a profit. I would need someone with enough resources but without a financial interest. Maybe if the government knew all about me...

Film:

The Circle (2017).

Book:

Ellul, Jacques (1967). "Chapter 4: Technique and the State." In Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Questions:

- What do we gain (and lose) with complete, ordered, accessible information? What do we gain (and lose) with ignorance, inefficiency, and messiness?
- What are various parties motivated by? What are they optimizing for?
- What are the implications different groups having different motives?
- What does "complete information" still not give us?