# Analysing the Californian Ideology through the Cambridge Analytica Scandal

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# Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the Californian Ideology using psychoanalytic ideology critique. The Cambridge Analytica scandal exposed Facebook's role in allowing advertisements from powerful and secretive political actors to influence elections, as well as revealing Facebook's attitude towards surveillance and user data. As Facebook is one of the world's most powerful technology companies, this case can help in understanding the global economy. Many scholars have argued about the importance ideology has in relation to capitalism, and this thesis seeks to understand what the scandal can tell us about ideology in Silicon Valley, which was first described by Barbrook and Cameron in their paper *The Californian Ideology.* I examine their notion of ideology as a mask over reality, then using psychoanalytic concepts, I provide a more satisfying perspective based on Žižek's theories of ideology. In doing so, I use the concept of fantasy to understand how cybernetic utopia constructs "reality", how *jouissance* functions through hacking, how the language of network science structures knowledge, and how the primacy of capitalism is misrecognised through transference and techno-determinism. This helps to explain Facebook's reaction in the aftermath of this scandal, as a traumatic encounter with the Real, resulting in a restructuring of Facebook's "reality".

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 The Cambridge Analytica Scandal

The Cambridge Analytica scandal grabbed headlines on March 17th 2018 when The Guardian and The New York Times reported that 50 million Facebook profiles were illegally obtained by data analytics company Cambridge Analytica (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Rosenberg, Confessore & Cadwalladr, 2018), later revised to 87 million profiles (Badshah, 2018). In these reports, Cambridge Analytica whistleblower Christopher Wylie claimed he had made “Steve Bannon’s psychological warfare mindfuck tool” (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). A few days later, Channel 4 News released undercover footage of Cambridge Analytica founder Alexander Nix, in which he claimed to have thrown elections worldwide using social media platforms, blackmail and dark ads (Channel 4 News, 2018), with right-wing billionaire Robert Mercer funding these operations. When exposed, this story became a major political scandal that reverberated across the international media (Tibken, 2018; Newman, 2018). Within a few days, Facebook Inc. lost $119bn (Neate, 2018), and it led politicians in the USA, EU and UK to demand an audience with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

Facebook’s behaviour over several years has attracted both anger and adoration from the media, politicians and activists (Access Now, 2015; Dutta & Fraser, 2008; Smith, 2011). In the stories referred to above, a number of factors created concern, from censorship, lack of transparency, privacy violation, legal threats and denial of responsibility. Facebook admitted they knew this data had been sold to Cambridge Analytica in 2015, but did not inform anyone. Cambridge Analytica agreed to delete this dataset, but Facebook did not take steps to verify that this deletion had occurred (Frier, 2018; Bridge, 2018). When Christopher Wylie made the Cambridge Analytica

scandal public, Facebook reacted by issuing legal threats, staying silent, and attacking leakers (Newton, 2018a; Adams, 2018; Wong, 2018). Eventually, Facebook did respond, but this was two years and four months (Madrigal, 2018a) after Facebook knew about the data leak. In this response, Zuckerberg repeatedly said “sorry”, promised to “do more” but did not address questions about structural problems within the company (Zuckerberg, 2018a). Zuckerberg has refused to attend hearings with UK politicians (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport International Grand Committee [DCMSIGC], 2018a: Q4131), faced accusations by EU politicians of avoiding questions (CNBC, 2018: 01:19:30), and even admitted spreading fake news to cover over the scandal (Frenkel *et al,* 2018). Seeking to understand such actions, many accuse Zuckerberg of simply lying to continue exploiting users (Locklear, 2018; DCMSIGC, 2018b: para. 221-222).

Facebook’s reaction to this crisis has been criticised by politicians, the media, and users, but also by communications theorists (Staley, 2018; Alaimo, 2018; Frier, 2018). According to these writers, Facebook’s actions are contrary to a good PR strategy. The writers struggle to understand why Facebook refused to speak to the media, blamed others, bullied journalists (Staley, 2018), and kept this data leak secret for so long (Alaimo, 2018). How can we understand these actions then? According to Barbrook and Cameron (1996), Silicon Valley tech companies like Facebook are saturated by the “Californian Ideology”, a counter-intuitive amalgamation of left and right-wing ideas. This ideology has been criticised for being overly optimistic and ignoring problems (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996: 45; Morozov, 2011: xiii; Fuchs, 2017: 55-57), so perhaps examining this ideology will help explain Facebook’s failure to prevent the scandal and subsequent reaction. I will explore whether *The Californian Ideology* can help provide explanations for Facebook’s behaviour, which also may help us understand how this ideology functions.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The questions for this investigation are:

- Q1: What is the Californian Ideology, and how does it operate?

- Q2: How does this operate within Facebook?
- Q3: What does the Cambridge Analytica scandal tell us about the Californian Ideology?

## 1.3 Structure of this Essay

In Chapter One I provide an introduction to the case, the research questions and structure. I also discuss positioning of the research and argue why this case is useful to examine.

Initially, in Chapter Two, I examine the Californian Ideology, as developed in the paper of the same name by Barbrook and Cameron (1996). I investigate their concept of ideology as a mask over reality, originating from Engels' definition of "false consciousness" (Engels, 1893: para. 6), and also employed by other critics. I argue that this concept of ideology struggles to understand the role that fantasy plays in ideology.

In Chapter Three, I will re-examine the Californian Ideology using an alternative understanding of ideology as necessary for all subjects to construct reality. I apply Žižek's understanding of ideology (1994: 1-30), using concepts of fantasy, the Symbolic of language, the nonsensical enjoyment of *jouissance*, and unconscious displacement known as transference.

Chapter Four will examine the Californian Ideology as it functions within Facebook's virtual class - that is, communications specialists such as engineers, developers and managers. I will examine the fantasy of connecting the world, the language of network science, compulsive enjoyment of hacking, and avoidance of facing capitalism.

In Chapter Five I will examine the case of Cambridge Analytica, and what this can tell us about the Californian Ideology at Facebook. I will explain the concept of the Real, and use this to understand the crisis as the emergence of that which cannot be covered over by fantasy. This can tell us about how the fantasy functions when the subject is faced with a threat to their "reality", and how this is reconstructed so they can continue to believe in the fantasy.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will summarise the investigation and what this means for Facebook's future.

## 1.4 Rationale

The role of digital technologies in modern capitalism is hugely important. In *Platform Capitalism*, Srnicek argues that the digital economy is now "systematically important, much in the same way as finance" (Srnicek, 2016: 5), becoming "an increasingly pervasive infrastructure for the contemporary economy" (ibid.). Facebook is one of these pervasive companies: with 1.4bn people who use it daily (Statista, 2018a), it is one of the world's biggest owners of data (Chakraborty, 2018), the world's second biggest online advertiser (Rushe, 2018), and figures among the top ten most valuable global companies (Statista, 2018b). As a major multinational, Facebook's crisis has an international economic impact, and therefore, analysing this case can help understand the global economy (Srnicek, 2016; Fuchs, 2017: 153-178; Zuboff, 2015). As various authors have noted, ideology is crucial to the reproduction of the existing social order (Žižek, 1994: 1-15; Eagleton, 1991: 36-37; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007: 10), and this thesis seeks to demonstrate the ideological functioning of powerful technology companies. In Barbrook and Cameron's article (1996), they argue that the Californian Ideology legitimises contradictions of capitalism by enabling a belief in technological emancipation, a perspective shared by other writers such as Fuchs (2017: 145-146), Morozov (2011: xiii) and Mosco (2005: 1-7). In this thesis I will look at how this legitimacy is understood by Barbrook and Cameron, and investigate alternative methods to understand this ideology, how it functions in Facebook, and subsequently, in the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

## 1.5 Ideology Critique and IPE

I will situate this investigation within critical communications rather than International Political Economy (IPE), as this field can better accommodate my work. I will use ideology critique to understand Facebook's actions, which fits well into Fuchs' definition of Critical Media and Communications (Fuchs, 2017: 22-24). In contrast, it would struggle to fit into definitions of IPE. The *Oxford Handbook of Political Economy* (Lake, 2008: 758) says that, "as a distinct field, IPE focuses on the politics of international economic exchange." Specifically in a globalised economy, it asks what are "political determinants of what we now call globalization," (ibid.), and "how does integration (or not) into the international economy affect the interests of individuals, sectors, factors of production, or countries and, in turn, national policies?" (ibid.). The focus of these questions is about the state's relationship to the economy. However, in the contemporary global economy, we can argue that the state has stepped back, allowing capitalism to bypass national boundaries (Burnham, 2001: 107). As such, it can be illuminating to study the operation of capitalism rather than states. This investigation analyses the ideological component of the capitalism, which, as I argued in the previous section, is essential for understanding its reproduction.

## 1.6 Limitations

During this dissertation, events of the Cambridge Analytica scandal were still unfolding. I have incorporated articles up to the date of 8th December 2018. I focused on analysing ideology though Žižek's and Lacan's theories, specifically, fantasy, *jouissance*, the Real, the Symbolic, and transference. I did not investigate this case using other concepts. I specifically studied the hacker mentality in detail (see Section 3.3), which appeared to be a specific form of the Californian Ideology, prevalent at Facebook. The functioning of the Californian Ideology may be different in other tech companies. I have made use of various media sources in this investigation under the assumption that these articles and accounts are accurate and credible.

# Chapter Two: Limitations of Barbrook and Cameron's Analysis

## 2.1 Introduction

The first stage in this investigation is to examine the Californian Ideology, as described in Barbrook and Cameron's influential paper, *The Californian Ideology* (1995). Using this work, I will examine the explanations it can provide, particularly their understanding of ideology as a mask, along with works from other authors taking a similar approach. I look at the limitations of this approach, then in the next chapter, examine alternative concepts of ideology critique, before applying these to Facebook.

## 2.2 Wilful Blindness

California has clearly had global influence over the development of modern political economy and culture. In the 1960s, California became a space of free speech, rebellion and creativity; it is the home to Hollywood, and the region that developed the personal computer (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996: 44-48; Miller, 2013: 1). Today it is home to some of the world's biggest and most influential corporations, particularly in the technology sector (Srnicek, 2016: 36-92). In *The Californian Ideology,* Barbrook and Cameron trace the historical roots of this culture from the pro-democracy and anti-military campaigns, such as campaigns against the Vietnam War and for civil rights (1996: 47-48). This ideology rejected ideas from older generations, expressed new ideals through culture, and sought to create empowering new political structures (ibid.: 48-53). As this culture grew in influence, belief in cybernetic theories spread, such Marshall McLuhan's ideas that posited that new communications would enable everyone to be free from authoritarian control, allowing individuals and direct democracy to overthrow government and big business (ibid.: 48). This ideology is somewhat paradoxical, merging hippy counter-culture with free-market libertarianism (ibid. 56),

with the contradictions held together through a belief in resisting government control and the emancipatory potential of technology (ibid.). By the mid-90s, this ideology came to believe that freedom is only achievable by working with "technological progress and the 'free market'" (ibid.: 58).

Barbrook and Cameron provide a convincing argument that issues such as racial segregation, inequality and exploitation are ignored in this ideology (ibid.: 59-63). However, the authors argue that these problems are avoided through "wilful blindness" (ibid.: 45), but do not explain how this "blindness" functions. Additionally, "ideology" is not defined, but appears to be employed as a matter of self-delusion that should be combated with facts that uncover reality, a reality ignored by the members of the Californian Ideology, who they call the "virtual class" (ibid.: 49), that is the "cognitive scientists, engineers, computer scientists… and other communications specialists" (ibid.). As long as they ignore these problems, Californian Ideologues can continue to enjoy the benefits of well-paid work and personal autonomy. I will now show how Barbrook and Cameron's conception of ideology is limited, challenge their statement that Californian Ideologues are "wilfully blind", and put forward an alternative understanding, one that I can use in subsequent chapters to analyse Facebook.

## 2.3 Unmasking Reality

The notion that the rich and powerful are deliberately covering up the consequences of their actions has historical roots in Marxism. Engels argued the bourgeoisie were covering over reality of exploitation (Engels, 1893), a concept developed by Gramsci, Lukács, and others (Eyerman, 1981: 43), an understanding that equates ideology with "false consciousness" (ibid.: 44; Engels, 1893: para. 6), from which the reality of the world must be exposed, so workers can understand their real

conditions of existence. Ideology, for many Marxists, is a delusion, from which we need to be freed (Eyerman, 1981: 43). In Eagleton's book *Ideology* (1991), he traces the history of this term to Tracy, a prominent figure in the French Revolution who used the concept of ideology to describe the scientific study of ideas (ibid.: 66). His perspective was based on the belief that science and ideas were separate, ideas being illusions like religion or superstition (ibid.: 63-91). Marxists built on this concept of ideology, and in analysing capitalism, accused bourgeois economists of being ideologues who covered over exploitation and class conflict (Eyerman, 1981: 45-55). However, Marx's theory of ideology was not always compatible with this theory (Eagleton, 1991: 91); for example, his analysis of commodity fetishism focused on how the *appearance* of commodities disguised reality, which is a different understanding from "false consciousness". However, it remained a common epistemological perspective in Marxism of objective external reality which can be unmasked.

This concept of reality is also employed by other critics of the Californian Ideology, such as Morozov and Fuchs. In *The Net Delusion* (2011), Morozov accused Californian Ideologues of having "a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a 'stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside'" (ibid.: xiii). Morozov's use of the word "stubborn" suggests a deliberate and conscious decision to ignore objective reality. Fuchs takes a slightly more advanced theory of ideology based on ideas developed by the Frankfurt School (2016b: 13). His argument is that ideology is used to cover over reality, and in analysing digital communications companies, he argues that "ideologies try to advance specific interests" (ibid.: 13), such as sharing, connecting, and so on, which "mask the reality of commodification" (ibid.) that "happens behind the users' back" (ibid.). Here, appearances function to disguise the exploitation of capitalism, and the solution is to expose these false beliefs.

## 2.4 Whose Reality?

In the previous section, I examined ideology as a “mask” covering over objective reality. In Eagleton’s *Ideology* (1991: 10-31), he strongly argues against this concept, which assumes there is “some unequivocally correct way of viewing the world” (ibid.: 11), and empowers a select few who understand the world versus the rest of society, who accordingly “blunder around in some fog” (ibid.). In order to be effective, ideologies must “make sense of people’s experience” (ibid.: 14) and must “conform to some degree with what they know of social reality from their practical interaction” with it (ibid.). Dominant ideologies “shape the wants and desires of those subjected to them” (ibid.) but must also engage with the “wants and desires that people already have” (ibid.), catching people’s existing beliefs and directing them in a way that reproduces the dominant social order (ibid.: 15). In *The Californian Ideology*, Barbrook and Cameron identify such “fantasies” (1996: 62) but do not have any theoretical conception of how these might structure reality. Barbrook and Cameron never define their theory of ideology, therefore, there is a lack of theory for their claims. In the absence of a definition, it appears that the authors believe the virtual class deliberately masks the problems that technology and capitalism cause by covering reality with ambiguous digital utopias so they can enjoy a privileged position in society. However, without defining precisely how they employ the term, the authors do not explain how this functions.

The notion that the ideological mask covers objective reality suggests that the reproduction of the dominant system depends on it staying hidden. When it is exposed as false, it can no longer reproduce itself. For Barbrook and Cameron then, the publication of *The Californian Ideology* should help unmask the Californian Ideology. However, rather than being convinced, Californian Ideologues did not accept this reality; instead technology writers responded to the publication of the article with mockery (Sterling, 2015), dismissal (Kamiya, 1997), or vitriol (Rossetto, 1996). Rossetto’s response (1996) as editor of Wired magazine – which Morozov calls the “the official

printing organ" of the Californian Ideology (2011: 17) – attacked Barbrook and Cameron's work as an "anal retentive attachment to failed 19th century social and economic analysis" (ibid.: para. 2). Rossetto doesn't actually examine Barbrook and Cameron's specific criticisms, simply arguing they are ignorant of economics and "how technology actually diffuses through society" (ibid.), and encourages "dreaming about a different, better future" through "competition, risk taking, democracy and meritocracy" (ibid.). We could understand Rossetto here as acting to deliberately cover over the reality of capitalist exploitation, but this doesn't explain the mass-appeal of the Californian Ideology. Kamiya is not attached to libertarian capitalism, and in a thoughtful analysis, criticises Barbrook and Cameron for not paying more attention to the libertarian "dream of pure freedom" that "promises a world without restraints… A universe, in short, oddly like the Internet." (1997: para. 16). Kamiya makes an assertion here that the *dream* of freedom and "spontaneous order" (ibid.: para. 29) in fantasies of the Internet are critical to understanding the subject's attachment to the Californian Ideology. This utopian dream contradicts the exploitation that Barbrook and Cameron argue exists in objective reality (1996: 45), so this creates a conflict within the subject's understanding. Here we find that the notion of unmasking reality lacks the theoretical tools to understand how the subject resolves this contradiction between objective reality and dream. As Eagleton says, this notion of unmasking reality misses the "affective, unconscious, mythical or symbolic dimensions of ideology" and "the way it constitutes the subject's lived, apparently spontaneous relations" in daily life (Eagleton, 1991: 221). He suggests that Freud's work can help investigate the role that dreams play (ibid.: 177), a tradition that Žižek builds on to analyse ideology (1994: 1-30).

## 2.5 Summary

In this chapter I have investigated Barbrook and Cameron's understanding of the Californian Ideology (1996), as well as work by Fuchs (2016b) and Morozov (2011). In doing so I have

discovered that Barbook and Cameron's critique of this ideology did not explicitly define its theoretical foundations. Additionally, the view of ideology as a mask struggles to explain how fantasy functions within the subject. In the next chapter I will examine an alternative theory of ideology using psychoanalysis to advance this investigation.

# Chapter Three: Re-examining the Californian Ideology

## 3.1 Introduction

In this section I will apply Lacanian psychoanalysis to understand the Californian Ideology, which Barbrook & Cameron first defined in their paper, *The Californian Ideology* (1996). I will provide understanding about how the subject can resolve the contradiction between dream and reality, where the concept of "wilful blindness" (ibid.: 45) struggled to do, as shown in the previous chapter. I will apply concepts based on Žižek's interpretation of Lacan's work (1994: 1-30), which I will then use to examine Facebook and the Cambridge Analytica scandal in later chapters.

## 3.2 The Cybernetic Fantasy

According to the Barbrook and Cameron's paper (1996), ideology appears cover up objective reality. In this theory, "the moment we see it 'as it really is'" the mask "dissolves itself into nothingness" (Žižek, 1989: 25). In the previous section, I examined how Barbrook and Cameron's paper did not dissolve the Californian Ideology. Instead tech writers defended these dreams and Barbrook and Cameron's account of objective reality was attacked. Examination of how the subject understands reality *through* fantasy can allow us to move beyond seeing the Californian Ideology as dependent on "wilful blindness" (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996: 46). We can use this to understand how this virtual class understands reality itself.

Barbrook and Cameron seem to understand that the fantasy does play an important role: for example, the article argues that this ideology believes in a “cybernetic frontier” fantasy (1996: 63) but this fantasy is not explicitly connected to their theory of ideology. In contrast, the dreams for Žižek and Lacan are central to how the subject understands and constructs their “reality”. This reality is in quotes to signify that it is not objective reality, but a “reality” which each subject constructs (Žižek, 1989: xi), meaning there is no external objective reality to uncover; all “reality” is subjective. Subjects necessarily use fantasy to create understanding, which creates a complete picture of “reality” based on partial knowledge of the world. Žižek understood the social circulation of fantasy as necessary to the functioning and reproduction of capitalism (Žižek, 1994: 1-30). Fantasies are both personal and shared, where social narratives combine with contingent scenarios in an individual’s life (Homer, 2004: 85-86), and are based in the register of the Imaginary (ibid.). For example, in advertising, we are told fantasies of new, smarter technologies that will improve our lives, and movies may tell us the USA saves us from terrorism, communists, aliens, and so on. The social components circulate through culture and combine with personal fantasies to function as a screen, together enabling us to understand the world. Rather than fantasy covering over reality, for Žižek, dominant social fantasies help subjects construct “reality” in a way which supports the reproduction of the dominant social order (1994: 1-15).

With Žižek’s understanding of fantasy (1994: 1-15), we can build on Barbrook and Cameron’s identification of a “cybernetic frontier” fantasy (1996: 63), and examine how this fantasy functions in the Californian Ideology. Barbrook and Cameron identify McLuhan as a key actor in creating the cyber-utopian dream (ibid.: 48), but we can go further back than this, to Norbert Wiener, founder of cybernetic theory (Conway & Siegelman, 2004: 93-108). His background was in mathematics, and with other researchers in the post-war US, he was part of the Macy Group, an organisation that worked across disciplines on developing algorithmic solutions to social, psychological, economic

and biological problems (ibid.). Wiener worked on cooperative systems between machines and humans, mathematical theories to organise society efficiently (Heims, 1990: xvi). Wiener's work provided a vision for communications enabling a flat, decentralised society, subsequently taken up by Beers (Medina, 2015: 575), McLuhan (Levinson, 1999: 63) and others (Conway & Siegelman, 2004: 4-8). McLuhan built on this work, and was especially utopian, positing the idea that with modern communications, a new society is possible:

> *"Electronic media...abolish the spatial dimension... By electricity, we everywhere resume person-to-person relations as if on the smallest village scale. It is a relation in depth, and without delegation of functions or powers... Dialogue supersedes the lecture." (McLuhan, 1964: 255-256)*

McLuhan's utopian fantasy sees new technology as enabling radical social change, transforming institutions and decentralising power. He believes that these new communication structures can create a "cosmic consciousness" enabling "collective harmony and peace" (ibid.: 80). We can see this same utopian dream repeated as it circulates through modern understandings of the Internet, for example in Perry-Barlow's influential Internet manifesto in 1996, he declares the Internet a place where "all may enter without privilege or prejudice" (Perry-Barlow, 1996: para. 7) where all can enjoy the "wealth of our marketplaces" (ibid.: para. 4). In this manifesto, it is the oppressive government that is criticised, and the networked, connected "civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace" (ibid.: para. 16) that can set us free. This manifesto appeared in 1996, and could be found on 40,000 different websites within nine months (Frezza, 1996). Although Perry-Barlow later denied this manifesto was serious (Silverman, 2016), large numbers shared this fantasy, showing that it resonated with many computer enthusiasts, creators of the early Internet. This utopia was also echoed in the final lines of the first Matrix movie, notable for representing evil as mysterious psuedo-government figures trying to control and repress society. Neo is a computer hacker with superpowers who saves humanity, and promises that people can have "a world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries. A world where anything is possible," (Wachowski &

Wachowski, 1999), appearing much like Ayn Rand's utopia in *Atlas Shrugged*, a place away from government control, where people can be free (Fitting, 1991: 102-103). The fantasy of Internet helps construct "reality" for the Californian Ideology, and this understanding of fantasy can help to further this investigation.

As well as the fantasy, Žižek uses the concept of the Symbolic. This functions to construct understanding the world based on symbols such as language (Homer, 2004: 33-49; Shepherdson, 2003: 117-147). However, the Symbolic order is always incomplete: there is something missing in our experiences that can never be represented (Homer, 2004: 83). Whenever we describe objects in language, we cannot describe them completely (Homer, 2004: 33-50). The Symbolic also structures our understanding, so specific words create a specific knowledge of the world. An example is the way that we understand business organisational structures. The "networked" organisational structure, common in Silicon Valley, has origins in cybernetic theory (Ouellet, 2010), and enables an understanding of relationships as complex and changeable, in contrast to the word "hierarchy" which creates an understanding of social structures that are rigid, and empower one group over another (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007: 141-164). Domination by management still exists in "networked" organisations (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007: 308), but the language of networks makes it more difficult to describe. When the Symbolic lacks the appropriate language, fantasy covers over the gap, making the Symbolic appear complete (Žižek, 1989: 137). In Fisher's *Upgrading Market Legitimation* (2007), the author argues that words like networks, outsourcing and just-in-time are "new keywords in the lexicon of the new capitalism" and also "keywords of the Information Revolution" (ibid.: 6). Fisher argues that "spontaneous order" is the most important concept in neoliberalism, where the multiplicity of selfish individuals creates rational and benevolent order (ibid.: 20). This language is paralleled almost "one-to-one" in digital network discourse (ibid.: 6), words that are employed to describe data science, social networks, and even natural ecosystems

(Kelly, 2010: 1-17). An individual “node” – a computer, a person, or an organism – is understood as “dumb”, but as they connect with other “nodes”, they create rational order (Fisher. 2007: 20). Notably, this network has no authority: it is democratic, self-regulated and spontaneous (ibid.: 6-10). Intelligence, in network theory, is created through relationships, and the more connections there are between “nodes”, the more intelligent and democratic the network is (ibid.: 7). Specifically in relation to social networks, individuals become the sole unit of analysis; they must be free, adaptable, and flexible to make new connections and self-organise. On the Internet, government must avoid regulation in order to allow this rational and spontaneous order and individuals must have freedom to express their opinions so the collective network can learn (Kelly, 2010: 95). Fisher argues that the language of network science makes neoliberalism appear a “technological reality” (ibid.: 10), because it structures our understanding of society, economics, and technology. As a result, this language struggles to describe how more connections could possibly create a less intelligent, more conflict-ridden society. The Californian Ideology’s knowledge is structured by the Symbolic of network theory that understands the Internet as an “act of nature” that “grows itself through our collective actions” (Perry-Barlow, 1996: para. 3). The cybernetic frontier fantasy of “freedom and self-determination” (ibid.: para. 15) that is “naturally independent” (ibid.: para. 2) of any “elected government” (ibid.: para. 2) covers over gaps in the Symbolic. Capitalist crises, ownership, monopolies, surveillance, and manipulation cannot easily be described in network science. These are covered over by the cybernetic fantasy that tells the subject that the Symbolic order is complete (Žižek, 1989: 137).

This analysis has helped to move beyond the limitations of theories that conceive of ideology as a mask that covers reality. By incorporating the cybernetic fantasy and the language of network science, we can understand how this creates “reality” for the Californian Ideologue, which I can apply later in analysing ideology at Facebook.

## 3.3 Enjoying Hacking

Although we can understand the Californian Ideology as a specific ideology, we can also identify different forms of the Californian Ideology. One of these distinctions is the hacker, as opposed to an engineer, scientist, or programmer. Facebook attaches great importance to a hacker mentality (Zuckerberg, 2017a: The Hacker Way), so I will focus on analysing in this section how the hacker functions. Žižek attaches great importance to the category of *jouissance* in political analysis (Dean, 2004: 1), and in this section, I will analyse how this connects into enjoyment of hacking, as well as defining what hacking is, which will help to understand the hacker mentality. *Jouissance* is a term which is not easily translated into English, but it can be understood as a paradoxical and nonsensical enjoyment beyond enjoyment, which cannot be expressed or symbolised (Homer, 2004: 89-91). The subject always assumes that the desire for *jouissance* can be fulfilled, but it cannot; the fantasy (described in Section 3.2) is one of the ways that the subject makes sense of their own constant dissatisfaction with the search for *jouissance* (ibid.). Žižek shows how the insatiable desire for *jouissance* is structured by social fantasies, given direction and meaning (1989: 86-92). In order for *jouissance* to occur, the subject must be motivated by an aspect of fantasy that they strive for. One aspect of this fantasy may be Internet freedom or democracy, which the Californian Ideologue tries to make reality by building new technologies that allow better debate, create connections, and prevent censorship. However, as soon as new technology encounters the present, it never lives up to this fantasy, always disappoints, and does not quite provide the Internet of their dreams. Rather than this failure being disappointing, this failure is what the subject wants, as it allows them to continue enjoying reaching for the fantasy: this is *jouissance*. The disaster for the subject would be for the fantasy to become reality; this would mean the subject cannot experience further enjoyment (Žižek, 1989: 138-139; McGowan, 2016: 19-50). For the hacker, we can see this *jouissance* functioning through hacking, which I examine next.

The term “hacking” has been contested during its development from early computer programming to the present day (Thomas, 2002: 114-118). What activities can be considered “hacking” are not clear-cut; they are defined by peers in a fractured hacker community (Thomas, 2002: 133). Hacking may be defined by peers as attacks for political motives against companies (ibid.: 228 – 232), building your own hardware and starting a business (ibid.: 18-19), demonstrating technical skill (ibid.: 114), fighting wars against online enemies (ibid.: 201) or engaging in long and intense programming sessions (Levy, 1994: 113). In contrast, people who self-identify as software engineers or computer scientists do not tend to have such a confrontational, intensive and anti-authoritarian attitude (Scherba, 2015). However, there is little formal agreement about what hacking is, and author of *Hacker Culture* Douglas Thomas argues that peer-groups have freedom to define it themselves (Thomas, 2002: iv), but still contends that all definitions involve “mastery over technology, independence, and confrontation” (ibid.: x) in a “performance of technology” (ibid.: 47). In this performance, hackers fight against assumptions of previous generations, engage in extreme and intensive programming sessions, and demonstrate technical mastery. This enjoyment of hacking shows the influence of Ayn Rand, not being a question of asking permission, but asking, “Who will stop me?” (Rand, 2009: 23). The hacker presents a threat and opportunity to humanity (Thomas, 2002: 48) - “both hero and antihero… both cause and remedy of social crises” (ibid.: 52). Extreme enjoyment of hacking is evident in a judge’s statement during the sentencing of one hacker, describing his uncontrollable hacking as “similar to a drug or gambling addiction” (ibid.: 192).

The ambiguous and fluid definition of hacking meant the term was more susceptible to change over time, from being somewhat critical of capitalism to supporting it. The free software movement was an example of this early radicalism but as capitalism became dependent on digital technologies, hackers became more supportive of capitalism (Lucas, 2018: 78). The release of the film *Hackers* in the 90s anticipates the significant influence the media was to have over the cultural perception of

hacking: the heroes in this film are hackers, acting illegally to prevent a multinational corporation committing fraud, but Thomas notes that the film's producers "had too much at stake to describe in any accurate or reliable way what multinational capitalism is or hackers' relationship to multinationals" (Thomas, 2001: 169). As such, the definition hacking was progressively sanitised. This was also a time when capitalism absorbed criticism of inflexible and undemocratic organisational structures (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007: 514) and the fantasy of Perry-Barlow's market-oriented cybernetic fantasy circulated around the Internet (Frezza, 1996). As the Internet developed, new startups and products entered the market, replacing old businesses and products. New startups used technology to push back against older business models, which created an appearance of resistance against authority. The Californian Ideologue calls this disruption (Christiansen, 1997: 61), which is consistent with Perry-Barlow's manifesto in rejecting authority and embracing the free market (1996). Disruption, as a market-focused method of technological progress, subsumes the concept of hacking to capital accumulation, but only so far as capital accumulation is a means rather than an end. To the Californian Ideologue, the fantasy of the digital utopia enables them to enjoy their acts of hacking by disrupting inefficient, hierarchical business models, and replacing them with smarter, fluid networked businesses. This hacking can be understood as enjoyment, *jouissance,* which becomes an uncontrollable compulsion to hack in order to bring this cybernetic fantasy to life. The concept of *jouissance* as an uncontrollable urge to hack helps us to understand the Californian Ideology more; rather than a "wilful" (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996: 45) refusal to acknowledge the problems of techno-libertarianism, this ideology *needs* to believe in the fantasy of Internet utopia. Without this fantasy, the subject cannot direct their *jouissance* (Žižek, 1989: 138-139).

This section has moved the investigation forward in understanding how *jouissance* functions for the hacker in the Californian Ideology and how it depends on the cybernetic fantasy. Rather than "wilful blindness" (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996: 45) we can understand how this ideology needs to

believe in fantasies of Internet utopia and technological emancipation in order to enjoy a compulsion to hack. In the next chapter I will use this to understand how hacking as *jouissance* manifests at Facebook.

## 3.4 Techno-Determinism

So far in the investigation we have covered ideological concepts of fantasy, the Symbolic, and *jouissance,* which has helped understand how the Californian Ideologue structures "reality" and directs their enjoyment into hacking. In this section I will investigate how technological determinism functions in ideology to cover up the contradictions of capitalism.

The Californian Ideologue believes technology is a natural force, but as Marx outlined in *Capital*, it is capitalism that demands this technological dynamism (Marx, 1976: 617). New technology is necessitated by capitalist competition and class struggle, but growth and technological progress are antagonistic, so this antagonism results in periodic crises (Harvey, 2001: 315). As Marx argued, "its technical basis is therefore revolutionary" (Marx, 1976: 617). Technological determinism, on the other hand, tells us the opposite: technology is an independent actor that results in historical and social change (Fuchs, 2017: 84). As Barbrook and Cameron identified, a belief in techno-determinism in the Californian Ideology is "nearly universal" (1996: 50). The techno-utopian fantasy allows technology to take precedence, and so tells the subject they are playing a unique role in history through developing new technologies (Martinez, 2018: 264; Morozov, 2013: 15; Mosco, 2005: 55-85). The primacy of technology over capitalism functions in ideology as *misrecognition*, specifically, a type of misrecognition called *transference*, where the subject makes an unconscious displacement (Žižek, 2014: 189) to "mask a conflict" (Denis, 2005: 1776). Psychoanalysis can show us that in capitalism the free market functions as God (Žižek, 2006: 91; McGowan, 2016: 114). Yet,

for the liberal capitalist, there is a possibility of believing in complete human freedom, because there is no explicit demand to worship a divine being. Although there is no *explicit* demand to believe in God, unconsciously, capitalism demands that we submit to the divine free market. We have to submit to this God and therefore we are not free subjects - “capitalist freedom is utterly false, which is why we cling to it so vehemently” (McGowan, 2016: 119). However, in the Californian Ideology, the authority of free markets appears to be *misrecognised* as the divine being of technology. The misrecognition is easy to make for the virtual class, since the fantasy covers up the inconsistencies of the Symbolic (see Section 3.2), making capitalism appear as just another technology. This is visible in the religious language of McLuhan’s texts, where he suggests “the computer… promises... a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity” (McLuhan, 164: 80), in Stenger’s belief that cyborg appendages will mean we become like “angels” (Mosco, 2005: 97), and interpretations of Ray Kurzweil’s work, which understand the Singularity – the merging of human and machine – as “events described in the Bible” (O’Gieblyn, 2017: para. 57). Kevin Kelly, ex-editor of Wired Magazine, writes that technology *is* God, which he calls the Technicum (Beaty, 2011: para. 1). He argues that technology is inevitable, the driving force of history, and that the free market is a tool of the Technicum (ibid.). The USSR disobeyed the Technicum, and Kelly argues that this explains the failure of Communism (Kelly, 1994: 64). This *transference* of the role of God from capitalism to technology helps cover up the inconsistency of the Symbolic in the Californian Ideology, which uses the language of networks to understand the Internet, economics, society, and even biological systems, but cannot symbolise exploitation, class conflict and crisis (Žižek, 1989: 1-56). It also provides a divine purpose to Marx’s equation of meaningless capital accumulation: capitalism has a moral cause. Instead of technology merely enabling meaningless accumulation, the transference of capitalism’s role onto technology means that the digital emancipation of humanity depends on accumulation.

## 3.5 Summary

In this chapter I have provided an alternative understanding of ideology, providing insight where the concept of ideology as a mask was limited. This analysis used ideas from Lacan and Žižek to understand “reality” as subjective, which is always screened by the subject’s fantasy. This fantasy for the Californian Ideology is a cybernetic frontier, a lawless space where we are freed from authority by emancipatory technologies. The Symbolic language of network science structures knowledge in a way that tells the Californian Ideologue that the Internet can create a fluid, democratic and self-organising society, and the gaps in this knowledge are covered over by the fantasy. Within the Californian Ideology, the hacker personality experiences hacking as a compulsive urge to master new technologies, create confrontation, engage in extreme programming sessions, and seeks to push forward technology quickly. Finally, techno-determinism functions as misrecognition of how capitalism is technologically revolutionary, instead seeing technology itself as being the independent variable that changes society. This functions through psychoanalysis as misrecognition of the God of free markets. In the next chapter I will use these ideological concepts to analyse how the Californian Ideology functions and manifests within Facebook.

# Chapter Four: Ideology at Facebook

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the functioning of ideology at Facebook. Previously, I looked at the limitations of ideology as a mask over reality, and how the psychoanalytic understanding of "reality" can overcome these. The psychoanalytic concepts of fantasy, transference, the Symbolic and *jouissance* as aspects of the Californian Ideology will be applied in this chapter to analyse Facebook.

## 4.2 Connecting the World

As argued in the Section 3.2, analysing the role of fantasy is necessary to understand how the Californian Ideology constructs "reality", evident in Antonio Martinez's *Chaos Monkeys*, which describes his time working at Facebook:

> *"The critics… think Facebook is doing it [connecting the world] only to make more money. They're wrong. Facebook is full of true believers who really, really, really are not doing it for the money, and really, really will not stop until every man, woman, and child on earth is staring into a blue-framed window with a Facebook logo... there's no telling what his [Zuckerberg's] mad visions will have him and his followers do." (Martinez, 2018: 285)*

To understand Facebook then, we need to examine these "mad visions". In an early interview with Zuckerberg, while at Harvard, he says he set up Facebook with the intention of allowing friends to connect. "I know it sounds corny" he said, "but I'd love to improve people's lives, especially socially" (Kirkpatrick 2011: 35). At this time Zuckerberg didn't have a clear vision of what Facebook would be, but the focus on a social mission was there from Facebook's early days. It began as a simple social directory, enabling people to find each other (ibid.: 29). By the time Facebook started expanding beyond Harvard, Zuckerberg had a team of people working for him. In

interviews with people involved at the time, one developer explains that “what we were building was not a product so much as it was a network composed of nodes with a lot of information flowing between those nodes” (Fisher, 2018: para. 100). Rather than a private company, Zuckerberg conceived Facebook as a “social utility” (ibid.) transforming the world for public good. Another employee explains that he saw Perry-Barlow’s utopian vision in Facebook:

> *“Back in the '90s all of us were utopian about the internet. This was almost a hearkening back to the beautiful internet where everyone would be connected and everyone could share and there was no friction to doing that. Facebook sounded to me like the same thing. Mark was too young to know that time, but I think he intrinsically understood what the internet was supposed to be in the '80s and in the '90s.” (Fisher, 2018: para. 128)*

Zuckerberg laid down a clearer and more specific vision in his 2012 Founder’s Letter (2017a) as he brought the company to float on the stock exchange. In it, Zuckerberg said that “Facebook was not originally created to be a company. It was built to accomplish a social mission — to make the world more open and connected” (ibid.: para. 1), which will lead to a “transformation” (ibid.: para. 3) of society. Facebook will “give people the power… to transform… institutions and industries” (ibid.: para. 4). This transformation could end authoritarian censorship because Facebook is a “network” that is “built from the bottom up” (ibid.: para. 11), and will force governments to be more accountable, transparent, and responsive (ibid.: para. 20), a fantasy evident even in Zuckerberg’s private emails (Digital Culture Media and Sports Committee [DCMSC], 2018c: 47). The virtual class of employees at Facebook needed to essentially take a “citizenship oath” (Martinez, 2018: 263) by Facebook’s “ministry of propaganda” (Martinez, 2018: 289), who demanded employees believe that Facebook is “the ultimate and inevitable final chapter” in communication (Martinez, 2018: 261), “the true teleological end goal of modern media” (ibid.), values that “were enshrined” (ibid.: 263). Notably, Facebook set up a live display by their reception desk of the transformative cybernetic dream of global connectivity, where there is a “flat-panel screen” with a “real-time animation of Facebook friending activity,” (ibid.: 208-209), and as such, the cybernetic fantasy is

literally visualised for the virtual class every day on their way to work. However, connecting people was not enough: the “Like button” was developed so Facebook could “map all of the connections in the world” regarding people’s interests (Nikolaenkov, 2011: 32:00 – 35:00). Next, with the launch of Facebook’s Open Graph, Facebook enabled users to “connect to anything you want in any way you want,” (ibid.), such as reading books and watching movies instead of just “liking” them, creating “an order of magnitude more connections” (ibid.). This allowed people to “deeply integrate” everyday actions “into the Facebook experience” (Scoble, 2011: 00:40 – 01:00) through “frictionless sharing” (ibid.). In order to make this happen, Facebook had an “ambition to have every app be social,” (Isaac, 2011: para. 17) and “a smartphone in every hand running Facebook apps,” (Pachal, 2011: 2014). Zuckerberg believed that this would enable Facebook to be the centre of the Internet, evident in internal emails (DCMSC, 2018c: 52) as well as at F8, Facebook’s Developer conference:

> *“If we can take these separate maps of the graph and pull them all together, then we can create a web that's smarter, more social, more personalized, and more semantically aware... connections aren’t just happening on Facebook, they're happening all over the Web, and today with the Open Graph we’re bringing all these things together”* (Parr, 2011: para. 6).

For the Californian Ideologue, this dream appeared to be coming true, with journalists describing political transformations happening because of social media, changes happening “because the will of the people is heard more” (The Telegraph, 2011). They proclaimed that the 2008 Obama campaign was the “Facebook election” (Dutta & Fraser, 2008: para. 4) as citizens could “connect directly with American voters” on social media (ibid.). With Egypt’s overthrow of Mubarak in 2011, Facebook was credited by influential Egyptian blogger Wael Ghonim, who said, “I want to meet Mark Zuckerberg one day and thank him… this revolution started on Facebook.” (Smith, 2011: para. 5). In a video of Facebook’s 2011 developer conference, a Zuckerberg impersonator channels Facebook’s excitement, screaming and shouting “Yeah!”, “Come on!”, and “we’re going to change the universe!” (Nikolaenkov, 2011: 00:00 – 00:30), which Zuckerberg agreed, “is accurate” (ibid.:

07:55). It appeared to the Californian Ideologue that social transformations were happening due to social media, removing the power of authoritarian governments. However, as a reminder that the journey is only “1% finished,” Facebook’s “ceilings are left exposed and the office space is left unfinished,” (Facebook Careers, 2016: para. 10). The “reality” of these social changes was seen *through* the cybernetic fantasy.

In this section, I have analysed how the cybernetic fantasy functioned at Facebook. This depended on making connections between people and their actions all over the web, and making Facebook the centre of the Internet. This helped Facebook’s virtual class construct a “reality” that explained transformational changes in the world, and in the next chapter I will use this to understand how this fantasy struggled to cover over the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

## 4.3 Move Fast and Break Things

In this section, I will look at how the cybernetic fantasy directs enjoyment into hacking. This can be understood as a form of nonsensical enjoyment, *jouissance*, as outlined in Section 3.3. I start by looking hacking in the founding of Facebook, before examining its evolution.

The first iteration of Facebook, called Facemash, was created one night when Zuckerberg was at university. This simple site enabled Harvard students to rate female classmates’ attractiveness, which Zuckerberg created by stealing photos of classmates from university servers in a “guerrilla computing” operation (Kirkpatrick, 2011: 23). According to public posts, Zuckerberg hacked through the night, “breaking into the private user data of each of Harvard’s residences and blogging proudly” (Hoffman, 2010: para. 30). Harvard’s management found him guilty “of violating student privacy” (ibid.). He celebrated this verdict by drinking champagne with roommates (ibid.). Breaking rules and norms for the Californian Ideologue is part of hacking, and risking offence is part of this enjoyment. He later apologised, saying “I’m not willing to risk insulting anyone”

(Kaplan, 2003: para. 10). Enjoyment of hacking arguably emerges in the Zuckerberg vs Winkelvoss case: Zuckerberg settled an undisclosed amount after being accused of stealing the idea for Facebook (Kirkpatrick, 2011: 65). Already at this early stage, Zuckerberg's hacking showed enjoyment for breaking data protection laws, intellectual copyright, confrontation and pushing against accepted social values. Kirkpatrick argues Zuckerberg just doesn't "pay much attention" to rules (ibid.: 24), and once turned up to meet wealthy investors wearing pyjamas (ibid.: 104). This enjoyment transformed into Facebook's early motto, "Move Fast and Break Things", and, as Facebook expanded, the lack of oversight was empowering. "There was an absence of process that was mind-blowing" (Fisher, 2018: para. 103), one employee said, with people "working stealthily" (ibid.: para. 103) and launching code "in the middle of the night. No testing—they would just ship it" (ibid.: para. 103), saying, "that's the hacker mentality: You just get it done" (ibid.: para. 107). In the office, employees would code while drunk, rarely sleep, surrounded by shocking graffiti like a "10-foot-high... huge buxom woman with enormous breasts wearing this Mad Max–style costume riding a bulldog" (ibid.: para. 77), a "visual and a physical manifestation of what's happening on the computers" (Metz, 2014: para. 8). The focus on hacking created a culture "without oversight, without change control and without governance", Silicon Valley's "wild wild west" (DCMSIGC, 2018b: Q4350). Zuckerberg commented that "I need servers just as much as I need food." (Kirkpatrick, 2011: 58), appearing to depict an uncontrollable addiction.

In Section 3.3, hacking is understood as a compulsion, and this need emerges later in Facebook's life. Zuckerberg's letter to investors in 2012 makes clear how Facebook's virtual class is dependent on hacking. This is a belief in "hands-on" (Zuckerberg, 2017a, The Hacker Way: para. 5) work instead of "debating for days whether a new idea is possible" (ibid.), and believing "that something can always be better" (ibid.: para. 3). Notably, he disavows Facebook's own history with illegal activity, saying hacking has an "unfairly negative connotation" (ibid.: para. 2), saying "hacking just

means building something quickly or testing the boundaries of what can be done" (ibid.: para. 2). The focus on action is evident in Martinez's book, with senior staff saying "We're not here to fuck around. You're at Facebook now" (2018: 265) so "just fucking do it" (ibid.: 266). He says "pointless all night hackathons serve as a pep-rally to ensure 'total commitment'" (ibid.: 262), and the launch of Google+ threatened Facebook's survival, so Facebook declared war, with Zuckerberg shouting that Google "must be destroyed!" (ibid.: 289), resulting in "total war" (ibid.: 290). To ensure that staff focus on enjoying hacking, the modern Facebook HQ is located on "Hacker Way", the sign in reception commands workers to "HACK" (Robison, 2015), and ubiquitously placed posters reinforce this (Martinez, 2018: 266).

This section examined how enjoyment of hacking functions at Facebook, which I will use in the next chapter to analyse the Cambridge Analytica scandal. From its early days, Facebook challenged social norms, broke rules, focused on technical mastery and intensive programming, and even declared war. Signs and symbols in the Facebook office represented these values, and kept the virtual class focused on hacking.

## 4.4 The Centre of the Internet

In Section 3.4, I covered how the Californian Ideology believes in technological determinism, where technological progress functions as God. Zuckerberg has always claimed he is not motivated by profit, as described by Fuchs (2012: 155). Fuchs sees Zuckerberg as deliberately covering over the reality of exploitation. If we examine Facebook's ideology using Žižek's approach, we can develop an alternative theory. Following on from the investigation in Section 3.4, we can look at how *misrecognition* and *transference* function so that Facebook's virtual class can believe in inevitable technological progress.

It appears that, from the start of Facebook, up until 2017, Zuckerberg has consistently misunderstood capitalism and the importance it has on sustaining his business. Rather than a deliberate strategy, his avoidance of profit can be understood as part of the Californian Ideology. In Kirkpatrick's semi-autobiographical account of Facebook's development, he interviews an ex-director, Sean Parker, who says Zuckerberg "was not thinking, 'Let's make some money and get out'" (Kirkpatrick, 2011: 47), instead Zuckerberg had "imperial tendencies" (ibid.), and wanted to "build something... to take over the world" (ibid.). Zuckerberg seemed consistently averse to Facebook's profits. In Facebook's early days, he did not see "a business imperative" (ibid.: 35), instead focusing on the "social" aspect (ibid.). However, as costs began to mount, he started placing adverts (ibid.: 42). Zuckerberg even created apologies underneath adverts saying: "we don't like these either but they pay the bills" (ibid.: 43). On meeting Sheryl Sandberg, who saw Facebook's potential to be an "advertising powerhouse" (ibid.: 256), Zuckerberg sought to pass on this unpleasant responsibility. Zuckerberg continued to believe he was "forced by circumstances to accept advertising" (ibid.: 258), but still avoided it, despite Facebook's almost total reliance on advertising (Fuchs, 2017: 154; SEC Filings, 2018). In *Chaos Monkeys*, Martinez describes the layout of the Facebook offices in 2012 as keeping the "Ads team at arm's length," (2018: 2) like a "pair of sweaty underwear" (ibid.). Even when Facebook floated on the stock exchange to raise money in 2011, Zuckerberg maintained Facebook was not "designed to be a company" (Zuckerberg, 2017a: para. 10), it was about a "social mission" (ibid.). According to Martinez, "most of Facebook, outside of the Ads team, had no clue how Facebook made money" (2018: 446) and were "quite content to stay that way" (ibid.). Zuckerberg simply wanted enough money for a "good economic engine" (Kirkpatrick, 2012: para. 6) to transform the world. As covered in Section 4.2, the virtual class were exhorted to believe that Facebook was the final and inevitable chapter in human communications, because Facebook sees history as a story of how of we have "come

together in ever greater numbers -- from tribes to cities to nations" culminating in its final form, that of Facebook (Zuckerberg, 2017b: para. 3).

While Zuckerberg did not see the role capitalism played, one specific act of *transference* was important to Facebook's success, that is, the focus on growth before profits (Kirkpatrick, 2011: 319). By focusing on user growth rather than financial growth, Facebook has ensured almost complete market dominance. Facebook's early team sometimes engaged in communal chants of "Dominate!" (Fisher, 2018: para. 185). As Srnicek describes in *Platform Capitalism*, social media platforms have a tendency to become monopolies once they capture a large number of users (2016: 45), a point that Peter Thiel, a director of Facebook, agrees with, but says dominance allows companies to serve people better (Thiel, 2014: para. 23). Facebook's mission to become the "centre" of the Internet (see Section 4.2) required domination, but Zuckerberg covered this up with a fantasy of Facebook as public infrastructure (Fisher, 2018: para. 125; Zuckerberg, 2017b: para. 3). One developer says, "It's kind of like they're a standards creating body where everyone is benefiting" (Metz, 2012: para. 31). With the launch of the Open Graph (Nikolaenkov, 2011), Facebook intended to instigate an "ecosystem" (ibid.) of apps to provide new services, but also to collect data, "feeding it back into the Facebook machine," (Metz, 2012: para. 8), so that Facebook could realise its ambition of being the centre of the Internet. By 2012, 9 million apps tied into Facebook (Metz, 2012: para. 5), allowing many actions around the Internet to be more "social" (ibid.: para. 10). The task for Facebook's Growth team was to increase the number of users, and "exploited every piece of psychological gimcrackery, every tool of visual legerdemain, to turn a pair of eyeballs into a Facebook user ID" (Martinez, 2018: 374). The "religious" nature of Facebook (ibid.: 263) forgave the virtual class for manipulating users, as the Californian Ideologue can believe these tactics are for the greater good. But, despite a growing userbase, burgeoning data collection, and complex data analytics, Facebook still had to successfully monetise it. The problem

was solved by monetising Facebook's vast number of social apps, which enabled data collection and targeted adverts on a massive scale (ibid.: 380-292).

## 4.5 Summary

This chapter has helped to answer the question of how the Californian Ideology functions within Facebook. Firstly, in Section 4.2, analysis of the fantasy showed how the virtual class at Facebook were commanded by powerful internal propaganda to believe in the transformational power of connecting and sharing. Secondly, in Section 4.3 I examined how this functioned through compulsive *jouissance* of hacking, which emerged as a demand for quick results, confrontation and intensive programming. Thirdly, in Section 4.4, I examined how ideology at Facebook functions through transference. This misrecognises capitalism's role and displaces it onto technology, and led to a focus on rapid growth of users, apps and data. In the next chapter I will use this research to investigate what the Cambridge Analytica scandal can tell us about this ideology.

# Chapter Five: The Real at Facebook – Cambridge Analytica

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to investigate what the Cambridge Analytica crisis can tell us about the Californian Ideology. So far I have examined how Barbrook and Cameron understood ideology as "wilful blindness" (1996: 45), and how this limits our investigation. I then applied Žižek's ideology critique (1994: 1-30) to understand how the digital utopia, hacking, and techno-determinism function within this ideology, and how this emerged in Facebook. In this chapter I will look at the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the aftershocks, and how the Real of data accumulation, unauthorised surveillance, and manipulation emerged, and how this led to the virtual class restructuring "reality".

## 5.2 The Real: A Scandal Emerges

Previously, in Chapter Three, I introduced a number of psychoanalytic concepts, such as the Symbolic, fantasy, *jouissance*, and transference. In this chapter I will also bring in the concept of the Real, as that which cannot be covered over by fantasy. We can understand facing the Real as a traumatic encounter that the subject tries to avoid or distance themselves from (Žižek, 2006: 61-78). In Žižek's ideology critique, the dream structures "reality" itself, so, to escape a traumatic event, the subject creates a new "reality" that enables an escape from this trauma (Žižek, 1992: 8). This section examines how the Real was exposed during this scandal, causing anxiety within the company, and how it was covered over by a restructured fantasy.

Controversy has been a regular occurrence at Facebook. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada found Facebook guilty of privacy invasion (OPCC, 2009), and the US Federal Trade Commission made a similar finding (FTC, 2011). The next year, the Irish Data Protection

Commissioner investigated them regarding user privacy (BBC, 2012), and Edward Snowden's documents revealed Facebook's collaboration with the National Security Agency (The Guardian, 2013). Facebook also has been strongly criticised by professional psychological organisations (Bullen & Oates, 2014), and faced widespread criticism about their Internet.org project (Access Now, 2015). However, these problems appear to have been successfully covered over by the cybernetic fantasy described in section 4.2. This appears to be evident in an interview with Zuckerberg, who said, "we have gotten mostly glowing and adoring attention from people" until the recent scandal, showing no recognition of these controversies (Swisher, 2018: para. 164)[1]. Surrounded by positive stories from Facebook's internal "filter bubble" (Dalal, 2018: para. 16) live displays of new friends being made across the world (Martinez, 2018: 208-209), and powerful internal PR (ibid.: 259-270), Facebook could cover over the Real of these scandals with fantasy. However, with the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit referendum, allegations of manipulation by Cambridge Analytica and Russia emerged and public criticism became widespread. Facebook responded with an updated mission in 2017, putting greater emphasis on community (Zuckerberg, 2017b). Facebook understood dissatisfaction with globalisation as an absence of local community, a problem solvable through Facebook with self-organised groups; a focus on the local, away from the global (ibid.). However, the Real could not be completely covered over. Ex-employee Martinez describes privacy "as nuclear weapons are to Iran: this constant cloud overhead" (Martinez, 2018: 325), but rather than face this problem, there appears to be a pattern of avoidance, hiding from the traumatic Real. Ex-Facebook employee Sandy Parakilas describes being asked "do you really want to see what you'll find?" when asking about data misuse (Madrigal, 2018b: para. 5); the company took no action after Obama's campaign team harvested "the whole social graph" (ibid.: para. 8); COO Sandberg was reportedly angry because employees investigated Russian interference (Frenkel *et al*, 2018: Minimising Russia's Role, para 6); and Zuckerberg said it was "crazy" that Facebook influences elections (Newton, 2016: para. 1). The pattern appears to

show how their construction of “reality” depends on covering over the Real. Facebook’s spending on internal “propaganda” (Martinez, 2018: 289) enabled an “intoxicating” (ibid.: 263) fantasy to cover over the traumatic Real.

Although Facebook’s fantasy was powerful, the emergence of the Cambridge Analytica scandal was an enormous and inescapable encounter with the Real for Facebook’s virtual class. As Žižek describes, the encounter with the Real can stir overwhelming anxiety (Žižek, 1992: 8; Žižek, 2006: 61-78), which is visible in Facebook’s reaction. When the story broke, headlines across the world covered the story of how Facebook enabled dark money to manipulate elections, spread fake news, division, and so on (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Rosenberg, Confessore & Cadwalladr, 2018). It took Facebook five days to respond (Wong, 2018). For days, journalists demanded answers, but got none, in spite of plummeting share prices (Dwoskin & Romm, 2018). During this time, Facebook tried a number of times to push away the horrifying Real. When contacted for comment by Guardian journalist Cadwalladr, Facebook threatened to sue to prevent the publication, sent letters to media outlets to argue that the crisis did not constitute a data breach, and blocked both the whistleblower Christopher Wylie and the company Cambridge Analytica (Grierson, 2018; Adams, 2018; Wong, 2018). Despite Zuckerberg’s silence, Facebook’s head of news feed commented, “people [here] are very upset” (Grierson, 2018: para. 6). One employee dared to disobey Facebook’s “citizenship oath” (Martinez, 2018: 263) by speaking to the press, leaking an internal memo from Vice President Andrew Bozworth. This memo argued that all “growth is justified” (Mac, Warzel & Kantrowitz, 2018: The Memo, para. 11) , “all of it” (ibid.), even if “someone dies in a terrorist attack” (ibid.: para. 7), or it “costs a life by exposing someone to bullies” (ibid.). This was what Bozworth calls the “ugly” of Facebook (ibid.: para. 2). Facebook’s virtual class attacked the leaker on internal Facebook groups, reacting with a mixture of 3,000 likes, sad and angry emojis (Newton, 2018a: para. 7), commenting on a “fucking terrible” act from an

“irresponsible jerk”, with a “god complex that jeopardizes our inner culture” (Newton, 2018a: para. 9). This leaker is “sabotaging the company” and that which “makes Facebook great” (ibid.). However, the content of the leak is significant, as it seeks to incorporate some of the Real into the fantasy. Bozworth's “ugly” accepts that people use Facebook for bad, but still justifies all growth. This scandal forced Facebook to confront the Real instead of avoiding it. Subsequently, Facebook restructured their “reality” to incorporate Facebook’s “ugly” by turning away from growth at all costs, emerging in Zuckerberg’s promise to “make our community safer” (Zuckerberg, 2018a: para. 15). This initial apology accepted “we made mistakes,” (ibid.: para. 2) but emphasised that it was Cambridge Analytica, Russians, and Alexandr Kogan (who sold Cambridge Analytica the data) that were the “bad actors” (ibid.: para. 10). The restructuring of reality functioned through turning away from Bozworth’s demand for growth at all costs. Instead, Facebook now suggested slightly slower growth and more investment in preventing misuse. In the next section I will look at this in more detail, as the restructuring of “reality” continued to emerge over the following weeks and months.

## 5.3 Internet Independence

In this section I will explore Facebook’s reaction to the ongoing controversy around the Cambridge Analytica scandal. I have shown how the virtual class incorporated Facebook’s negative impact on society as a problem caused “bad actors”. In this section I examine how Facebook’s fantasy of the Internet as a frontier outside government control emerged.

In Facebook’s restructured “reality,” Facebook connects people, but now also keeps us safe in a dangerous world. This functions through Zuckerberg’s description of a “philosophical shift” (Bloomberg Government, 2018a: para. 164) which is to “make sure” that Facebook is “used for good” (ibid.: para. 166). Previously, Facebook “focused on... the good that connecting people can

do” (ibid.: 86; CNBC, 2018: 00:00:40). In this old “reality”, failure to be completely optimistic would be denounced, with journalist Kara Swisher being told “you’re so negative!” by Facebook for seeing the potential for misuse of a new feature (Recode, 2018: 00:04:00). Facebook COO Sandberg says they now understand and incorporate the “ugly of humanity” (ibid.: 00:01:00) into their fantasy, which Chief Technologist Schroepfer says is the “biggest cultural change I have seen since I've been there” (ibid.: 00:13:00). Facebook continues to characterise the Cambridge Analytica fallout as external “bad actors” (Zuckerberg, 2018b: Fake Accounts, para. 13) that are “manipulating people” (ibid.: para. 9) or developers “misusing our information” (CNBC, 2018: 00:01:35). They also blame careless users, saying “the vast majority of the data that Facebook knows is because you chose to share it” (Nichols, 2018: para. 11). Facebook’s apology campaign tries to repair the damage, but significantly doesn’t take responsibility or specify what they did wrong (Beers, 2018; Morse, 2018). What they mean is, “sorry, but… we did nothing wrong” as one politician put it (DCMSIGC, 2018b: Q4285). Blaming others enables Facebook to believe that current criticism will be temporary, fixable through technical solutions rather than a structural crisis. As Zuckerberg says, “If people wanna focus on some real [difficult] issues for a couple of years, I’m fine with it” (Swisher, 2018: para. 164). The incorporation of the “ugly” of humanity still posits Facebook as a benevolent, transformative company that is “good for society” (Bloomberg Government, 2018b: para. 852), but their fantasy now includes Facebook “protecting” the world (Zuckerberg, 2018b: para. 1), demonstrated through incredible numbers of accounts blocked, posts removed, and pages taken down (ibid.: para. 13; Rosen, 2018; CNBC, 2018: 00:57:45), as well as stories of helping refugees, victims of terrorism and natural disasters (Bloomberg Government, 2018b: para. 87; CNBC, 2018: 00:50). However, Zuckerberg still does not give up on the cybernetic fantasy, evident in his feeling of “responsibility to keep on moving forward and giving people tools to share their experience and connect and come together in new ways” (Swisher, 2018: para. 194)[1]. This mission to keep users safe also justifies closer ties with government security agencies

(Zuckerberg, 2018b: Coordinating With Governments and Companies, para. 4) – but this relationship is on Facebook's terms, where Facebook chooses what data to share. This demonstrates a clear change from the Californian Ideology's anti-military beliefs (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996: 47-48). It also justifies monopolistic practices – by owning WhatsApp and Instagram they can share information between platforms to keep us even safer (Recode, 2018: 00:24:00). However, when governments dictate these terms, Facebook is far less willing to comply.

In John Perry-Barlow's manifesto, described in Section 3.2, he says "I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you [governments] seek to impose on us" (Perry-Barlow, 1996: para. 2), because governments "have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement" (ibid.). Facebook seems to share the utopian vision of the Internet being outside government control, a lawless frontier (Wylie, 2018: para. 15). This belief appears in Zuckerberg's 2017 post *Building Global Community,* in which Facebook is on a par with governments and global institutions aiming to help "spreading prosperity and freedom, promoting peace and understanding, lifting people out of poverty" (2017b: para. 4). We can see this frontier fantasy still operating in Facebook's responses to politicians around the world. In opening remarks to EU politicians, Zuckerberg says chirpily "it's good to be back in Europe!" and "thank you for inviting me here today" (CNBC, 2018: 00:00:10), refusing to acknowledge the EU had demanded his attendance, not recognising them as authority. The rest of the EU testimony was notable for avoiding answering questions (Constine, 2018a; CNBC, 2018: 01:19:30), and UK authorities complained that "getting basic answers from people who know better has [never] been so difficult" (DCMSIGC, 2018b: Q4352, para. 2), and that Facebook sees government demands "more as advice" (DCMSIGC, 2018b: Q4352, para. 11). Politicians appear to be tolerated by Facebook, as the older generation that doesn't even understand the basic terms of technology. This is evident is senators asking Zuckerberg, "If I'm emailing within WhatsApp, does that ever inform

your advertisers?”,  (Bloomberg Government, 2018a: para. 720) and “Is Twitter the same as what you do?” (Bloomberg Government, 2018a: para. 398), justifying Facebook’s position. This belief appears in Zuckerberg’s consistent refusals to appear before UK politicians – even when representatives from nine countries are involved – with Facebook’s Lord Allen saying Zuckerberg cannot personally attend “every appearance” (DCMSIGC, 2018a: Q4131, para. 11). Zuckerberg’s desire to comply with the “spirit” of EU’s new privacy laws, but not the *actuality* of being regulated by it is evidenced in Facebook’s decision to move data outside Europe (Hern, 2018). Facebook aims to create new standards for industry (Zuckerberg, 2018b: para. 8) its own “Supreme Court” of fake news (Newton, 2018b: para. 19), and depending on circumstances, claims it *is* and *is not* a news publisher, whichever position helps avoid regulation (Levin, 2018). It appears that Facebook treats politicians as if they will never understand the Internet – they are the “weary giants of flesh and steel” that Perry-Barlow describes in his manifesto (Perry-Barlow, 1996: para. 1); on the Internet, politicians will “always be immigrants” (1996: para. 12). When politicians threatened Facebook’s Lord Allan, he said that politicians would be wrong to “turn off the internet” (DCMSIGC, 2018a: Q4273, para. 4), having to be reminded by Damian Collins MP that “the internet and Facebook are not necessarily the same thing,” (ibid.: para. 6). Facebook’s desire to be the centre of the Internet emerges here (see Section 4.2 and 4.4), and the cybernetic frontier fantasy creates a “reality” where Facebook sees themselves as defenders of the Internet against “colonial” invaders (Perry-Barlow, 1996: para. 15).

In this section, I have examined how the restructuring of “reality” after the Cambridge Analytica functioned. The modified, pessimistic ideology includes a fantasy where Facebook keeps society safe. The fantasy of the Internet as a frontier functions through Facebook’s consistently unresponsive and confrontational attitude towards authority.

## 5.4 Hackers at War

So far in regard to the Cambridge Analytica scandal, I have demonstrated that the crisis erupted as an emergence of the Real, which threatened the “reality” of Facebook’s ideology. In this section I will look at how *jouissance* functioned as an uncontrollable demand for hacking at Facebook, as examined in Section 4.3, as involving confrontation, declarations of war, intensive programming, and a demand for fast results.

The fantasy described in the previous section, where Facebook now keeps us safe from bad actors as well as connecting people, means that the company can continue to enjoy their compulsion for hacking. When asked by Kara Swisher about recent scandals, Zuckerberg says Facebook “should be judged on when we become aware of an issue, how we respond” (Recode Decode, 2018: 00:27:00), and that he shouldn't resign because “the important thing... is... to get this right” (ibid.: 00:45:00). It is evident, in being interviewed by the EU Parliament, that Zuckerberg is animated talking about solving these challenges, using “more AI tools” (CNBC, 2018: 00:57:00), which can “upgrade” (ibid.: 00:56:00) the technology to do a “better job of executing our policies” (ibid.: 00:56:00). Zuckerberg appears excited by the idea of an “arms race” (ibid.: 00:59:00) in AI between Facebook and its “adversaries” (ibid.). In opening the F8 Developer conference, text appears across the stage, saying “we build because this last year was hard” (Facebook for Developers, 2018: 00:00:00). Zuckerberg appears to be waking from a nightmare. With a fixed grin and a distant stare, he says “this has been an intense year! I can't believe we're only 4 months in!” (ibid.: 00:01:50). In the rest of the keynote, Zuckerberg talks passionately about resolving these problems (ibid.: 00:02:00 – 00:34:00), concluding by promising to “keep building” and “believing” (ibid.: 00:34:00). However, rather than just seeing this arms race as between adversaries such as Russian actors or right-wing groups, reports are that Zuckerberg told staff “that Facebook Inc. was at war” (Seetharaman, 2018: para. 1), “under siege from lawmakers, investors and angry users” (ibid.: para. 2). This is consistent

with how Facebook behaves when its fantasy is under threat (see Section 4.3). Zuckerberg ignored investors' questions about his leadership (McMahon, 2018), and upset them after promising large investments in security, threatening their returns (Seymour & Dodd, 2018: para. 7); after George Soros criticised the company, Facebook funded anti-Semitic smears against him (Frenkel *et al*, 2018); and after Apple CEO Tim Cook attacked Facebook's "surveillance" practices (Drozdia & Bodoni, 2018: para. 1), Zuckerberg apparently ordered all employees to drop iPhones (Liao, 2018); and an Ipsos survey showed users no longer trust Facebook (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2018). Facebook is investing heavily in lobbying (DCMSIGC, 2018b: Q4330; Molla, 2018), and warned governments of "consequences" if they regulate (Drutman, 2018: The Challenge of Regulation, para. 4). This war with governments seems to be escalating, with DCMSC seizing internal emails from Facebook (Cadwalladr, 2018). As described in Section 3.3 the hacker finds *jouissance* from conflict as well as technical problem solving, so we can understand Facebook's declaration of war as a form of enjoyment.

The threat of regulation is not just a threat to the frontier fantasy of the Internet; it also threatens the enjoyment of fixing these problems. Zuckerberg says he wants "the right regulation" that won't "prevent new technologies like AI" (CNBC, 2018: 01:05:00). When talking about election interference, it is a combination of AI, community moderation and transparency that can fix it – rather than, for example, banning all political advertising (CNBC, 2018: 01:04:00). The enjoyment of fixing politics emerges through Facebook's new Candidate Info feature, where candidates can speak to voters over Facebook (Constine, 2018b). When criticised by the EU for collecting details of non-Facebook users, they created a "Clear History" feature, rather than simply stopping questionable data collection (CNBC, 2018: 01:12:00). I also covered in Section 4.3 how hacking in Facebook functioned as a desire to fix things quickly, hence "Move Fast and Break Things" became a motto. Facebook changed this motto in 2014 (Baer, 2014) but the consequences are still with

Facebook. In a testimony to politicians, Soltani says that as a result of the command to “not fuck around” (Martinez, 2018: p. 265) and “just fucking do it” (ibid.: p. 266) Facebook used poor code, workarounds, and broke privacy policies to achieve quick results. Internal emails show how Facebook’s growth team risked PR backlashes by manipulating users’ privacy settings on Android phones (DCMSC, 2018c: 243). Despite the “high-risk” (ibid.) of negative publicity from this workaround, one email says that “the growth team will charge ahead” anyway (ibid.), appearing to indicate some kind of nonsensical enjoyment about taking risks, bypassing user permissions through technical skill. Potentially, poor code and quick fixes resulted in another massive data leak in September 2018 (DCMSIGC, 2018b: Q4359; Gallagher, 2018). It could be that many of Facebook’s more questionable strategies to surveil users emerged indirectly from an insatiable desire for results and growth rather than a deliberate strategy. This would make these questionable tactics easier to cover over by the cybernetic fantasy: a strong belief in the transformational power of sharing and connecting could justify breaking a few rules.

In this section I have analysed *jouissance* in the form of hacking as it emerged in the Cambridge Analytica crisis at Facebook. We can understand that Facebook’s enjoyment of conflict and belief in the fantasy of Internet independence led them to declare war on those who criticised or threatened the company. This enjoyment also functioned through a compulsion to fix all these problems internally.

## 5.5 Data & Capital Accumulation

In Section 4.4, I looked at techno-determinism, the belief that Facebook as the inevitable final chapter in communication. This disguised capitalism as driving forward technology and functions

as transference. In this section I look at how this transference functioned in the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Previously I discovered how Zuckerberg consistently avoided advertising, and only wanted enough money for a "good economic engine" (Kirkpatrick, 2012: para. 6), appearing uninterested in how this engine functioned as long as it created an increasingly detailed map of connections and enabled Facebook to be the centre of the Internet. In contrast to his interest in the technicalities of AI, Zuckerberg's lack of interest in profits is revealed in his testimony to Congress. On two occasions he said is "not sure" about tracking people across devices, giving the same response about tracking offline activity (Bloomberg Government, 2018a: para, 484; Bloomberg Government, 2018b: para. 739). Even in a basic question about Facebook's use of cookies, his knowledge appears poor: "I know that the — people use cookies on the Internet, and that you can probably correlate activity between — between sessions," (Bloomberg Government, 2018a: para. 312) – he gave only information available on the Dummies Guide on Internet basics (Dummies Guide, n.d.). Employees at Facebook were apparently astonished (Thompson, 2018). One US senator asked a deceptively simple question, "How do you sustain a business model in which users don't pay for your service?" Zuckerberg replied simply, "Senator, we run ads." (Bloomberg Government, 2018a: para. 228-229). Given Zuckerberg's lack of interest in ads, it could be that Facebook's fantasy is that it simply runs ads, in the same way newspapers or billboards do. This would disguise Facebook's complex methods of accumulating profit though data analysis and collection, which must occur *before* these adverts can appear. Facebook must have granular data on users in order to allow advertisers to target a particular audience (Fuchs, 2017: 164; Zuboff, 2015: 77). It was friend data that allowed Kogan to harvest 87 million profiles (Kogan, 2018: 1; Badshah, 2018), data that formed the basis of Cambridge Analytica's manipulation tools (Kogan, 2018: 3; DCMSC, 2018a: 02:56:00). Zuckerberg's internal discussions about friend data appear to acknowledge that giving developers

access to friend data is a privacy risk, but he concludes that allowing access to friend data was critical for Facebook to become the centre of the Internet (DCMSC, 2018c: 50). This justification relied on “data reciprocity” (ibid.: 49) where Facebook provided friend data to apps in exchange for data flowing back to Facebook. This “data reciprocity” from millions of apps (Metz, 2012) appears to have allowed Facebook to create increasingly detailed social maps of the world, our activities, locations, friends, devices, interests and so on. This is consistent with how Fuchs (2017: 137-144), Srnicek (2016: 50-60) and Zuboff (2015: 79) describe the targeted advertising model of accumulation, that require detailed personal data to personalise ads. Facebook was motivated to create this increasingly detailed map, to bring the cybernetic fantasy to life (see Section 4.2), and to realise Facebook’s dream of being the centre of the Internet. External developers and companies appear to have had almost “frictionless” (Scoble, 2011) access to user data for years, evident in a blog post by developer Ian Bogost. He describes how “every Facebook app—even the dumb, innocent ones—collected users’ personal data without even trying” (2018: para. 5), because it was “hard to avoid extracting” (ibid.). Although apps asked users to authorise their data to be shared, it was not clear, and made “it seem official, safe, and even endorsed” (ibid.: para. 25), when actually, the apps extracted and stored personal data on private servers with no guarantee of any protection (ibid.). This is corroborated by accounts of the Obama election team in 2012 saying “Facebook was surprised we were able to suck out the whole social graph, but they didn’t stop us once they realized,” (Madrigal, 2018b: para. 8). As discussed in section 5.2, Facebook consistently looked away when presented with these issues. When Facebook claims they fixed the problem in 2014 (Zuckerberg, 2018a: para. 6), this may comfort users worried about their personal data, however, “if your data was taken, it has very likely been sold, laundered, and put back into Facebook” (Koebler, 2018: para. 4), as appears to have happened in the Cambridge Analytica scandal (DCMSC, 2018a: 02:27:00; Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). This mass data collection was covered over by techno-determinism, believing the inevitable “so-called Zuckerberg's Law” that “postulates that

people share twice as much information each year" (Isaac, 2011: para. 30). We can see how the connection to God (see Section 3.4) appears through what Martinez describes an "almost religious" (2018: 263) devotion to connecting and sharing, as if this alone sustained Facebook's business.

In an interview with Kara Swisher[1] (Recode Decode, 2018; Swisher, 2018), Zuckerberg still appears to believe in techno-determinism, technology as the independent factor that can create a better world. He defends his belief in pushing forward technology by experimenting, because "getting things right first time has a high cost" (Recode Decode, 2018: 27:00–32:00) that is, it will "slow down progress" (ibid.), and therefore will prevent the company "serving people" best (ibid.). Defending his belief that technological progress overrides social harmony, he says, "values are only worth what you give up for them," (ibid.). Slowing down progress he says, would mean a "lot of good that should happen won't happen" (ibid.), and the "good is diffuse", "not things that get in the news" (ibid.). He says the good is evident in "people coming up to me in the street and saying they got married because of Facebook" (ibid.) or saying that "I have this kid because of Facebook" (ibid.), or in "stories of how communities on Facebook are the most meaningful things in their life" (ibid.), and fantasy functions by completing these stories, saying this is happening everywhere (Žižek, 1989: 132). However, in internal emails, he accepts that what is good for the world isn't necessarily good for Facebook (DCMSC, 2018c: 49). What he doesn't look at, which is absent from other internal emails obtained by DCMSC, is the opposite: that what is good for Facebook is not necessarily good for the world (DCMSC, 2018c). This is the Real that the virtual class "don't want to hear" (Mac, Warzel & Kantrowitz, 2018: The Memo, para. 10), the Real that Bozworth's leaked memo tries to come to terms with (ibid.). He justifies growth at all costs, even if this results in terrorist attacks, bullying, self-harm, and so on (ibid.: para. 6). Growth also justifies:

> *"All the questionable contact importing practices. All the subtle language that helps people stay searchable by friends. All of the work we do to bring more communication in. The work we will likely have to do in China some day." (ibid.: para. 8).*

The anxious and outraged reaction to the publication of this internal message was described in Section 5.2, but although Facebook distanced themselves from these comments (ibid.: para. 17), the questionable practices are backed up by the internal emails released (DCMSC, 2018c; Cadwalladr, 2018). So, while the reaction can be understood as partly anger towards the employee that leaked the post, it can also be understood as the virtual class having to face the Real, Facebook's mass-surveillance, manipulation, fake-news accusations, and so on. With the publication of this post, and the fallout from the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the virtual class faced a threat to their "reality" (Žižek, 1992: 8). With this post in the public domain, published in technology magazines and newspapers, the Real is unavoidable. As described in Section 5.3, this threat to their "reality" is covered over by blaming all of Facebook's unsightly practices on external threats that Facebook will now protect us from. This enables Facebook to avoid looking at its decisions regarding user data, allowing Facebook to continue believing Facebook's data surveillance is an inevitable part of technological progress (Isaac, 2011: para. 30). As such, Facebook can continue to believe in the fantasy of transforming the world for good, albeit in a more pessimistic manner, in a world filled with "bad actors" (Zuckerberg, 2018a: para. 10) that Facebook now needs to protect us from.

This section examined how techno-determinism at Facebook functioned through the transference of capitalism onto technology, enabling Facebook's questionable practices to be covered over by growing the network of users, activities, and apps, which the virtual class believed to be inevitable.

## 5.6 Summary

In this chapter I examined how the Cambridge Analytica scandal resulted in Facebook rebuilding "reality", taking a more pessimistic outlook on society after facing the Real. Facebook still believes it is benefiting the world, but now believes in a fantasy of keeping the world safe, too. The frontier fantasy functions through Facebook's attitude towards politicians, whom Facebook ignores or attacks, not accepting their authority. The enjoyment of hacking directs *jouissance* into conflict and technical fixes, manifesting in declarations of war against governments, users, and investors. Facebook's transference of capitalism onto technology functions through techno-determinism, which sees Facebook's practices as inevitable, and results in ignorance and avoidance of how Facebook generates profits, covered over by Facebook's increasingly complex network of cybernetic connectivity. The exposure of the Real in this scandal led Facebook to continue to avoid this by blaming these problems on "bad actors" rather than looking at how Facebook generates profits. This chapter has concluded the investigation, and has answered the questions laid out in the Introduction. The next chapter will summarise and conclude this thesis.

# Chapter Six: Conclusion

This investigation found that the Californian Ideology had a noticeable – and potentially major – influence on Facebook and the Cambridge Analytica scandal. It overcame some of the limitations in Barbrook & Cameron's approach to ideology, helping to understand the role of fantasy in this ideology. Specifically, I set out to answer three questions. These focused on understanding what the Californian Ideology is; how this operates within Facebook; and what the Cambridge Analytica scandal tells us about this ideology.

In Chapter Two, I examined the Californian Ideology as described in Barbrook and Cameron's paper (1996), as well as work by Fuchs (2016b) and Morozov (2011). I found that these authors appeared to understand ideology as a mask, a concept that could not explain how the subject resolves contractions between objective reality and fantasy.

In Chapter Three, I employed psychoanalytic theory instead, based on Žižek's ideology critique (1994: 1-30). I found that the Symbolic language of sharing, self-organising and connecting constructed the Californian Ideology's knowledge, viewing communication as a network that enables society to become fluid and decentralised, and the cybernetic frontier fantasy covered over the inconsistencies. Enjoyment emerged through hacking as confrontation, mastery of technology and rule-breaking, while transference emerged as a belief in techno-determinism, where technological progress covered over capitalism's role in creating technological change.

I examined Facebook's ideology in Chapter Four, and found that Facebook's virtual class believed that through sharing and connecting, Facebook could democratise the world, empower people and end dictatorships. Powerful internal propaganda placed Facebook at the centre of the Internet, and pressured the virtual class to believe in this fantasy. Hacking emerged as confrontation, desire for technical mastery, demand for quick results, and refusal to adhere to cultural conventions. Many at Facebook, including Zuckerberg, avoided looking at how Facebook makes profits, covering over

capitalism through a belief in techno-determinism, the inevitability of Facebook bringing the world together.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I investigated how the traumatic Real emerged as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, where Facebook's dependence on mass-surveillance, manipulation, and monetisation of data became unavoidable, threatening their "reality". However, rather than destroying the cybernetic frontier fantasy, "reality" was reconstructed, with problems blamed on "bad actors" (Zuckerberg, 2018b: para. 10). Facebook now appears to believe in slowing down growth to counteract these "bad actors". However, the virtual class also appears have declared war on those that threaten the Facebook's independence. Enjoyment continues to function through conflict and a desire to find technical fixes, while capitalism is still disguised by techno-determinism. Based on this evidence, I believe this investigation shows that the Californian Ideology has a potentially major influence at Facebook.

In the last chapter, I found that many questions revolved around Zuckerberg's suitability as CEO (Swisher, 2018: para. 109; McMahon, 2018; Griffin, 2018). Based on this thesis, I believe that replacing Zuckerberg could fundamentally change the company's culture and ideology. Zuckerberg's strong belief in the cybernetic fantasy and techno-determinism, technical mastery, confrontational attitude, and so on, are essential to Facebook's ideology. However, due to Zuckerberg's apparent commitment to war with users, politicians and investors, trust in Facebook may continue falling, and calls for his resignation may become widespread.

Another important issue to consider is whether Facebook employees are becoming less convinced by the fantasy. This may function through a cybernetic fantasy that now struggles to cover over the Real (Žižek, 1992: 8) of Facebook's domination, meaning employees cannot find *jouissance* (Žižek, 1989: 138-139) through hacking, and giving workers a reason to leave. Some former advisors and employees now actively see Facebook as a destructive force (McNamee, 2018; Allen, 2018; Bridge,

2018). This appears to show that some employees have come to face the Real of Facebook's accumulation methods.

This thesis also connects to a wider climate of crisis in Silicon Valley. Many CEOs such as Musk (Korosec, 2018), Bezos (Heater, 2018) and Kalanick (Matney, 2018) have faced widespread criticism, while Google has been struggling with an increasingly organised workforce (Ghaffery & Johnson, 2018). Tech companies are no longer considered reliable investments (Dew, 2018; Vlastelica, 2018; Waters, Mayer & Jopson, 2018) and Wired declares that society now hates Silicon Valley's "toxic culture" (Griffith, 2018). Based on the anger politicians from many countries after Zuckerberg consistently refused to cooperate (DCMSIGC, 2018a: Q4131-Q4136), regulation of Facebook appears inevitable in some form. So, rather than using this moment merely to demand regulation of Facebook, this crisis opens the possibility for confronting capitalism and demanding radical reforms. Increasing numbers of tech workers appear to be doing this, such as Liu (2018) and Prado (2018), and others (Ghaffery & Johnson, 2018) who are re-imagining ownership and democracy in Silicon Valley. As the virtual class faces the Real of capitalism, it is possible for this class restructure "reality" around a new utopian fantasy (Žižek, quoted in: McMillan, 2016: 13-14). Popular books such as Bastani's forthcoming *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (2019), Mason's *Postcapitalism* (2016), and Srnicek & Williams' *Inventing the Future* (2015) may succeed in capturing the virtual class's imagination, enabling workers to believe in a new world of democratically owned technology that does not need to exploit users or workers. The uncertainty of capitalism in 2018 offers many possibilities for ideology critique, because economic, social and ecological crises cannot easily be covered over by existing ideological fantasies, and this provides opportunities for new fantasies to emerge.

# Content Notes

1 There is both audio (Recode Decode, 2018) and transcript (Swisher, 2018) available of this interview. Where the transcript catches the details correctly I have used referenced this; when it does not, I have referenced the audio.

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