4. From Human Capital to Human Heritage

When recorded, the techno-anthropological circle transforms human capital into an asset of humanity. At present, we are witnessing a vast and inequitable production of surplus value in which humanity as a whole—including retirees, children, the unemployed, and the otherwise occupied—generates value that is enjoyed solely by a select few platforms. Already at this level, consumption, the quintessential form of human life, is undergoing a profound transformation. From its previous state of wastefulness, it is evolving into the most remarkable generator of value that humanity has ever witnessed. While production, driven by merit, is subject to increasing automation, consumption, born from consumption itself, emerges as the primary wellspring of all value, both in conceptual and economic terms. The task at hand is to ensure the equitable redistribution of this capital—the documedial surplus value—for the greater benefit and well-being of humanity as a whole.

This heritage is first of all *new*, for although the consumption acts it records date back to the origins of the human species, they have not been, until now, documented and transformed into data, into potential capital. Moreover, this new heritage is *rich*, as it does not merely document wealth or possessions, but rather captures the thoughts, words, deeds, likes and dislikes of humans who continually enrich the vast archive from which artificial intelligence draws its wisdom. Thirdly, this heritage is *renewable*, since data ownership has the public character of ideas: unlike tangible assets, data can be shared without loss. Finally, and above all, it is an *equitable* heritage, emerging not from the inherently contentious and subjective concept of merit, but

rather from the inexhaustible and egalitarian force of need that makes all humans equal.

4.1 A New Heritage

The human heritage is ontologically new. Acts that have characterized the human way of life (walking, watching, consuming, appreciating, fearing) for millions of years, and that have left no or very few traces so far and only in solemn circumstances, are now being recorded and transformed into documents. This represents a qualitative and quantitative change: the anthropic mass has reached unprecedented heights, a circumstance that potentially turns into a possible resource what is effectively the root cause of the environmental crisis. All these forms of life are being meticulously recorded, a departure from the past where traces were elusive. These are acts that we rarely consciously acknowledge. Who keeps track of the precise time and location when they searched for a restaurant? We may cough multiple times during a phone call without paying much attention to it, and when asked how many times, we would struggle to recall. Similarly, there are actions we know we perform but refrain from quantifying, for how many of us, before the advent of the smart phone, counted their steps during a walk? Many experiences that would have gone unnoticed without the Web, like monitoring our biorhythms, now find their place in recorded history. It is far more important to recognize this capital than to discover a new world or conquer space, for it signifies the proliferation of objects and meanings within our own world.

   The critical and decisive realm where humanity's heritage is produced is what I have called the "docusphere," a vast repository of human life forms that introduce into the world an infinite variety of objects that previously left no trace. The fact that the computer to which I am currently dictating or on which I am typing keeps track of the time and location of my input does not require any deliberate intention on my part. This seamless operation is cost-effective and encompasses a wealth of data, ranging from my geolocation and body temperature to the direc-

tion of my gaze, capturing everything I did before and after this dictation. These unassuming yet significant aspects herald a Copernican revolution that now more than ever underscores the indispensability of theory.

The new resources, in fact, would be incomprehensible from a theoretical standpoint if we were to adopt the mainstream perspective that treats social reality as a mere reflection of the actions and thoughts of its actors, an approach I refer to as *intentionalism*. Intentionalism, by tying social reality to collective intentionality, deprives social objects of their autonomous ontological reality, reducing them to mere reflections of mental operations. The most influential exponent of intentionalism, the U.S. philosopher John Searle, has spoken of an "immense invisible ontology" consisting of social objects.[1] However, he did not specify whether these objects were novel, and this ambiguity is understandable since he had in mind an ontology subordinate to physical entities and collective psychology. Searle's reliance on the constitutive rule that X counts as Y in C for social objects, positions them as composites of physical entities (natural or artificial) on one hand and collective intentionality on the other. The subsequent definition of social objects as mere outcomes of collective intentionality[2] undermines their autonomy in relation to the intentional states that produce them. In philosophical terms, intentionalism reveals itself as the direct heir to transcendental idealism, wherein the self constructs its own world, which, therefore, is but a reflection of its creator's thoughts and will.

Just as transcendental idealism dissolved into a nihilism in general ontology, intentionalism gives rise to a nihilism in social ontology, with political implications that prevent us from relying on the collective human heritage to address the challenges posed by automation. Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, intentionalism fails to provide a satisfactory response to the question of why platform services are frequently offered free of charge. Why indeed? If there were no financial interest, the

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1   John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

2   John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

behavior of platforms would be inexplicable. But if we view data as the mere shadow of collective intentionality, then we will equally fail to understand why platforms go to so much trouble to collect it, and above all, we won't be able to understand how it is possible to collect something that does not exist. **To account for the existence and autonomy of data, a realistic perspective rooted in social ontology is required. This perspective embraces the thesis of** *documentalism,* which contends that social objects are much more than mere reflections of the intentions of social actors, just as the artworks showcased in a gallery are more than mere reminders of the artists' ideas.

Within this framework, the Web emerges as an enormous social objects machine giving rise to a comprehensive archive of human life where everything is written. It encompasses both intentional communication (even an audio message is writing, because it is repeatable) but also the vast expanse of data documenting our actions, even those we never consciously intend to produce. **From the perspective of documentalism, the constitutive rule of social objects—including data—can be stated as Object = Recorded Act. These social objects (data) emerge as the result of recorded social acts, embodying the intricacies of human behavior and meticulously preserved in some form of medium.**[3] The result is none other than the docusphere, a vast territory that would disappear without the act of recording. Yet, when documented, it gives rise to a tangible digital heritage that transcends the realm of the virtual, as it keeps track not of thoughts and intentions but of actions. By emphasizing the constitutive ontological nature of recording, which emancipates the object from the producing subject, documentalism goes beyond the perception of social objects as mere reflections of intentionality and recognizes intentionality itself as a reflection and derivative of social objects. This not only explains how data (unlike collective intentionality and other phantom entities) can be capitalized, but also why individual intentionality—what we are and what we want—is significantly shaped by the surrounding environment, primarily a documentary context. Social intentions and desires, everything that goes beyond the immediate satisfac-

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3   Ferraris, *Documentality,* cit.

tion of organic needs, emerge from the encounter of a living body that supplies vitality and need with a documentary structure that determines the form that intentionality takes, namely the orientation of our higher and culturally determined needs.

Now, the following consideration arises: To assert that nothing exists outside the text[4] is an ontologically false and epistemologically unoriginal statement, as it merely suggests that intuitions devoid of concepts are blind and that conceptual frameworks play a constitutive role in knowledge acquisition. However, it becomes an ontologically valid and epistemologically groundbreaking assertion when we recognize that *nothing social exists outside the text*. Here, the "text" refers to the power of record keeping and capitalization that predates the so-called "civilizations of writing," as exemplified by the pivotal role of capitalization in human civilization and confirmed by the explosion of recording on the Web. Finally, it can become an economically and politically intriguing proposition when we transform the necessary condition (nothing social exists outside the text) into a sufficient condition (if there is a text, then there is something social). By demonstrating how recording has the power to bring forth objects that otherwise would not exist, we can establish that what is produced through the documentation of human forms of life is an entirely novel and ever-growing capital.

In the pre-digital era, when every human action was not automatically recorded, consumption left little to no traces. However, today, consumption and the intricate web of human activity surrounding it for various purposes (needs, desires, useful or futile acts, curiosity, and multifaceted necessities in an animal structurally inclined towards dependence). It is produces value, i.e., data capital. It is this very data that progressively makes humans as producers more and more obsolete. Yet, it is precisely this data that also works a miracle that no revolution had ever performed: humans are no longer valued solely for their physical prowess, patience, or precision, nor are they merely regarded as incidental parts of a machine. Rather, they become indispensable because of

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4   Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

their being human, as bearers of preferences, interests, and values, i.e., of a diverse array of needs and consumptions that give machines sight and substance.

4.2 A Rich Heritage

This human heritage is *epistemologically rich.* Unlike banking capital, which informs us about the assets of others, or financial capital, which reflects human expectations about the future, the human heritage provides us with a detailed, varied, and unprecedented panorama of human life forms. This heritage, if appropriately interpreted, possesses the potential to furnish us with a social physics as robust as natural physics. We find ourselves amidst an epistemological revolution whose magnitude we have yet to fully grasp. The traditional dichotomy between nature as the realm of necessity and society as the realm of liberty is now inverted: the more we deepen our knowledge of nature, the more it reveals chaotic and unpredictable phenomena; whereas the more we grow in our understanding of human behavior through data generated by our actions, the more these behaviors appear predictable and uniform.

First and foremost, there is an advantage in terms of **analysis**. In the analog world, recording data and making it replicable requires careful deliberation, attention, and energy. Not so in the digital world, where the only energy required is the electricity that powers the machines. Moreover, in the analog world simply consulting and comparing data requires expertise, skill, patience, and time that, in the case of large textual corpora, can exceed the lifetime of a human being. These recording and consultation limits do not apply to the world of data, leading to a change of scale. Anyone walking into a restaurant at eight o'clock in the evening would be able to predict that in four hours, the place will be empty (unless it is New Year's Eve). The scope of predictability has now expanded exponentially, underscoring the potential value of this new capital. Companies like Amazon engage in profiling individual behaviors not for policing purposes but rather to leverage the knowledge of individual consumption patterns. This allows the company to send

unsolicited goods to customers (only 3% refuse the merchandise), as they respond to the personalized preferences of the profiled individuals with surgical precision.

The encounter between machines and humans generates a powerful form of **prediction**. Machines have become increasingly proficient at replicating the past, enabling precise projections for the future, as nature, whether organic or spiritual, tends to repeat itself more often than we might think. However, what no machine can do, primarily because it has never faced the urgency of metabolism, is to project itself into the future or devise ways to meet future needs—a necessity inconceivable for any mechanism while inevitable for every organism. The mouse approaching the cheese is aware of the future while the trap about to snap does not have the faintest idea. In the case of humans, desire and trap, organism and mechanism, are inherently entwined. Consequently, humans can be perfected and educated—processes that will be further explored in the next chapter.

The abundance of data also fuels **invention**, a natural outcome of the exponential growth of the archive. The Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico astutely observed that the archive of the moderns dwarfs its ancient counterpart. This means that we have a far greater quantity of models and examples. This is all the more true today as the explosion of documents in the age of recording has created an archive that has no equivalent in history. This, too, is an advantage that we do not sufficiently reflect upon, and that should serve as a foundation of a fourth *New Science*, following Vico's three—a collective endeavor in times like ours that, contrary to prevailing belief, are exceptionally favorable to humanism. "Invention" is both the act of invention and that which is invented, encompassing not only concrete manifestations but also abstract ideations, the conception of something completely new. However, it is worth remembering that in legal and ecclesiastical language, both more attuned to the etymology of *inventio*, it also refers to the discovery of a treasure or relic, that is, of something that was previously hidden, subsequently found, and then inventoried. In this sense, *inventio* aligns with the rhetorical quest for arguments and the scholastic process of discovering (or, often,

rediscovering) ideas. This arsenal and armory of arguments and ideas has reached its apex in the age of documedia capital.

4.3 A Renewable Heritage

Thirdly, this human heritage is **renewable** in several ways. When I, as a data producer in a digital economy request to retrieve my data from a platform, I do not harm the platform's economy since I do not deprive it of its resources. Instead, I gain possession of a good that, when combined with that of others within a humanistic or mutualistic platform, will allow me to create value to be redistributed with humanistic motivations. This realization addresses the ethical concerns of philosophers and all well-intentioned individuals while simultaneously increasing economic resources.

Embedded within this consideration lies a crucial element of data, namely its **shareability**. By virtue of being recorded and therefore iterable, data takes on a level of abstraction resembling ideas rather than things. If I give someone a barrel of oil, I lose possession of it, but if I give away billions of data, I still retain ownership, although not exclusively. This might not necessarily be a disadvantage, as it is possible that the alternative use of my data could still benefit me. If that were not the case, if syntactic capital were a commodity like oil or steel, it would be difficult to ask platforms to share it. Indeed, platforms could argue that without their investment, foresight, and research, it would not have been possible to transform the forms of human life into wealth. But as we just saw, unlike oil and steel, you get to share your data and keep it. In this sense, data sharing bears no resemblance to expropriation.

Linked to iterability is that fact that, in addition to being sharable, data is **recyclable. This means that it can be used over an indefinite period** albeit in this case, too, the consumption of non-renewable resources such as electricity is necessary for data to be iterated. Shareability and recyclability form the bedrock of the potential for alternative capitalization, a core principle underpinning the Web. Instead of advocating for the Web's status as a common good or lamenting the capitalization of

commercial platforms, it is necessary to mobilize intermediary bodies such as associations, institutions, mutual societies, and unions that seem to have lost their traditional roles but have the potential to find new purpose through the capitalization of the human forms of life.

An additional aspect stemming from iterability is the possibility of **semantic recontextualization:** syntactic data can become semantic (acquire meaning), depending on how it is processed. This process bears resemblance to the distinction between, but also permutability of, 'strong' documents (registration of deeds) and 'weak' documents (recording of facts), which I explored elsewhere.[5] Consider, for instance, a testament and a separate inventory of assets prepared by the testator. These represent two distinct practices: the former is a deed that disposes of something, while the latter is a memorandum or a record that simply provides an account of existing items. This difference forms the basis for differentiating between a strong document, which is performative and determines the existence of a social object, and a weak document, which is merely the record of a fact, although its function can have epistemological implications. For a future historian, the difference between the will and the inventory may appear irrelevant if their purpose is to ascertain the testator's assets. But there is no doubt that these two texts are fundamentally different in nature.

These characteristics can be summarized by the fact that the fundamental nature of the goods that comprise the human heritage is **intangibility**. It is necessary to avoid the naturalistic fallacy according to which data is raw material. From this perspective, the metaphor of data as the new oil is misleading for a number of reasons related to the difference between tangible and intangible goods. We said that, unlike oil, data is renewable; it is not a physical commodity but rather a recording of life forms; being digital, it does not require the same levels of resource-intensive extraction processes, refinement, and distribution; finally, it does not generate energy but requires it. The latter circumstance, however, poses a limit to renewability. Renewability applies to data but not to its production and management. Intangibility, thus, does not preclude a

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5   Ferraris, *Documentality*, cit.

link to **materiality**, which does not concern the content of the data, but the supports that enable its extraction, storge, and circulation.

While the digital realm was once heralded as immaterial,[6] today we recognize that 2% of greenhouse gas emissions (equivalent to those generated by air travel) are associated with data management,[7] particularly the proliferation of Blockchain technology.[8] Additionally, the raw materials required for digital technology pose two significant challenges: On one hand, no European nation is a primary producer of metals and rare earth while China appears both in a favorable position in terms of resources and imperiled by the environmental repercussions of extraction activities. Of course, a judicious use of these technologies could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2023.[9] It is within this context that academia, industry, and politics must forge alliances following the core tenets of the Webfare project.

4.4 An Equitable Heritage

With human heritage, a general economy is delineated, which confers economic value to what was traditionally considered worthless or wasteful. In this deep reevaluation lies the foundation for a democracy of needs that fuels Webfare. Indeed, this heritage makes no distinctions between rich and poor, beautiful or ugly, intelligent or foolish. For even those without a penny to their name, burdened by misfortune, and deemed unsightly, wicked, or dim-witted, provided that they have internet access, generate a data heritage that is equal to and more important than the heritage produced by the richest, most beautiful, and smartest

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6   Jean-François Lyotard, "Les immatériaux," *Art & Text*, 1985.

7   Luciano Floridi, *Il verde e il blu: Idee ingenue per migliorare la politica* (Milano: Cortina, 2022).

8   Ellen Meijer, "Blockchain and Our Planet: Why Such High Energy Use?" *Pre-Sustainability*, June 6, 2022, https://pre-sustainability.com/articles/blockchain -and-our-planet-why-such-high-energy-use/

9   Global e-Sustainability Initiative GeSI, https://gesi.org/research/gesi-smarter 2020-the-role-of-ict-in-driving-a-sustainable-future

humans on earth. This because such a heritage is more representative of the collective, average human experience. We are thus breaking free from the shackles of past capitalization models, intricately tied to the exploitation of the many and the presumed merits of the few. Neither do we embrace a totalitarian instrument of control or indulge in the perilous utopia of a world fueled by the rarest and most unreliable of human endowments: intelligence. The crucial political dimension of humanity's heritage resides in emphasizing the significance of need in the formation of value, in contrast to the emphasis on ability that characterized capitalization in pre-automated production.

It has rightly been observed that need, and its amplified form, desire, are revolutionary.[10] Indeed, on behalf of what are revolutions waged if not to satisfy needs and desires? It has also been noted that desire is a fundamental element of economy,[11] and indeed there would be no economy without needs to fulfill. **The novelty here is that need emerges as a factor of capitalization, assuming a paramount role in the entire process. While the ancient Greeks emphasized that in the beginning was the logos, and modern humans wrote that in the beginning there was action, the humans of today and of the future must recognize that in the beginning, and even more so in the end, there is passion, manifested through need, as the essential catalyst for the origin, growth, and ultimate meaning of capitalization.**

What does it mean to be human? Does it mean to think? To create? No, it means to consume, to manifest needs in a techno-socio-economic system. Precisely because, unlike machines, we are destined for a radical interruption, it is we who through consumption imbue the entire process with purpose, direction, and value. Hence, we witness the emergence of a general economy, seamlessly integrating consumption, thereby transforming it into value and, above all, knowledge. **Within**

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10   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Viking Press, 1972); Ágnes Heller, *Towards a Marxist Theory of Value* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1972).

11   Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974).

this all-encompassing paradigm, the human heritage is *teleologically, that is, ethically, equitable.* **Instead of a sign of divine favoritism for an individual, as in the Calvinist genesis of bourgeois capital, this Catholic capital—in the etymological sense of Catholicism as "universality"—grows in value when shared among all human beings, regardless of wealth, intelligence, ethnicity, or faith. Cooperation reigns supreme and the concept of the free rider fades into insignificance.** Without appealing to (an often disregarded) ethics, data in itself fosters a sense of solidarity that counteracts individual selfishness. Its very essence and interpretation demonstrate that humans can truly only benefit from aggregated data, i.e., from a cooperative attitude, while individual data holds little value in itself. This results in a system of valorization that does not privilege the individual and labor, but rather collectivity and need, which some may view as a potentially repressive desublimation, unaware of the vast and novel possibilities that it offers.

From here, a whole new purpose for philosophical and social reflection emerges: to **outline a capitalization system driven by humanistic platforms that offer an alternative, non-competitive approach to liberalist platforms,** which, for their part, have successfully harnessed a new source of value. If the revolutionary drive comes from capital, then true revolutionaries do not wage war against it; instead, they envision alternative capitalization processes. In this sense, the pursuit of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people" becomes a questionable moral project. Because not only would it be problematic to base humanity's happiness on the happiness of a single individual, but, as ample evidence suggests, happiness itself is hard to define and is rarely the primary goal of humans. It is much more reasonable to focus not on delivering happiness but on providing resources: "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs." After all, we cannot guarantee universal happiness unless we resort to something as whimsical as laughing gas. However, as moral beings, we can and should ensure that humanity is not overburdened by needs, enabling humans to pursue growth, education, and progress.

This would allow humanity to achieve a level of dignity indispensable for life to be genuinely worth living. However, the point is that the soci-

ety that emerged with the birth of agriculture over the past ten thousand years places more emphasis on merit (as seen through the lens of labor) rather than need. **It is thus not at all difficult to reward merit; indeed, this is common practice, with the result that a tiny fraction of humans have superior resources to billions of their peers.** This is a form of ideological representation in which merit becomes the ultimate reference for inequality even if it may have nothing to do with merit itself.

The conceptualization of a human heritage brings about what has long appeared merely a chimera—the recognition of need on par with merit.[12] This forms the crux of justice as access to substantive rather than just formal rights. This is also the reason why, until now, fulfilling this aspiration has proved elusive. Strictly speaking it is right that everyone is given what they deserve according to their abilities and contribution to society. To receive something based on one's needs is far more difficult to justify not only because needs traditionally involve asking rather than giving. But mainly because it is difficult to determine the precise measure of an individual's needs, distinguish them from desires, and perhaps even from excesses.

Nevertheless, as we saw, human life generates and is the ultimate foundation of value. This means that all humans connected through the Web create value, but only those without other means of income could potentially receive dividends from capitalization. If we could harness and redistribute to all of humanity the value derived from the capitalization of needs—a capital whose most conspicuous manifestation today is the Web—we would take a decisive step towards the attainment of

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12   Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970, pp.13–30: "In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"

the highest good. **One may wonder whether this valorization of need only serves a moral imperative. This is not the case. A sound economic rationale underpins this proposition. In an era of automated production, it is essential to recognize that what is required above all is need precisely because it cannot be automated and is therefore a primary source of value.**

Ultimately, human needs define the value of things. Whether immediate, like hunger or thirst, or more abstract, like emotional, social, or cultural interests, our needs have always determined the value of goods. This principle becomes particularly important as technology increasingly supplants human involvement in the production of goods. No longer involved in the production of goods, humans become producers of value, viz., they determine the essence, necessity, and thus value of production based on their unique peculiarities and preferences in the act of consumption recorded by the Web.