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Gift politics: exposure and surveillance in the anthropocene

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Abstract This article discusses the role of gift relations in the Anthropocene. We reinterpret Mauss's original concept of the gift to understand its application and transformation in a social context that increasingly sees human behavior as a resource for the realization of governmental and corporate objectives. Contemporary gift relations focus on reciprocity through personal data instead of physical artifacts, and on promoting control and consumerism instead of forging moral and personal obligations. In our analysis, we distinguish two important elements. First, gifts are used to elicit voluntary exposure of personal data by individuals. In exchange for personal data, people are granted material or immaterial rewards. Second, gift relations have a pervasive element of surveillance that aims to influence behavior through personalized feedback or mechanisms of punishment and reward for good behavior.

Introduction

In early 2015, several media covered a remarkable initiative by the Chinese government. It was said to work on a "Social Credit System", which gives every Chinese citizen a score based on various behavioral characteristics, ranging from financial solvency and criminal records to online behavior and opinions expressed on social media. Details on the inner workings of the system are still vague, though it is clear that points will be deducted for online gambling, for instance. On the other hand, the purchase of diapers leads to bonus points – it indicates responsible behavior. Citizens

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also play an active role in this system by rating fellow citizens and companies, such as evaluating their teachers or doctors. Interestingly, many Chinese citizens are reportedly bragging about their score on the Chinese equivalent of Twitter [66].

The Social Credit System is proposed to have full coverage in 2020. By then, "everyone in China will be enrolled in a vast national database that compiles fiscal and government information, including minor traffic violations, and distils it into a single number ranking each citizen" [30]. Citizens with a low personal credit score can be excluded from certain jobs, housing or credits and get only limited Internet connectivity [16]. Citizens with higher scores will receive tangible benefits, such as easy access to travel visas, business loans, and the like. In a statement on the website of the institute responsible for developing the system, the reasons for this government initiative are explained. China has in recent years "changed from a society of acquaintances to a society of strangers" [52]. As a result, moral norms have become blurred: "When human behavior is not limited by morals, a system is needed that constrains the behavior of people" [52].

The Chinese system within which citizens are valued, ranked and divided by means of allocating points to all kinds of behavior may seem "Orwellian," but we will argue that the underlying mechanisms of punishment and reward are more and more common in the governance of citizens in democratic societies as well. Governments, semi-public organizations, and private companies entice citizens to comply with certain standards and norms by offering financial or material rewards in return. In the following, we describe several examples of this technique and its relation to new forms of surveillance. In exchange for your personal data, online companies give access to their services. Quick access to public buildings and spaces, such as airports, is given to those who voluntarily give authorities insight into their personal data. And insurance companies offer discounts to clients who disclose their daily behavior, such as lifestyle or driving style. In these and other examples, our new digital transparency is used to control and influence behavior in terms of security and consumerism.

We propose that the underlying mechanisms to control and influence behavior can be best understood as examples of a "gift relationship," as Mauss described it in his classic essay "The Gift" (Mauss, [1923–1924] [44]). According to Mauss, the mechanism of the gift is "one of the human foundations on which our societies are built" ([44], p. 5). Although gift transactions in primitive societies have been intensively studied, the study of gift behavior in our society is a rather neglected area of research (see [31, 47], for exceptions). Reasons for this neglect can be traced to the fact that the social significance of gift transactions has been drastically diminished by the emergence of a capitalistic society and the changing moral order of economic relationships [8]. Contracts and laws have become dominant techniques to coordinate and control social interaction.

However, the richness and complexity of gift exchange make it possible to study it from different theoretical angles. Komter [33] argues that there are two dominant types of approaches. First, there are analyses that focus on the gift as a means for creating social networks and mutual solidarity between members of a community ("moral cement approach"). Second, gift exchange is studied as a means to exercise power and to achieve social control over others, apart from its potential from expressing solidarity or friendship. This article fits in the latter approach. It aims to contribute some reflections on the reciprocal element of the gift in our current epoch, also known as the Anthropocene. The article proceeds in two parts. It starts with an analysis of the social

context of the Anthropocene in which gift politics can thrive, followed by an analysis of new power relations throughout society. The second part of the article focuses on the way the gift functions as a generator of surveillance and control in the Anthropocene.

Governing in the anthropocene

The notion of the "Anthropocene" – as originally developed in climate studies [67], and applied to the realm of criminology by Shearing [64] – provides a fitting metaphor for the challenges of governance of the conduct of citizens in contemporary society. In geological terms, the Anthropocene is the age in which humankind has a powerful influence on the environment; Earth's climate and ecology of the planet. The Anthropocene is seen as distinct from the most recent geological age – the Holocene - an interglacial period with relatively high temperatures and a stable climate. Although there are different dates for the onset of the Anthropocene, several scholars suggest that the beginning of this new geological epoch already started with Europe's Industrial Revolution, in the latter part of the eighteenth century [9, 68]. From the late nineteenth century, scientists were becoming aware that the temperature on Earth rose significantly due to, among others, massive population growth, deforestation, and use of fossil fuels. Today, the Anthropocene is an increasingly popular term used in scientific literature and by the media as an expression of the degree of environmental change on Earth, positioning human actions as accountable for accelerating trends in many global environmental transformations.

In sociological terms, the era of the Anthropocene, the moment at which human history intersects with geological time, involves the mutation of systems beyond modernistic models of human decision-making, in which human beings are expected to make realistic and well-considered decisions that are founded upon sufficient available facts and alternatives. Although the notion of the Anthropocene places human agency (still undifferentiated, taken *en bloc* and generically, according to Latour [34]) at the center of attention, it also calls into question beliefs about the positive effects of human behavior and interventions. In its place comes an awareness of the risks modern societies themselves produce, ranging from extreme weather events to global warming (eg, [3, 27]). As Chakrabarty said: "The Anthropocene has been an unintended consequence of human choices" ([7], p. 210). This is the Anthropocene in a sociological sense – the age, which could be characterized as "involving humans being basically in conflict with themselves through the structures and systems that they have themselves created in order to improve their lifestyles and well-being" ([49], p. 8). The Anthropocene can therefore also be seen as articulating, alongside the human impact on the environment, the ways – as Beck has argued (although he did not use the term itself) – of "debating, preventing and managing risks that it itself has produced" ([4], p. 332).

We use the concept of the Anthropocene first and foremost as a sociological pointer rather than as a scientific descriptor of climate change and the environmental risks of global warming. In the Anthropocene, risks presuppose human decisions and require a fundamental change in our thinking on the linkages between our *Umwelt*, the surroundings in which we are situated, and the way we try to limit and regulate risks. The assumption that has structured social development in the Holocene, an external environment that somehow influences human activities, is no longer a useful starting point

for thinking about risks. We are part of an environment that we are actively changing. In this way, the Anthropocene is a new political and social condition that radically transforms our relations to each other. It implies a worldview that sees individuals as an inherent part of collective problems and, therefore, as a justified object of intervention to unlock the potential for behavioral manipulation.

Understood in a broad and critical sense, the Anthropocene implicates that classic forms of limiting and regulating risks are experiencing extreme new pressures. The contract and the law, for instance, remain crucial for the ordering of society but are insufficient to understand the ways the behavior of human beings is currently controlled and influenced. An important reason for this is the rise of new problems, such as terrorism and new illnesses. One of the most striking examples of these new problems is welfare diseases, which are the result of lifestyle choices instead of exogenous health determinants (eg, [54, 70]). These new problems trigger the development of new techniques to control human behavior. Healthier lifestyles are not pursued by universal legislation, but by manipulations in people's daily choices. Providing access to health care and protecting the public hygiene are complemented by influencing the lifestyle of citizens – most importantly, changing habits of smoking, drinking, eating, and promoting exercise [51]. As such, the discussion has shifted from protecting citizens against harmful externalities, such as epidemical diseases and poverty, to finding ways to make citizens act more responsible concerning the problems they cause themselves or the opportunities they leave unused (eg, [46, 53]).

In the following, we will argue that gift relations are one of the emerging techniques that are used to influence behavior in the governance of the Anthropocene. The gift functions as a technique for governments, semi-public organizations, and private companies to construct knowledge on human behavior, which can subsequently be used to manipulate that behavior for purposes as varied as security politics and commercial consumption. In order to better understand the way the gift functions as a means to influence behavior, we first turn to Foucault's genealogical discourse on power relations, and Harcourt's [29] notion of the "expository society".[1] In this way, it becomes clear how the gift functions today as a generator of surveillance and behavioral control.

Power relations: Sovereign, disciplinary, securitarian, expository

According to Foucault, power is of all ages. From the brute and absolute power by a monarch to the imperceptible power of the architecture of the prison, power comes in many (dis)guises and is intimately connected to mechanisms of control. It is in this sense that Foucault distinguishes a sovereign society from a disciplinary society. He associates sovereign power, which falls back into a Marxian scheme of dominators and the dominated, with the absolute power and authority of the monarchy – the dominant form of rule in Europe from the Middle Ages up to the sixteenth century. This form of power, as something that excludes and prohibits, can be traced back to the philosophical-juridical work of Hobbes and Beccaria. Foucault speaks of "the

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[1] Interestingly, although Foucault never refers in his work to Mauss, he was influenced by Bataille's notion of transgression (and thus indirectly by Mauss).

Beccarian dynamic" ([21], p. 129) with respect to the power of the law and associates the right to decide on life and death (*jus vitae et necis*) with the figure of the sovereign.

Foucault demonstrates that in the 17th and 18th century a new type of power emerges. In *Discipline and Punish* [17], he suggests that the functioning of disciplinary power moved away from a legal-discursive and Marxist representation of power. That is, away from a series of negative effects, such as "refusal, limitation, obstruction, censorship" ([19], p. 139). In its application in concrete assemblages, Foucault shows how disciplinary power makes people productive, efficient, and obedient units and involves various methods to teach people desired or appropriate behavior. This means that Foucault's approach to power is not to define power itself; he looks for the effects it creates, which in return give shape to a modern social organization. As such, disciplinary power is less a property in the hands of, for example, an absolute monarch or ruling class than an anonymous strategy that is exercised in schools, factories, prisons and hospitals in order to make the individual body as docile as possible, and its effects cannot be contributed to an appropriation, but "to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings" ([11], p. 25).

While the modern epoch showed "the inversion of the spectacle into surveillance" ([24], p. 23), late-modernity offers a new diagram within which elements of power come to function. In his lectures *Security, Territory, Population* [23] and *The Birth of Biopolitics* [22], Foucault overtakes his previous analysis of discipline and states that we are now at a point where disciplinary power is slowly losing its influence and is making way for a power relation that he calls "security", which is further concretized by modalities such as "prevention, population, normalization, and risk" [62]. Foucault claims that security techniques distinguish themselves from techniques of discipline by their reflective nature; they point to the future. Deriving the norm from statistical data and subsequently spreading these, from outside, over the population, makes it possible to predict potential risks and to prevent them. For example, it is not the delinquent, "the disciplinary addition to the juridical" ([17], p. 251), but the future criminal who is the object of intervention. This being the case, securitarian logics makes it difficult to fall back on an analysis of power that works through discipline and in the internal ordering of closed structures, such as the prison. With security, the normalization, inherent to Foucault's conception of institutions as disciplinary, disperses into an infinitesimal "tracking and profiling" of people's behavior and groups "at risk" ([62], p. 265).

Harcourt [29] denounces that we have now also moved beyond securitarian logics. In his book *Exposed*, he argues that we are living today in a new political and social condition that is radically transforming our relations to each other, the political community, and ourselves. He speaks of a society in which an expository power "thrives on individualities, differentiation, and efficiency – and that shapes us into our digital selves" ([29], p. 104). In this expository society, spectacle and surveillance are overshadowed by the fact that we are constantly willfully exposing ourselves to virtually everyone, at every moment, and simultaneously watch others. Rather than acquiescing to structures of command and surveillance by force, against our will, we have surrendered to them voluntarily, as many of us exhibit our most intimate details on social media. Each day, we like, share, favorite, follow, and connect with others on Facebook, Google, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Through these social media, people seem to express a strong desire for surveillance – that is, to watch and be watched [50].

Although Harcourt speaks of this new form of power mainly in relation to our behavior on the Internet, we might object that all Harcourt is doing is refining the analysis of security by Foucault. Many of the examples he mentions (the use of Big Data, for example) to illustrate how we are continuously surveilled and profiled by data collecting organizations, including governments and commercial parties, such as Facebook and Google, fit in a securitarian scheme that is primarily interested in predicting and preventing bad characteristics, habits, or predilections, rather than with sanctioning them or understanding and addressing their past causes. However, this would ignore the novelty of the effects of expository power, which Harcourt explores, precisely in order to show that this new type of power is deeply linked with the way we are willing to upload our lives onto virtual networks. As such, expository power does not repress, but rather exploits our desires. It does not impose external control, but rather elicits voluntary transparency. Precisely this aspect unlocks expository power's potential for surveillance: it is a new technique to generate behavioral insight without the explicitly coercive elements of discipline and security. It is to this very point that we now turn: in what ways does expository power influence human behavior in the Anthropocene?

Modalities of expository power

Expository power is essential to the business models of governments, semi-public organizations, and private companies to manage and control our behavior. It is a technique to influence human behavior on the basis of information and data that individuals have voluntarily made public or handed over to an organization. The constant flow of new data provides the information needed for the governance of the conduct of citizens. Governments and corporations may have different objectives, but the technologies and tools they use are the same [60]. We discern three modalities in order to explain the mechanisms through which expository power works: (i) digital platforms, (ii) consumer scores, and (iii) new forms of punishment and reward.

(i).   *Digital platforms*. The first modality of expository power is the move towards digital platforms, which personalize and customize services and products to users. Examples of digital platforms are Apple, Netflix, Facebook, and YouTube. Although there are differences in the way digital platforms use and treat data of their users, an important characteristic is the acquisition of virtual "credits" – "likes" on Facebook, "views" on YouTube or "followers" on Twitter. Active users of these digital platforms expose themselves – through videos, messages, or photos – in order to reach a public. This public may serve personal and professional objectives (work opportunities via LinkedIn, opinion making via Twitter), but can also be an objective in itself ("going viral" on YouTube as a business model). The benefits of exposing yourself can be directly material – for instance, by selling products or generating income from advertisers – or more immaterial, such as establishing a certain professional profile or image. In exchange, the digital platforms – as part of their general conditions – use your online data for their own purposes. They can use that information for their services (such as

personalizing your account, suggesting interesting new contacts, and offering paid premium packages) or sell information to other companies that are interested in personalized marketing.

(ii). *Consumer scores.* The second modality of expository power is the way individuals are valued, ranked, and divided by means of consumer rankings and consumer scores.[2] Consumer scores are "a modern day numeric shorthand that ranks, separates, sifts, and otherwise categorizes individuals and also predicts their potential future actions" ([15], p. 6). Although ranking persons by scores is as old as human society, we are facing today, as Harcourt writes, "the proliferation and extension of this scoring logic to all facets of life" ([29], p. 205). This means that public and private parties are creating all kinds of consumer scores that rank persons on everything; from the likelihood someone will keep his or her job to how likely a person is to commit a crime. There are individual health risk scores, churn scores, job security scores, fraud scores, and consumer profitability scores, amongst others. One of the goals of consumer scores is to produce "objective data" about individuals and their behavior for "the purposes of knowing, controlling, and modifying behavior to produce new varieties of commodification, monetization, and control" ([71], p. 85).

The information used in consumer scores can come from a large variety of sources. One of the ways they are created is by using information people voluntary share on digital platforms. Health scores are a well-known example of this. Exercise programs, weight loss programs, and healthy nutrition schedules depend on the personal information submitted. The more information is submitted, the more transparent behavioral patterns become, and the more specific the instructions for a healthier lifestyle can be made. Therefore, users of health apps enter data about their behavior and their physical state – exercise, nutrition, weight, etc. – and receive advice and plans to follow for a healthier lifestyle. By confronting one's own behavior and physical state to standards of a healthy life, the opportunities for improvement become clear and suggestions for new routines can be followed. In this way, this modality of expository power serves as a counterbalance for weak willpower. It is a means to strengthen self-discipline. In exchange for personal information, a model for a healthy life is presented.

Another example is the common practice of credit card companies to analyze people's consumer patterns and to "score" their clients in order to decide who should be kept and who should be gently pushed out the door. The brands people buy, the sort of products people buy, the places where people buy, the number of times and the time of the day clients call the company's information line – this and other behavioral data is linked to the likelihood that clients will be able to pay off their credit or will be a good bet for extending credit lines. Are you buying cheap brands or paying your groceries with a credit card? A sign of financial problems. Are you logging into your account in the middle of the night? A sign of anxiety.

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[2] A well-known example is the international trading site *eBay*, which makes use of a valuation system to regulate the buying and selling of articles. The use of a feedback profile, that consists of a score, plus comments from other members who have bought something from, or sold something to, this person, gives both the buyer and the seller enough information to decide whether or not they wish to do business with one another [10].

Charges appear for marriage counselors? A sign of personal problems. Are you buying diapers? A sign of responsibility.

(iii).   *Punishment and reward.* The third modality of expository power is the use of information and data that individuals have voluntarily given up in order to punish and reward specific individual behavior. Examples of this are financial rewards to govern the conduct of persons. Financial benefits are given to persons for behaving according to a certain lifestyle. What is important here is that in these arrangements, punishment and reward are transformed from an action induced by an exterior agency to a self-induced control mechanism. Both insurance companies and their clients have an incentive to reduce risks – and thereby damage claims – by strengthening individual responsibility for risk reduction. [3] In the Netherlands, for instance, a car insurance company has installed an electronic device into their clients' cars to track their driving style (speeding, accelerating, gas use, etc). The information collected is sent to the company's data center for analysis and comparison to standards of safe driving. Clients with a "safe driving style" are given a discount on their annual insurance policy: 35% for safe drivers and 10% for the reasonably safe drivers [63].

Another example is the control of low-risk travelers at airports. Citizens can register for a special form of security check, which gives them quick access through airport security. Once registration has been approved, a card with biometrical data containing both fingerprints and iris scan is made. This biometric chip allows travelers to cross borders without being held up for questioning or physical inspections at the airport. This means that citizens voluntarily hand over personal data in exchange for access to the "fast track" on the airport. This form of expository power embeds punishment and reward transparency into the movements of persons. With self-surveillance being installed as an intricate control mechanism of flows, we leave the traditional view of control behind. That is, control which is external and coming from the outside. Here, control has become an immanent part of flows. Control is "designed into" [58] the flows of everyday life. In terms of surveillance, this means the faster the flow, the greater the control ([57, 62], p. 38).

The application of Harcourt's notion of an expository power presents a picture of a society in which we willingly exhibit information of ourselves in the social and political domain, with modalities such as consumer rankings and forms of punishment and reward that make this power relation more regular, efficient, and constant. Current technological possibilities to quickly process and analyze large volumes of "big data" combined with the "datafication" [45] of social action into online quantified data accelerate and expand the potential for the algorithmic anticipation of behavior [55, 60]. Ball and Snider [2] speak of a "surveillance industrial complex" and Zuboff [71] of "surveillance capitalism".

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[3] The insurance literature calls this a shift from "spreading risk" to "embracing risk" [1]. Other examples include pension plans using "defined contributions" rather than "defined benefits", which shifts the risk of a small return on investment to the client. Or companies ask for something in return, such as the installation of theft protection and sprinklers for property insurance.

However, what is missing in their analyses is an understanding of the underlying mechanism that makes people expose themselves willingly. [4] Although there are different mechanisms at work, we suggest that the gift relation forms an important explanation for the way forms of expository power work. We reveal ourselves and make ourselves virtually transparent to surveillance in order to get something in return. To understand more fully the implications of the gift relation for controlling and influencing human behavior, we first discuss Mauss's original concept of the gift, and second show how this concept explains the close relationship between gift giving and expository power, which in turn helps us to understand new forms of control and surveillance in the Anthropocene.

Rediscovering the gift

In his famous essay "The Gift", Mauss [44] showed that gift giving has an important social and psychological function. It is the tie that binds people. Surprisingly, Mauss never gives a definition what a gift is. Derrida even suggests that Mauss "speaks of everything but the gift" ([14], p. 138). Nevertheless, the logic of Mauss's argument depends on the fact that gift giving and social relations are fundamentally tied to each other. Analyzing fieldwork undertaken in non-western, traditional cultures, such as tribes in Polynesia, Melanesia, and the American Northwest, Mauss argued that the gift functioned as a social bond between persons; it was the cement of social relationships. The "spirit of the gift," as Mauss [44] called it, cannot be reduced to an utilitarian rationality, but rather tend toward a threefold obligation: there is the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation for the recipient to present a gift in return. According to Mauss, "everything—food, women, children, property, talismans, land, labor services, priestly functions, and ranks—is there for passing on, and for balancing accounts" ([44], p. 18).

Although you might expect gift giving to have declined in late modernity, due to the increasingly impersonal nature of relationships, the advanced division of labor and a significant commercial sector, gift exchange remains a significant element in contemporary society. Not only do we give and receive gifts on special events, such as weddings, baptisms, and birthdays. Daily exchanges as grocery shopping for older adults and watching over your neighbor's house while they are on vacation are considered examples of gift giving as well. The state also provides examples of mutual gift giving, as receiver and giver through taxes and social health insurance ([56], p. 35).

When viewing social life as a system of transactions between groups and individuals, it is important to draw a close distinction between exchange and commercial transactions. As Levi-Strauss made clear, the first one "does not bring a tangible result as is the case in the commercial transactions" ([1949] [35], p. 54). The profit is neither

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[4] This is related to the age-old question why people act in self-damaging ways, such as accepting laws and practices that are contrary to their own interests. Forms of "voluntary servitude" [59] are, according to Pallitto [48], often explained by the distribution of power: the way ideologies and discourses define what is normal in terms of personal and economic relations. Pallitto [48] suggests a different explanation that focuses on an individual's motivation. By viewing acts of self-subjugation as a form of "bargaining" with a powerful actor or system, he suggests we will find a more rational explanation for the trade-offs people make in their daily lives. The gift relation, as we understand it, is also a trade-off – albeit a specific type.

direct nor is it inherent in the objects that are interchanged as in the case of commercial transactions in our society. In addition, Gouldner pointed out that Mauss neglects the role of power of the gift. He argued in *The Norm of Reciprocity* [28] that reciprocity does not necessarily mean equivalence. In contrast to thinkers such as Malinowski [39], who emphasized that the amount of the return to be made is roughly equivalent to what had been received, Gouldner states that there are always relations of power in play concerning the individual's ability to reciprocate. As a consequence, reciprocal relationships may be very asymmetrical. In addition, Sahlin [61] criticized Mauss's preoccupation with the spiritual significance of the gift. He demystifies the spirit of the gift and reinforces the accountability of the principle of reciprocity. As such, he identifies a continuum of reciprocities and distinguished three forms of reciprocity: "generalized reciprocity" (transactions that are putatively altruistic, such as in the "pure gift" as Malinowski [39] defined it); "balanced reciprocity" (direct and equivalent exchange of the same types of goods to the same amounts); and "negative reciprocity" (maximization of their own interests by the participants at the other's expense, as Gouldner defined it).

Although gift giving is often portrayed as a positive social process, fulfilling various political, religious and psychological purposes, the examples we discussed above present a less encouraging observation. They show that a gift, when linked to the latest technology, can actually become a stealthy euphemism for surveillance. Social media like Twitter and Facebook thrive on the "social surveillance" [32, 69] exercised by their users towards each other: to see and be seen, to like and to share [40]. Facebook turns social activities such as "friending" and "liking" into algorithmic relations for marketing purposes [5], just as governments scan Internet traffic to identify terrorist activities. Lyon [38] makes a similar point when he discusses the similarities between Marx's [41] notion of "categorical suspicion" in the police analysis of target groups and the "categorical seduction" applied by corporations to potential consumers who are singled out for being part of a group with certain characteristics (cf [25]). Facebook likes, Google search history, ITunes downloads, online purchases, smartphone location tracking, "wearables" (eg, smart watches and behavior monitoring apps), and tracking devices in your car: just a few examples of everyday items and activities that can be used by governments, semi-public organizations, and private companies to "trigger punishments (real-time rate hikes, financial penalties, curfews, engine lock-downs) or rewards (rate discounts, coupons, gold stars to redeem for future benefits)" ([72], p. 1). At this point, we can connect the concept of the gift relation with expository power and show how their combination forms a technique of surveillance fitting for the Anthropocene's focus on finding new ways to influence human behavior.

The politics of the gift

Mauss's concept of the gift helps us to understand mechanisms of expository power – albeit in a different form than in Mauss's original analysis. Classic examples of presents and gifts, as Mauss described it, were physical objects such as tools, talismans, emblems, and food, which implicated a firm obligation to reciprocate the gift with one of equivalent value. In the Anthropocene, gifts can also be constituted by personal data. The obligation to reciprocate is not to find an object of equivalent value or perform a personal or social

duty. Instead, reciprocity takes the form of handing over personal data or giving other parties access to monitor your data. This makes gift relations less tangible and – at first sight – less intrusive than gifts that require a tangible act of reciprocity. Furthermore, Mauss argued that gifts created "feeling bonds" between giver and recipient. Nowadays, however, gifts are no longer purely a sign of personal commitment to the recipient. The objective of gift politics is not to constitute some sort of friendly feeling between the participants or to coordinate social interaction among equals. The gift is a mechanism used by governments, semi-public organizations, and private companies to elicit consumerism or forms of behavioral change for purposes of control.

We can now analyse gift politics along the lines of the mechanisms of surveillance to show the way it works upon human behavior: (i) Who controls the conditions? (ii) How is compliance achieved? And, (iii) how is behavior manipulated?

(i). *Controlling the conditions*

Contemporary surveillance practices are a radically different breed than what Foucault described in *Discipline and Punish* [17]. Now more than ever, surveillance has moved from the closed environments of prisons and schools to everyday life in which it has become "continuous and unbound" ([12], p. 181). Moreover, it has transformed from merely physical monitoring of human behavior to incorporating "soft" means of collecting personal information through automation [43]. New technologies have propelled an ethos of "new surveillance" [6, 36], which is less invasive and coercive, but also less visible and expensive, and more readily available and continuously collected [42]. This becomes clear in the previously described modalities of expository power, in which the giver stipulates what constitutes reciprocity instead of leaving it open to the interpretation of the receiver. Credit card companies have insight into their clients' buying behavior. Google and Apple make the use of online data part of the general conditions of their services. And airport security requires handing over personal data for access to the "fast track". Moreover, companies such as Google and Apple use their conditions to acquire a sort of "carte blanche" regarding personal data, including the right to sell data to third parties, which makes it impossible to know beforehand what will be done with personal data.

(ii). *Eliciting compliance*

Merely setting the conditions does not force people to comply with them. People agree with the conditions of a gift because of the prospect of a certain reward, which can be either material (financial benefits) or non-material (access, participation, self-help). Zuboff [71] cites Google's Chief Economist, Hal Varian, to explain how this mechanism works: "Everyone will expect to be tracked and monitored, since the advantages, in terms of convenience, safety, and services, will be so great … continuous monitoring will be the norm". Put more concisely: "Why am I willing to share all this private information? Because I get something in return" ([71], p. 83). Triggers can be positive – a reward for safe driving – but can be also (and simultaneously) negative: punishment in the form of denying access to certain benefits. Parties are especially successful in eliciting exposure when they deal in scarce products: time, money, and access. They hold bargaining power because they can offer something that people desire or need. A life without Google products is possible but will certainly have big

implications for your social and professional life. The same goes for credit cards: buying plane tickets or booking a hotel room is almost impossible without them. The gift becomes an offer you cannot refuse.

(iii).   *Manipulating behavior*

The application of new technologies makes it possible to monitor and influence behavior at a distance [13, 26, 37]. Surveillance, therefore, must be broadly defined as "the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction" ([38], p. 14). The objective of surveillance is to create anticipatory and voluntary compliance. In the Anthropocene, governments, semi-public organizations, and private companies have come to see human behavior as a resource for their material and immaterial objectives, such as safer driving, healthier lifestyles, promotion of consumerism, and improvement of airport security. Technology is the prime method for analyzing and influencing human behavior. People change their behavior because, for instance, feedback mechanisms are designed to make the consequences of behavioral choices explicit. When people sign up for a car insurance that offers a discount for a safe driving style, the incentive is to voluntary comply with the norm for "safe driving." And when the Chinese government makes social credit scores for online behavior and consumption patterns transparent, it creates a means for citizens to control the consequences of their actions for their social credit score.

Although these features are not always simultaneously present in expressions of gift politics, they show that exposure is often less voluntary and less innocent than presumed. In its intended effects, it is similar to Foucault's notions of discipline and security. However, instead of being carried out by confining people under the gaze of a Panopticon, surveillance is now produced in a "mirrored glass house" [29, 65] where people expose themselves, watch others, and are being watched. Here, the distinction between the observers and the observed is blurred and no longer runs across clear-cut lines of governments versus citizens – people observe each other and themselves (eg, health apps) and allow themselves to be observed by both private and public actors. What also sets it apart from a more classic view on security and control is the fact that surveillance can serve commercial objectives. Through gift politics, private corporations are able to target individuals for personalized marketing, and to introduce feedback mechanisms that allow people to monitor and modify their own behavior.

Conclusion and discussion

Our epoch is the epoch of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is an age, the name constructed by combining the roots of two Greek words, *anthropo* meaning "human-made" and (*cene*) meaning "new", where the human imprint has raised to geological proportions. Dating the start of the Anthropocene around the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century has generated some on-going controversy, but there is consensus around the view that the key to its definition is that the Earth is moving out of the geological epoch of the Holocene and that human activity, particularly in social, political and economic spheres, must be considered the driving force for this departure. Although the jury is still out on the staying power of the concept of the Anthropocene,

there is increasing awareness that the social and cultural settings of societies – principles of responsibility and reciprocity; ways of punishment and reward; ideas about where forms of social control are going – will take novel, and probably highly diverse, forms in our society.

Here, we have not addressed the scientific relevance of the Anthropocene from a geological perspective but rather explored ways to control and manage the risks that are produced by human activity from a sociological viewpoint. In this sense, the Anthropocene is related to Beck's analysis of a risk society [3] – an era in which humankind is confronted by problems of its own making as a result of technological progress and unbridled capitalism. This indicates an implosion of classic modernistic schemes of thought in which human intervention was understood as unproblematic and necessary against harmful externalities. Nowadays, human action is seen as an inherent part of collective problems and, therefore, as a justified object of intervention to work upon individuals' behavioral potential. As such, we have identified new ways in which governments and corporations seek to influence human behavior: mechanisms of gift giving are used to elicit people's voluntary exposure of personal data, which in turn can be a generator of surveillance and control.

Although it is impossible to make a clear distinction between gift giving in the Holocene and the Anthropocene, we have argued that different kinds of gifts, in different social contexts, have different effects. In the Anthropocene, gifts have taken the form of personal data instead of physical artifacts or moral obligations. An important reason for this is our new relationship with technology and the ways human actions are now constantly tracked and traced, transformed into data and sold on to parties with an interest in influencing and modifying our behavior for profit. Exposure of personal data is elicited by offering individuals something in return – a discount on their car insurance, quick access through security checks, or connectivity through social media. As a consequence, neither "punishment and pleasure" nor "commerce and surveillance (data mining, profiling, monitoring)" can any longer be decoupled. To make sense of this double bind, we could paraphrase Derrida [14] and suggest that each gift can turn to poison (the German word for poison is *Gift*).

The notion of the Anthropocene makes a convincing argument to search for new ways to influence human behavior to solve collective problems. However, the matching techniques of expository power can also be used for purposes of control and consumerism. This leads to the question: what forms of resistance are possible against a form of power that relies on individuals' voluntary exposure? According to Foucault [18], power cannot be understood without resistance coming into the equation somewhere. There is "no power without potential refusal or revolt" ([20], p. 324). Thus an important question is the extent to which, in resisting expository power, there may be a tendency to experiment with techniques of counter-hegemonic power: techniques that allow for different ways of behaving, leave space for heterogeneity, and create subjectivity in adversary to mechanisms that objectify individuals as mere consumers or controllable elements.

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