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How to postpone the end of the world: globalization and algorithmic governance in information and surveillance capitalism

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Abstract

This essay revisits the theme of globalization to contextualize the current platformization, dataism, and datafication of society, known as "information and surveillance capitalism." The research highlights how the ideology of the "technological sublime" undermines a more critical view of technology companies and the environmental crisis. Within the current information regime, digital technologies ambiguously impact liberal democracy by restricting rights, intensifying surveillance, and neglecting agendas that require global governance, such as climate change. Finally, the essay emphasizes that the academic community debates algorithmic governance in the fields of organizational and management studies.

Keywords: Globalization. Algorithmic governance. Technological sublime. Surveillance capitalism.

Como adiar o fim do mundo: globalização e governança algorítmica no capitalismo da informação e de vigilância

Resumo

O ensaio retoma o tema da globalização para nos situar no presente processo de plataformização, dataísmo e datificação das sociedades, simplificadamente denominado capitalismo da informação e de vigilância, destacando como a ideologia do sublime tecnológico retarda uma visão mais crítica das empresas de tecnologia e da crise ambiental. No presente regime de informação as tecnologias digitais impactam de forma ambígua a democracia liberal por restringir direitos, intensificar a vigilância e negligenciar agendas que requerem ações de governança globais, tais como mudanças climáticas. Por fim, o ensaio enfatiza que a comunidade acadêmica incorpore o debate acerca da necessária governança algorítmica nos campos de estudos organizacionais e de gestão.

Palavras-chave: Globalização. Governança algorítmica. Sublime tecnológico. Capitalismo de vigilância.

Cómo posponer el fin del mundo: globalización y gobernanza algorítmica en el capitalismo de la información y de vigilancia

Resumen

El ensayo retoma el tema de la globalización para situarnos en el actual proceso de plataformización, dataísmo y datificación de las sociedades –llamado simplemente capitalismo de la información y de vigilancia–, destacando cómo la ideología de lo sublime tecnológico retrasa una visión más crítica de las empresas tecnológicas y la crisis medioambiental. En el actual régimen de información, las tecnologías digitales impactan ambiguamente la democracia liberal al restringir los derechos, intensificar la vigilancia y descuidar agendas que requieren acciones de gobernanza global, como el cambio climático. Finalmente, el ensayo enfatiza que la comunidad académica incorpore el debate sobre la necesaria gobernanza algorítmica en los campos de los estudios organizacionales y de gestión.

Palabras clave: Globalización. Gobernanza algorítmica. Sublime tecnológico. Capitalismo de vigilancia.

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay, we revisit the theme of globalization to situate ourselves within the current process of platformization, dataism, and datafication of societies – the so-called information capitalism (Han, 2022) – with the purpose to problematize how the technological sublime (Liu, 2019) delays a more critical view of companies and the environmental crisis. Globalization, understood as the multifaceted set of interdependent processes (economic, political, cultural, and technological), reconfigured the notions of time, space, and sovereignty, to promote the intensification of global interactions while deepening inequalities and asymmetrical power relations (Celano & Guedes, 2014).

From different perspectives, many authors have defended and contested the idea of globalization as the culmination of Eurocentric modernity (B. Santos, 2006; T. Santos, 2011). In response to hegemonic discourses on the growing interconnection and interdependence of markets, nations, and societies, we have observed debates about the darker side of global capitalism following the emergence of multiple counter-movements and alternatives from the Global South (Silva & Guedes, 2017). This historical context of the globalized economy has been governed by oligarchic powers linked to the global financial system and by the illegitimate power of multilateral agencies led by the United States of America (USA), (Santos, 2011). In parallel, with the controversial globalization of the premises of US-led commercial and political neoliberalization in recent decades, a growing number of organizations, institutions, and governments have mobilized counter-movements and alternative perspectives aimed to address the increasing importance of global environmental governance for the future of humanity and the planet (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021).

With the successive crises of neoliberalism – the ideology that informs neoliberalization as a political process (Harvey, 2005) – a worldview emerges that political alternatives to the capitalist mode of production are exhausted. Several fields of knowledge, including organizational and management studies, have embraced anti-statist and sustainability-centered managerial perspectives (Banerjee, 2003), which has helped to overshadow the rise of financial institutions, such as the World Bank, within the domains of global environmental governance (Sullivan, 2013).

The relationship between human beings and nature remains a huge problem, considering that natural resources should not be consumed at the rate demanded by the capitalist logic of accumulation on a global scale (Santos, 2011). Murdock and Brevini (2019) prefer to characterize the present era as the Capitalocene, precisely because of the irrefutable evidence that the history of destructive human interventions in the Earth system is not divorced from analyses of the successive transformations of capitalism.

However, environmental debates have been globalized in a particular way with the holding of conferences and agreements, promoted by the United Nations (UN), which aimed to discuss environmental issues and establish an agenda for international cooperation for sustainable development (Hochstetler & Viola, 2012; Viola, 2002). Normative explanations on how (not) to manage complex environmental governance issues involving companies, society, and governments continue to flow primarily from North to South. This is informed by a growing concern, not with global governance or financialization, but with the resistance of emerging countries societies (Patrick, 2010) to fulfill the roles established by US-led global governance institutions (Kahler, 2013). Such discourses centered on sustainability management have brought to light the incompatibility between global oligarchic capitalism led by the US, and governed by the transnational capitalist class (Sklair, 2001) or transnational class structure with access to financial capital (Harvey, 2005), and the environmental issues (Gill, 2008) long proclaimed by so-called “ecocentrists”. The dynamics to incorporate the theories and practices of “green developmentalism” from the Global South remain contested (Böhm et al., 2012).

The contradiction of transforming the “ecocentric” approach into a matter of “sustainability-centered” management from a financial perspective of global governance involves political struggles led by US oligarchies and dynamics of resistance to conformity in emerging economies within the framework of global governance and development management. The colonial side of global governance and development management remains largely forgotten in academic debates and international forums. Doubts persist about who benefits from the dominant vision surrounding global environmental governance and the discrimination against alternative development models to neoliberal financialization presented by state-owned banks in

emerging economies (Hochstetler & Viola, 2012; Marois, 2016). In turn, the growing importance of emerging countries in various domains of global environmental governance and development management (Hurrell & Sengupta, 2012; Stuenkel, 2017) has resulted in difficulties for US-led agendas in the global economy.

Far from reaching a consensus, the publications in Cadernos EBAPE.BR indicate a profusion of denominations and developments with implications for the current phase of capitalism: entrepreneurial capitalism (Costa et al., 2012); flexible capitalism (Batista-dos-Santos & Oliveira, 2015); contemporary capitalism (Santos et al., 2016); surveillance capitalism (Vianna et al., 2022); communicative capitalism (Oliveira, 2022) and digital capitalism (Almada & Costa, 2023). In parallel, the review of Bruno Latour's work, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Honorato & Silva, 2021), made us reflect intensely and critically on the misgovernment and state of affairs of contemporary age. In this context, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their diverse manifestations (applications, platforms, and social media) have enabled, through their material and economic logics, new ways of organize, consuming, and relating (D'Andréa, 2020), with both satisfactory outcomes and negative consequences stemming from the concentration of power in technology companies (Atal, 2021; Valente, 2020). Finally, the essay emphasizes that the academic community should incorporate criticism of large corporations in general, and of technology companies in particular (Transnational Institute [TNI], 2023), to reverse the perplexity and inaction toward the necessary environmental (Lorenzetti & Carrion, 2012) and algorithmic (Srivastava, 2023) governance.

GLOBALIZATION, PLATFORMIZATION AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL SUBLIME

Globalization, characterized as one of the main organizing phenomena of international society in the second half of the 20th century (Santos, 2000; Sklair, 2002; Thompson, 2003), lost its intensity to protectionist, nationalist, and populist movements in the largest economies in the 2010s. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 caused an interruption in the flow of people for an unimaginable period to the defenders of neoliberal globalization. The global economy faced discontinuities in the flows of commodities, consumer goods, maritime and air trade routes, in what the media immediately called deglobalization (The Economist, 2021). However, globalization had lost momentum long before the pandemic, having devastated jobs and benefits and produced increasing flows of unwanted immigrants. Garcia Canclini (2020, pp. 10-11) affirms, "the only thing that seems to have globalized in the end is the feeling that almost everyone loses out. In a few years, the mandate to open borders and the fascination with connecting with distant places have transformed into desires to deglobalize."

Following a different notion of time and space, the symbolic dimension of globalization, represented by the mass consumer culture of global brands, has continued to gain scale and scope since the development of new production technologies in the 1980s. It changed substantially in the 1990s with ICT – such as the internet (via cables, Wi-Fi, or Bluetooth), computers/notebooks, digital cameras, and smartphones. The proliferation of digital platforms, such as Amazon (in the marketing of consumer goods and cloud services); Alphabet /Google (in online services and software); Twitter/X and Facebook/Meta (in social media); Apple (mobile devices and software), and others intensive in augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and machine learning technologies, is consolidated in the hyperculturality of the present (Han, 2019).

Currently, the waves of economic and cultural globalization seem to be a lesser evil in the complex context of international interinstitutional relations. States and international governmental organizations appear incapable to govern the scope and scale of industrial and financial capitalism with the simultaneous transnational expansion of informational capitalism (Castells, 1999) into digital capitalism (Oyedemi, 2019) or surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), resulting from the digitization, datafication, and platformization of social relations. Garcia Canclini (2020, p. 11) warns that "digital technologies, associated with socioeconomic and cultural globalization, promote certainties about what we gain: more diverse information and entertainment, spaces to debate and participate, access to goods, messages, and services not available in one's own nation." At the same time, we deny the scientific evidence of global warming that requires urgent cooperation among the main CO_2 emitters – China, the USA, and India.

From the globalization of markets – with the internationalization of companies in the post-war years – to informational capitalism (Castells, 1999), simultaneous transformations in the political and economic spheres resulting from the expansion strategies and operations of capital- and technology-intensive transnational corporations become evident. The so-called

digital economy is characterized by ICT integrated into the production, distribution, and/or marketing of goods and services. Governments and companies establish, within the context of the political economy of communications, power relations between the mass media system, ICT, and the broader socioeconomic structure in which they operate (Liu, 2019). Together, these elements are relevant to the understanding of the limitations of the current global governance structure in the age of information and surveillance capitalism. Among the most prominent economic actors at this moment of the 21st century are 5 companies headquartered in the US - Amazon, Microsoft, Alphabet, Apple, and Meta Platforms – and two companies based in China - Tencent Holdings and Alibaba Group (Murphy & Schifrin, 2025).

Taking into consideration the multiple dimensions (political and cultural) and environments (offline and online) of the transnationalization of economic activities, it is impossible not to question who governs globalization in the age of surveillance capitalism. A potential answer could be the investigation of digital platforms as transnational corporations, to unveil the contradictions between policies (and terms of use as discursive elements) and practices (typical actions of extraction, appropriation, and accumulation in the global chain of production and consumption of goods and services). Both as dimensions of the phenomenon of platformization of political, economic, and social relations led by big tech companies (Morozov, 2018) and sponsored by states (Liu, 2019).

To make this unveiling even more difficult, the technological sublime presents technology as the ultimate positive means to achieve a better life. The technological sublime is the tendency to exaggerate the superiority and excellence of technology, attributing "a totemic, quasi-sacred power" (Liu, 2019, p. 4) to the high-tech industry and its products. Gomes et al. (2024) elaborate a historical-philosophical analysis of the concept of the sublime, characterized as natural sublime, modern sublime, and technological or postmodern sublime. Authors recall thinkers who focused on the natural sublime, in the "uncontrollable grandeur and complete superiority to the subject, nature threatens and dissolves him, while at the same time causing him admiration and pleasure" (Gomes et al., 2024, p. 405).

The technological sublime - or American technological sublime (Nye, 1994) - "emerges with the new means of industrial production and with the metropolis […] as a type of excess that also attracts and terrifies […]" (Gomes et al., 2024, p. 405). While the digital sublime - algorithmic, or cyber sublime (Mosco, 2004) - "stems from the most recent Technologies, from the digital, […] virtual, cybernetic, which represent a new excess, a new abundance and incomprehension, causing great change in all fields of experience" (Gomes et al., 2024, p. 406). In sum, ICTs and their corresponding digitization have been responsible for the reconfiguration of our relationships with time, space, and power, also contributing to the production of the technological sublime, which "involves feelings of admiration and awe in the face of new technologies and their promises" (Gomes et al., 2024, p. 406).

Thus, the technological sublime manufactured by political and economic forces has camouflaged the concentration of power in conglomerates and their relations with the State, as well as the establishment of sophisticated surveillance infrastructure. This explains the resistance to a critical view of technology and exemplifies an embedded ideology that attributes quality, novelty, positivity, convenience, futurism, and utopia to technology. This phenomenon also contributes to the absence of a critical view of digital platforms, especially in a context of normalization of datafication as a new paradigm in science and society (Bezerra, 2024). Paradoxically, we choose to deny evidence and implications of contemporary phenomena proven by scientific data, such as global warming and algorithmic biases.

Additionally, new forms of surveillance and control - or technopolitics (Bruno et al., 2018) - lead us to the observation of how the mediation of relationships by computers and other electronic devices meets the logic of accumulation. In other words, the use of these devices; the monitoring of profiles, groups, and debates on platforms; the use of security camera circuits in public and private spaces, drones, and, especially, facial recognition and fingerprint collection technology are disseminated, normalized, and standardized (Han, 2018b), without the corresponding public debate in the new information regime.

INFOCRACY AND INFORMATION OR SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Han (2022, p. 7) asserts that the information regime is "the form of domination in which information and its processing by algorithms and artificial intelligence determine […] social, economic, and political processes." According to the author, the gain of power stems from

> […] access to information that is used for psychopolitical surveillance and the control and prediction of behavior. Information regimes is tied to information capitalism, which develops into surveillance capitalism and reduces human beings into *consumer cattle that provide data* (Han, 2022, p. 7, emphasis in original).

Zuboff defines surveillance capitalism as (2019, p. 8) as:

> 1. A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales; 2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification; 3. A rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history; 4. The foundational framework of a surveillance economy; 5. As significant a threat to human nature in the twenty- first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth; 6. The origin of a new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy; 7. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty; 8. An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow of the people's sovereignty.

Networks and technologies are used as key ingredients in the formation of swarms (Han, 2018a), whether spontaneous or not, that destabilize society with the aim to confront governments and influence legislative agendas. Google Maps, YouTube, Facebook, X, TikTok, and WhatsApp are part of the arsenal that hybrid activists and government authorities adopt in the information and disinformation guerrilla war. Digital technological intervention in the promotion of liberal democracy becomes ambiguous because it restricts rather than promotes civil and political rights.

The comprehension of the "democratic crisis under the information regime" (Han, 2022, p. 35) requires the understanding that the demographic information that enabled biopolitics has been replaced by psychographic information used for psychopolitics (Han, 2018b). According to the author, "data-driven infocracy undermines the democratic process, which requires autonomy and freedom of the will" (Han, 2022, p. 39). Similarly, Zuboff (2022) argues that surveillance capitalism has taken the place of democracies that have given up information spaces. A new institutional-political order was established by GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft; or GAFAAMT, if we include the Chinese companies Alibaba and Tencent), (TNI, 2021), which exerts oligopolistic control over digital communication and makes it impossible to understand social harms (e.g., disinformation and hate speech) as organic effects of economic operations.

Han (2022, p. 37) names Trump as "the first **Twitter president**" [emphasis added]. Anecdotally, President Donald Trump inaugurated the era of "Twiplomacy" (Twiplomacy, 2018) when he was elected in 2016 through his unorthodox use of Twitter (now X) to circumvent traditional media channels – resulting in numerous diplomatic gaffes. In 2017, Bruno Latour published *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime,* with the main proposition "that we shall not understand anything about the political positions adopted in the past 50 years if we do not bring climate change – and its denial" (Honorato & Silva, 2021, p. 391). Donald Trump's withdrawal, in 2017, from the Paris Agreement (adopted by 196 countries at the Conference of the Parties - COP21, held in December 2015 and in force since November 4, 2016), (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2021), and the Brexit referendum in England (in 2016) "are two milestones that reveal the stance of escaping the globalization game" (Honorato & Silva, 2021, p. 392) – in the sense of seeking global integration and governance to mitigate the environmental and inequality crises that result from the capitalist mode of production (Garcia Canclini, 2020).

Here it is appropriate to present the tangle of phenomena that we have difficulty to explain and deal with in everyday contemporary society. Latour (2020a, p. 9) affirms that

> without the idea that we have entered into a New Climatic Regime [an expression from the work *Facing Gaia* (Latour, 2020b)], we cannot understand the explosion of inequalities, the scope of deregulation, the critique of globalization, or, most importantly, the panicky desire to return to the old protections of the nation-state – a desire that is identified, quite inaccurately, with the "rise of populism".

Latour (2020a, p. 78) indicates that the "contradiction that broke out in diplomatic form on December 12, 2015, at the conclusion of the Paris Climate Accord, when every delegation muttered [...]: But then there is no world for all our development projects?!". Contrary to the internationalist maxim of *great power, great responsibilities,* the current hegemonic power denies the relevance of the agreement and delegitimizes the advances and scientific consensus that had been obtained as a result of years of debates and reports within the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC). Latour (2020b) emphasizes that the term "anthropocene" synthesizes this contradiction. In his words:

> Despite all the criticisms to which the concept has been subjected, the prefix "*Anthropos*" applied to a geological period is indeed a symptom of a repoliticization of all the planetary questions. As if a label "*Made in Humans"* had been engraved on all the old natural resources (Latour, 2020a, pp. 78-79).

Sklair (2020) explores in more detail how dangerous this "neutralization" of the Anthropocene is undermining serious global action in the face of the potential existential risks humanity faces. Banerjee and Arjaliès (2021) vehemently criticize the fact that Western imaginaries of "Anthropocene and Gaia", which propose to overcome the separation between nature and culture, are also based on exclusions that reflect the rationality of the Enlightenment and the legacies of colonialism. Among these legacies is data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019), which paves the way for a new stage of capitalism whose contours we only glimpse: the capitalization of life without limits.

The climate emergency requires no more evidence or data, but rather urgent collective action grounded in a different imaginary (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021). Engagement with ancestral knowledge (see Krenak, 2020, 2022) emerges as a solution to be pursued respectfully by academics in organizational and management studies for the development of a more Earth-centered perspective (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021). In an ongoing geological epoch shaped by humans, in which the evidence of a climate emergency is so compelling, some signs indicate that global environmental governance is retreating or becoming deglobalized.

Wickberg and Gärdebo (2023) argue that some recent developments by surveillance capitalists, such as Microsoft, suggest systems comprised of environmental data. Microsoft "has since 2018 invested $50 million a year in its 'AI for Earth' program, claiming it can reduce greenhouse gas emissions while increasing global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by $5 trillion by 2030" (Wickberg & Gärdebo, 2023, p. 334). This statement, however, fails to consider how its emissions are accounted for using dubious carbon dioxide removal claims.

The authors remind us that Microsoft launched, in 2021, before COP26, an artificial intelligence system consisting of a carbon accounting platform, with the aim of reporting CO_2 emissions around the globe. Evidently, such a system has as its main consequence an enormous concentration of power in the hands of Microsoft, becoming "a potential vehicle for power and epistemic truth" (Wickberg & Gärdebo, 2023, p. 334). This system also violates the European Union's (EU) Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, implemented in 2023, which requires the regular publication of reports on its environmental and social impact activities.

Meanwhile, Google reports increased water consumption associated with training artificial intelligence algorithms due to the cooling demands of data centers (The Times, 2024). Concerns about the carbon footprints of data centers and artificial intelligence servers are illustrated by recent announcements from Microsoft about reopening its nuclear power plant in Three Mile, USA; from Google, regarding an agreement to use energy from small reactors of the company Kairos Power; and from Amazon, to invest US$500 million to develop similar reactors (ClimaInfo, 2024). In parallel, we have the intensification of competition between governments and companies for access and exploitation of critical minerals (lithium, cobalt, and nickel) used in electric batteries and nuclear reactors (Centro Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais [Cebri], 2024).

SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM AND ALGORITHMIC GOVERNANCE: THE SINISTER RELATIONSAHIPS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATIONS

The influence of private (or non-state) actors on national and international technology policies involves different interests, types of strategies, and behaviors (Strange, 1994, 1996). Together, these factors raise questions from government authorities and the public regarding the scale of business influence in the political sphere and result in pressure for regulation in the face of corporate *lobbying* for self-regulation. In the current scenario, there is prevailing skepticism that self-regulation – even with components such as corporate policies, codes of conduct, guidelines, and terms of use – can address the significant social, political, and environmental challenges posed by the digital economy led by *big tech* companies.

In parallel, studies (e.g., Abboud & Campos, 2020; Napolitano & Ranzani, 2021) discuss the possibility of regulated self-regulation as a model for regulating social media platforms, with the aim to maintain a democratic environment on the internet. Regulated self-regulation contemplates the incorporation, in the terms and conditions of the platforms services, of principles of transparency, accountability, and the right to defense. Furthermore, platforms with greater influence on public debate should be regulated asymmetrically, that is, the larger ones would receive more demands than the smaller ones (Napolitano & Ranzani, 2021).

The debate on the regulation of *big tech companies* began focused on economic aspects that result from business expansion through acquisitions. For years, the size and influence of these companies generated unease and concern among authorities and civil society organizations (Valente, 2020). The risks associated with a high concentration of power (Atal, 2021) in the hands of few companies - Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon - had a certain speculative aspect, regarding what the future of the internet would be like. However, there were already concrete negative impacts on free competition and barriers to entry for small and medium-sized competitors. Reflecting the priority concerns of that time, the set of solutions has focused on antitrust measures that would allow for a balance between economic freedom, free competition, and innovation (Zanatta & Abramovay, 2019).

In 2013, the revelations made by former Central Intelligence Agency technology consultant Edward Snowden turned the page on this first stage of the regulatory debate. By the disclosure that the American government had access to the private data of ordinary citizens - even those who were not suspects or targets of formal investigations under the 2001 anti-terrorism legislation - Snowden helped deepen the perception that *big tech companies* should be subject to specific regulation. The main concern was the state access and control of private data circulating on the internet and social media, and how the ambiguous relationships between technology corporations and governments could jeopardize individual freedoms (Srivastava, 2023).

Back in 2016, the harmful influence of social media algorithms on political polarization alarmed Europe. After the call for a referendum on leaving the EU with little chance of approval, the United Kingdom found itself engulfed by an avalanche of misinformation on social media and the victory of the Brexit campaign – the most controversial political episode in the long process of regional integration. In the US, the peak of political events that led Congress to summon technology companies for hearings was the 2016 presidential election. In a highly polarized contest, social media platforms played a key role in the election result, with a general sense of confusion about what was true or false.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal was a watershed moment in this chain of events (Srivastava, 2023). The project, developed by researchers at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, used an application within Facebook that, once installed by the user – or citizen and consumer (Garcia Canclini, 2020) – collect data not only about them but also about their friends. With a database of 50 million Americans, Cambridge Analytica made highly detailed inferences, generating valuable material for political campaign strategies. The revelation that the data had been used to influence voters' decisions in the US and the UK in 2016 resulted in an inquiry in the British Parliament. One of the lines of investigation following the accusation by former employees was that Cambridge Analytica had provided the database of American citizens to the Russian government. Immediately, American authorities launched an inquiry alleging concerns about Russian government interference in the dissemination of fake news in the elections. As a result, informational guerrilla warfare in the post-Cold War geopolitical context has spilled over from expert debates into global public opinion (Korybko, 2018).

From Snowden´s denunciations to the Cambridge Analytica scandal, technology companies experienced continuous global expansion. The 2010s were marked by a shift in regulatory priorities: from antitrust measures aimed to regulate the size and economic influence of these corporations, to a growing prominence of political and geopolitical issues. Different situations indicated that Facebook's algorithm, which directs content based on inferences about user profiles, fuels the intensification of political, ethnic, and identity conflicts (Oyedemi, 2019). Extreme examples of the use of social networks include – with swarm tactics (Han, 2018a) - the Arab Spring demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, and Jordan in 2011; the June 2013 protests in Brazil; the incitement to violence in Myanmar in 2017. Social networks, messaging apps, and YouTube channels exerted extreme pressure for the dissemination of disinformation in the US presidential elections in 2016, 2020, and again in 2024; in Brazil in 2018 and 2022; and in the elections in India in 2019 and 2024.

This broader context led to the hearings of the Committees in the US Congress, from July 2020 (House Committee on the Judiciary, 2020) to January 2024 (US Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 2025), focused not only on the platforms that had more influence on the 2016 American elections – such as Facebook and Twitter - but also on TikTok (House Committee on Energy and Commerce, 2023), under allegations that it shared data from 170 million Americans with the Chinese government. Beyond the informational guerrilla warfare promoted by Russia, a major concern was the assumed export of Chinese values and surveillance incorporated into technologies (Liu, 2019) sold to its trade partners and geopolitical rivals.

Since 2017, the special management system of the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has required internet media and content services (such as Alibaba, ByteDance, and Tencent) to cooperate with the authorities. However, to ensure state control over TikTok's algorithm, the China Internet Investment Technology Fund (controlled by the CAC) acquired a 1% stake in 2021 as a golden share on Beijing Douyin Information Service (originally Beijing Bytedance Technology), (Sayari, 2024). As a result of congressional investigations, the law signed in April 2024, whose implementation has been delayed by the Trump administration, could result in a ban on TikTok if ByteDance does not sell control of its US operations.

In Europe, although there were already scattered directives and regulations on data protection, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) approved only in 2016. In force in EU member states since 2018, it inspired the General Data Protection Law in Brazil and the California Consumer Privacy Act (both in effect since 2020). Finally, in March 2024, a proactive regulatory experiment aimed at fairness and equity in digital markets - called the Digital Markets Act - came into force in the EU.

Internationally, in September 2024 in New York, the Global Digital Compact was agreed upon as part of the Pact for the Future, addressing pressing international issues such as sustainable development, international peace, the rights of future generations, technology and innovation, and digital cooperation. However, for progress in the protection of rights to occur, greater global governance and reform of institutions created under the aegis of post-war institutional liberalism will be necessary.

Currently, the algorithmic governance of big tech, understood here as "the agency of algorithms over people and things" (Silveira, 2020, p. 63), has implications for international relations in two ways: "(a) it creates new private authorities as corporations control critical bottlenecks of knowledge, connections and desires; and (b) it mediates the scope of state-corporate relations" (Srivastava, 2023, p. 989). In other words, "states become dependent on Big Tech, Big Tech circumvents state overreach, and states curtail Big Tech" (Srivastava, 2023, p. 989), in a classic example of how structural changes in the technological dimension force governments to cooperate with these corporations (Strange, 1994, 1996).

States use algorithms for campaigns, to allocate social benefits, combat tax fraud, control borders and drones, conduct surveillance with facial recognition, and prevent terrorism. Big tech companies use the same algorithms against states uniquely to boost their scale and global influence. Moreover, they resist government requests for forced decryption (as illustrated by the legal battle between the Brazilian Supreme Court and social media X to block accounts that disseminate anti-democratic messages). Algorithmic governance exclusively by corporations, that is, without any form of regulation exercised by people through normative and legal devices over algorithms (Silveira, 2020), erodes public trust in technology - by activating the perplexity and terror of the technological sublime (Gomes et al., 2024) - and generates a poorly informed citizenry in the age of infocracy dominated by digital platforms (Han, 2022).

Srivastava (2023, p. 991) argues that "algorithmic governance reflects both the use of algorithms *by* authorities and algorithms *as* authorities" [emphasis in original]. Algorithms that allow surveillance not only of the 5.17 billion users of social media, but also of the access of 5.45 billion internet users (Statista, 2024) in visits to Google, YouTube, and Facebook sites, can exacerbate biases and discrimination based on race and gender, and propel technology companies towards global dominance by capturing the political sphere. Consequently, algorithmic abuses and harms amplify when big tech companies assume a political role in governance as partners and interlocutors of states. Private authorities that are devoid of legitimacy and, above all, accountability.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Who governs globalization in the age of information and surveillance capitalism? This question guided us throughout the essay, while, in parallel, we also questioned who are the protagonists of the deglobalization of agendas that demand international cooperation with the construction of more (and not less) global environmental governance. We reaffirm the urgency of a critical and contextualized analysis of the dynamics of globalization and information and surveillance capitalism, especially in light of the phenomena of platformization, dataism, and datafication that permeate contemporary societies. Technological advancement, far from being a mere facilitator, has revealed itself to be an ambiguous agent that, on the one hand, enhances communication and connectivity, and, on the other, imposes limits on individual and collective rights, intensifies state and corporate surveillance, and diverts attention from pressing environmental issues.

The current information regime demands a reassessment of the roles played by large corporations, particularly technology companies, which are frequently at the center of discussions on global environmental governance. It is essential that the academic community, in integrating these critiques, not only deconstructs the narratives surrounding the appropriation of technological sublime by companies such as Tencent (Liu, 2019) and Meta (Mosco, 2023), but also promotes a dialogue that facilitates the construction of viable alternatives for environmental and algorithmic governance.

In the 1990s, traditional media emerged as an international protagonist through ICTs, becoming global. In the 2000s, neoliberal globalization confronted anti-capitalist views from social movements and non-governmental organizations, whose agendas were cosmopolitan. Currently, optimism regarding digital media masks a dystopian side of the technological sublime. We observe a transition from the biosphere and democracy to the technosphere and infocracy, in which structural changes in the technological dimension cause private digital platforms to surpass states in political and economic power, something not foreseen by Strange (1996), exacerbating inequalities and environmental impacts due to the high demand for resources. Technology companies dominate the global economic landscape, reflecting a model that prioritizes the capitalization of life (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). State surveillance, especially in the US and China, indicates underlying geopolitical problems (Morozov, 2018).

The regulation of platforms, especially in emerging countries like Brazil, is crucial to ensure digital sovereignty, which is the capacity to regulate digital infrastructures. In contrast to this demand, the research and development investments of these platforms are higher than state budgets (e.g., the five largest US-based technology companies invested over US$200 billion in 2022), (Conselho Digital, 2024). In other words, data-driven platforms and business models are mediating social, political, and economic interactions due to decades of liberalization policies that have resulted in a digital society that needs *venture capital* to address crises of social inequality and environmental degradation. The erosion of state sovereignty, exacerbated by digital colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019), demands comprehensive enforcement of current regulatory frameworks. This sovereignty must counterbalance corporate self-regulation, which, in a neoliberal context, has expanded its influence without consideration for social justice and climate change.

Since society's relationship with nature influences prescriptions for mitigating climate change, we conclude with a call for action, hybrid activism, and social movements that transform the imaginary with sustainable alternatives. One path is to abandon Western imaginaries, such as the Anthropocene and Gaia, in favor of decolonial versions based on knowledge systems that reflect the profound connection between nature and humans (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021). Krenak (2020), for example, reminds us that we have been alienated from the Earth, understood as an organism of which we are all a part. This division results in the loss of diversity and imaginaries, as well as the marginalization of those who resist the Eurocentric and neoliberal model of progress, such as the Krenak people and their Amerindian thought. Silencing this knowledge reaffirms the prevalence of the technological sublime and contributes to the concealment of the relationships between technology companies and climate change, as well as the algorithmic governance exercised by these same companies, which today act in decision-making processes that previously belonged to sovereign states (Srivastava, 2023).

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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