

Data Mining Research and the Disintegration of Society: The “Project X” Haren Riots

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We need [such classifications and calculations] because we have been dealing with increasingly high numbers of individual . . . entities whose activities and behaviours must be understood. . . .

Axel Bruns¹

Understanding the “Accidental” Haren riots

On September 21, 2012, the small Dutch city of Haren in the Northern Province of Groningen experienced, for Dutch standards, an unexpected and unprecedented spate of rioting. The riot occurred after a sixteen-year-old girl’s public Facebook announcement about her upcoming birthday party went viral via YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, resulting in thousands of young people congregating near her home to join in the “celebrations.” The party call was disseminated via the “Project X” meme—a meme referring to the title of an American comedy film about a Facebook party that got out of hand. The resulting riot caused millions of Euros in damages to property like cars and shop windows, and resulted in assaults against police officers as well as to the injuring of several people in Haren (*The Independent*, 2012). After the riots subsided, a commission was formed—consisting of several politicians and a couple of mass and new media scholars from the University of Twente and Utrecht University in the Netherlands—to investigate the cause and ways to prevent future riots. In March 2013, the commission published a large, general report entitled “Twee Werelden” (“Two Worlds”), and a more specific and well-researched report by

¹ “Entering the Age of the Generative Algorithm” (2014, n.p., author’s emphasis).

van Dijk et al. (2013) on the role of the media entitled “De Weg naar Haren: de rol van jongeren, sociale media, massamedia en autoriteiten bij de mobilisatie voor Project X Haren” (“The Road to Haren: the role of youth, social media, mass media and the authorities in the mobilization for Project X Haren”). This latter report provides an extensive and in-depth analysis of the role played by mass and social media in the event, making use of data mining techniques to map out the relationship between the various phases of the riot and mobile phone and social media traffic. Around 500,000 tweets are subjected to computer analysis, together with more than 50,000 Facebook posts, in order to also identify major topics, tones of conversation, causal relations, and possible groups and networks in relation to the riots.

This usage of data mining by social scientists, in which computers are called upon to handle the exceptionally large data sets generated by computers, has become widespread in recent years. Many social science and humanities departments in major Western universities have boosted their funding and productivity thanks to the implementation of new digital tools. Indeed, the area that is now widely known as the “digital humanities” has transposed the supposedly dusty labors of traditional humanistic research into a more glitzy and up-to-date endeavor by harnessing the latest computing technologies and their calculative potentials for collection and interpretation. “Big data,” in particular, with its promise of novel in-depth ways of understanding the world, appears to be the new buzzword in the corporate IT world, as well as in much cutting-edge social science and humanities research. Of course, a lot of this buzz has been the result of strategic ploys to keep certain non-Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) departments alive—a calculated endeavor that nonetheless also has the potential to rescue marginalized research. Many in the social sciences and humanities are moreover earnestly keen to dig into the treasure troves of big data and computer simulation for all kinds of worthy, and not merely strategic, purposes, for instance, comprehending the Haren riot. While such eagerness is understandable and indeed productive, this chapter suggests that we should remain apprehensive of uncritical uses and discourses around these new digital tools. Indeed, as a reaction to the uncritical eagerness with which digital tools have been embraced, especially in the social sciences, analyses that question such new media usage have also emerged. Excellent critiques of the incommensurability of computing and interpretation, by Jussi Parikka (2011) and Alex Galloway (2011) for example, build on a lineage of critical theories of technologies like those of Martin Heidegger, Paul Virilio,

Jean Baudrillard, and others. These critiques are, in fact, also considered by many to be part of “the” digital humanities.

In order to draw out the problems and limitations of how the Haren riots were analyzed by the social scientists involved in Project X Haren “Two Worlds” and especially in “The Road to Haren,” this chapter aims to extend such critiques by first outlining some of the curious paradoxes of the digital turn in the humanities and social sciences. So, let me start with some preliminary questions. What could the foundational split in “the” digital humanities between hopeful or eager appropriation and skeptical or critical problematization—as I illustrated above—possibly tell us about the weaknesses and problems surrounding the increasing reliance on digital tools for understanding (Dutch) society? How might we come to appreciate the way in which new media technologies, with their “vaults” of big data, currently alter research in the social sciences and humanities in general and in unexpected ways? What are the moral and political implications of this research? Do data mining and opportunities for simulation through new media allow for better forms of knowledge about the social and society, or are they profoundly antisocial and anti-truth, vis-à-vis what Martin Heidegger in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” (1977) already identifies as new media’s oppressively cybernetic and calculative logic?

I hope to demonstrate through investigating these questions, and by reinterpreting “Project X” Haren, that the use of data mining in the social sciences exemplifies the *aporia*—the central tension between fostering an ideal society and the always ideologically and culturally specific tools and conceptions that such a fostering entails—that always-already lies at the heart of the humanistic enterprise. I will do so by illustrating how the “knowledge gained” about society by way of data mining methodology is itself principally an allegory (both a derivative and a silent justification) of the technical apparatuses it uses. This is because such knowledge is not only a mere outcome of this apparatus, but also because such knowledge points toward the near-perfect obscuring of this apparatus’ central politics, which I call “speed-elitism.” Speed-elitism is essentially the sublimation of the ideals of social progress into the contemporary tools of acceleration. It is an ever more pervasive ideology that intensifies and supplants the Eurocentric roots of technocratic capitalism by way of the dissemination of its central discursive and technical mechanisms. These mechanisms are the fostering of the humanistic ideals of “freedom” and “emancipation,” as well as the ways in which these ideals are projected or “hallucinated” into the latest technological developments.

My main conclusion is that the realm of social representation has given way to the realm of algorithmic and object-oriented *functionality*, and I argue that this slippage is possible because acceleration and the utopian hope for a better society—a hope that governments and the social sciences alike translate into their managerial duties—have always been conjoined twins in the Western philosophical tradition. Due to this fundamental entanglement, the concept and construction of truth in academic work today hinges on the tension between modern technology’s general propensity for speeding-up and slowing-down. It also hinges on the tension between calculation and change (as well as “calculating change”) that those academic realms that concern themselves with the humanistic enterprise are doomed to shuttle between. After all, social “change” and individual autonomy over her or his life are central tenets of the emancipatory endeavor, but are also antagonistic forces. Especially the social sciences—but also to a large extent the humanities—*inhabit* this tension by assuming that the technological and methodological possibility of objectivity and “deep” knowledge is given, while also performing the idea that true objectivity, or at least a morally or scientifically “better” state of affairs, should *parse out* all assumptions or limiting techniques. Eventually, these accelerated tensions then increasingly generate “more true” as well as more questionable renditions of the social and of “reality” through, for instance, object-oriented computer programming and algorithms that generate aesthetically pleasing graphs and visualizations. The etymology of “algorithm,” which shows the word as originating from a contraction of the name of the Arab mathematician Al-Kwarizmi and the Greek αριθμός (number), indeed already reveals the kinship of data processing techniques to arithmetic and calculation with their subsequent connotations of objectivity, purity, and elegant factuality (Klein 1966, 149). This means that the “knowledge gained” from data mining and simulation should first and foremost be understood as an aesthetic procedure, the primary political function of this procedure being to *mask* the complicity of computing functionality in technologically stratifying society.

On top of this, I propose that the obsession with “analytical depth” using new media today marks the general displacement and simulation of the ideals of humanist and liberal representation, due to the ongoing acceleration of the political by new media technologies. In other words, the social sciences are here implicated in an increasingly displaced and potentially deluded ideal of social change and scientific progress toward the utopia of complete knowledge and ultimately a questionable ideal of moral and political community or society.

This accelerated displacement therefore resides at the heart of contemporary forms of hope but also of despair under the neoliberal globalization of information and communication technologies and their mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In turn, national governments partake in this illusion of the possibility of totally managing and understanding populations and social problems, leading to a downward spiral where “increasing control drives things out of control.” What this means is that the turn toward big data and digital tools *compromises* research in the social sciences in two consecutive ways, of which the latter way constitutes an intensification and displacement of the former. First, research is compromised—as always—by the political-economic-cultural conditions and the institutional politics in the Netherlands in which such research is necessarily embedded. Since the possibility of scientific and empirical research has taken as its necessary starting point the general knowability of the world, such politics has by and large rested on a Eurocentric and positivistic epistemological framework for which media technologies provide the materialization of the communicative ideal. Second, the form of today’s research is compromised by the aesthetics of acceleration inherent in new media tools and technologies. Such inherent qualities are, for instance, their heavy reliance on algorithms and the connotations of elegant truth of algorithmic mathematics. Put differently, data today are compromised not only through media rhetoric and ideology, but also through the *sedimentation* and transformation of that rhetoric into the interpretative uses of algorithmic media. The inherently speed-elitist qualities of these tools are, in effect, an intrinsic aspect of the aggravation of contemporary inequalities and the ways in which the social sciences play a part in dissimulating the complicity of their tools in this aggravation.

The “mining” metaphor in data mining also assumes a kind of archaeological effort, digging into the “depth” of texts, which Jacques Derrida famously unsettles in *Archive Fever*. Derrida here notes that “the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future,” and that “the archivization produces as much as it records the event” (1998, 17). At issue is therefore not simply *that* new media archive stuff, but that this media archive pretends to be a neutral tool or storage place—discreet from human subjectivity and interpretation or even overarching sociopolitical relations—in which the presented data supposedly “speaks for itself.” But the archive and indeed all media, in fact, makes possible what Derrida terms a “commencement”

or a narrative of origin and progress (as well as the general obsession with classification and recording), and a “commandment” through which it seeks to validate and in turn institutionalize law and authority, also by way of hiding its own logic and exorcizing what resists archivization (1998, 1). This supposition of depth or “excavation” by way of data mining, both in the technological collection and analysis of data, therefore harbors a specific phenomenological understanding of the term “data,” which Alex Galloway flags in “Are Some Things Unrepresentable?,” entailing the conception (or misconception) of data as raw facts or “givens” (2011, 87). Galloway thus usefully proposes that thinking of data as its synonym “information” suggests that there is always a “form” or an aesthetic aspect at work in the generation of data (2011, 88).

Keeping this close relation between the aesthetic aspect of in-formation and the formation of society in mind, this chapter calls attention to the ways speed-elitism currently aids but also hampers traditional scientific research and complicates traditional methodology. The latter complication should be taken as the more urgent object of analysis of the social sciences today. It also proposes that Heidegger’s work, as well as Baudrillard’s and Virilio’s, indeed took this methodological complication to task by thematizing as well as exemplifying it. Speed-elitism, which this chapter argues constitutes the ideological nexus of this complication, needs to be understood as the new near-totalizing and highly questionable economic and technological *condition of possibility* for much academic research and theory today. This chapter uses speed-elitism, then, as a shorthand for those techniques that foster the reproduction of dominant discourses and technologies of acceleration, which often express themselves in a worship of technological progress, connectivity, heightened mobility, and border crossing. The borders crossed are, for instance, the one between computing and the humanities, but also those between supposedly preestablished and discreet concepts and semantic items like “youths” versus “adults,” or “digital natives” versus “the rest of the grown-up population.” A central objective behind such border crossings lies in the seemingly benevolent bridging of all kinds of gaps through the implementation of tools and techniques of communication in order to open up all segments of society to increasing digital surveillance, oppression, control, and commercialization. At issue here is that such crossings made by academics and government officials are understood to be driven by a moral imperative, such that any critique of these objectives or imperatives—e.g. against the use of “big data” or digital tools for the “betterment” of society—initially appears as an immoral or

regressive injunction. Nonetheless, again, such critiques are possible due to the fundamentally aporetic nature of the humanistic enterprise, which sought to universalize a particularly Eurocentric idea of the ideal democratic, representative, enlightened, and transparent society.

The mediated suppression of social despair and disintegration

The origin of the productive use of digital tools in the social sciences can to a large degree be located in the development of the cybernetic feedback model set up by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's famous attempts at "noise control" for electronic signals transmission in *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1963), which became a major inspiration for American communications departments. Shannon and Weaver's endeavor was part of the attempt to achieve predictability in engineering, which, as Axel Bruns notes, is also the prerogative of contemporary algorithmic machines (2014, n.p.). This resulted in the problematic equation of finding solutions for mechanical disorganization with ways of eliminating noise by technological means—in other words, to ensure that media communicate with as little inhibition as possible, thus guaranteeing mediated transparency, coherence, and truth. Computing today, as an extension of this logic of supposed transparency, likewise hides its internal operations by presenting functionality in the form of believable simulations of, for instance, "society" or "community." What we see emerge therefore in the social sciences is a new kind of politics that is intimately intertwined with the largely invisible aesthetics of acceleration and simulation of these data systems. It thus becomes vital that we better grasp how the cybernetic attempt at purging "noise" and the resultant simulation of sociality is directly related to the violence of social exclusion and fragmentation under speed-elitism. This central concern with either eliminating or revealing "noise" can in turn, I suggest, be connected to the fundamentally progressive *spirit* of the social sciences and the humanities, which has been usurped in the general push for acceleration. I understand spirit here as *irreducible to* yet also *constitutive of* sociality, rationality, and indeed of technological calculation and communicative transportation. This recuperation of the spirit of the humanistic spirit in social and human research is hence essential vis-à-vis the complicities that the digital humanities and social sciences currently inhabit yet dissimulate,

and can according to Parikka be understood as a re-appreciation of “noise,” or rather, that which is irreducible to yet constitutive of communication as such (2011, 273).

This cybernetic purging of noise, which Parikka usefully flags—posited as a technocratic solution to the “problem” of media communication and representation that the social sciences too uncritically have adopted—affects the very possibility of political representation and community in contemporary, supposedly democratic societies (like the Netherlands) in negative and unexpected ways. Indeed, this chapter proposes that due to this purging of noise, governments are becoming increasingly blind to the negative fallout of contemporary technocracy. It concurs with Bruns’ claim that “algorithms fold into one the analysis of data and the production of order” (2014, n.p.) but notes that *disorder too* is an unintentional by-product of these tools. This means that the “Project X” Haren research, despite—or perhaps *because* of—all its good intentions and thorough investigations to aid in understanding the riots and providing recommendations, also participates in the speed-elitist drive to keep the *actual* cause of the riots concealed. It does so by failing to address the more fundamental role of new media ideology and technology in Dutch society, beyond mere instrumentalist concerns with the virality and speed of social media message dissemination (“The Road to Haren,” 11, 33, 74, and especially 118–24).

Recognizing the fundamentally altered relationship between “reality” and representation in our era of technological acceleration, which emerges in Heidegger’s work as the moment of the work’s enunciation as well as its central concern, will help us better grasp this fundamental role of the media. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger proceeds by asking after the essence of the work of art (a medium that does not hide its aesthetic dimension) by skillfully working through a number of productive confusions (2002, 4–19). These confusions concern the status of form and content (or matter), usefulness and uselessness, appearance and essence, depth and surface, and outside and inside. Showing that our understandings or experiences of the artwork cannot be disentangled from a certain limiting artificiality or aesthetic function, Heidegger suggests that thinking itself—as much as it is also a craft—must rely on such limitations as well. This means that any “truth” is always-already “artificial,” and that any claim to objective reality amounts to a representation, which in one sense brings the object closer but in another sense makes it withdraw or disappear. Heidegger chides Western thought for assuming or pretending it can

achieve a fully objective representation and a total communicative transparency in its scientific and philosophical endeavors. He especially proposes via an etymological approach typical of his work, that the slippage or mistranslation from the more revealing, “original” Greek terminology around being and object-hood (ουσία and συμβεβηκος) to the Latin terms *substantia* and *accidens* has been the origin of what he calls the “rootlessness of the Western tradition” (2002, 6).

At this point, I would like to suggest that the dual or ambiguous status of representation as “accurate” yet “removed” from its object—which Heidegger neatly uncovers in the “The Origin of the Work of Art”—precisely returns with a vengeance under speed-elitism, and that this fundamentally uproots the possibility for a representative politics. In this sense, we can conjecture that the young people who congregated in Haren (and many other economically marginalized Dutch people too) no longer feel politically represented; their only “connection” to a semblance of “society” is provided by the very technologies that equally obscure their concerns and desperation. The fact that the “Two Worlds” report suggests that there is a generational gap between youths and older people only serves to exacerbate this, as it leads to an argument in favor of connecting the rest of the older population to social media as well (2013, 21). Data mining in particular can be understood as the paradoxical upshot of the harnessing of change and risk through such “social” media—“social” being a term that arguably itself dissimulates the disintegration of the social—for neoliberal capital. My position on this, besides relying on Heidegger’s critique of communicative transparency, is also inspired by the insights of Baudrillard and Ulrich Beck on simulation and risk society. Beck in *World at Risk* (2009) and Baudrillard in “For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign” (2001) both claim in their own divergent ways that contemporary capitalism creates and in turn expropriates sites of tension, difference, and risk. In *World at Risk*, Beck suggests that the general covering up or dramatization of risk results in a politics of anticipation, exemplified by apocalyptic narratives and dubious scientific models that are themselves thoroughly implicated in the ongoing financialization and militarization of democratic societies and of the globe. While Beck proposes this analysis in relation to ecological narratives and responses, I suggest that his point about scientific modeling is equally applicable to any perceived threat that apparently requires a form of preemptive policing, especially through new media technologies. Baudrillard, partly in line with Beck, similarly argues in “For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign” that, under our contemporary form

of capitalism, the symbolic realm and the capitalistic reliance on information flows have collapsed into one another. The resulting simulation of truth relies on the representational fallacy of an empirical reality or a mode of thought that resides outside the capitalist logic of reproduction through social destruction and fragmentation.

Capitalism, or the main economic logic driving current “democracies” like the Netherlands, today seizes the ambiguity of *scientific* representation as such by incessantly calling upon and usurping the hope for a more meaningful cohabitation to which the seriously engaged social sciences and digital humanities—including, no doubt, the commendable Dutch media research team—respond. This acceleration of scientific representation is possible because the impossible scientific utopia of pure objectivity and of the unmediated representation of reality is enacted through the fantasy of technological superiority that stimulates capitalism. It is here that the tension between calculation and change, in the very desire to technologically predict and classify events and groups, leads the digital humanities into an immediate kind of *aporia* or internal division that is typical of the humanistic tradition in which Heidegger also participates; it wants to foster positive social change, but this very endeavor is produced in response to and as an offshoot of speed-elitism. In Heidegger’s work, this emerges as an appearance of mere philosophical description and progressive questioning that is actually smartly crafted on the supposed authenticity (or “transparent truth”) of Greek and Germanic conceptions. Nevertheless, this chapter proposes, in contrast to Beck and Heidegger, that such risk management engenders an increasingly obscure quality or aspect of contemporary society—of which the “Project X” riots can in fact be read as a symptom—so that such risk management can never harness social change over an infinite amount of time. It is for this reason that Heidegger’s “The Origin” opens up to its own deconstruction. This means that the representations, or rather, the seemingly neutral *presentations* of data and logical reasoning in the “Project X” Haren report on the role of the media do not inform us about the social or the real, but function as a smokescreen in order to dissimulate the contemporary disintegration of the social and the real due to high-tech neoliberalism. “The Road to Haren” contains a plethora of charming graphs and many “cauliflower-like” drawings of social media traffic typical of the imagery generally generated by networked media (2013, 26). But these drawings, as Galloway reminds us in “Are Some Things Unrepresentable?,” are quite simply stylized versions of the Internet’s own underlying network architecture (Galloway 2011, 87).

What we can infer from this, is that our entire political economy is increasingly built on an accelerated *modeling* of the spheres of language, culture, politics, and the economy; in fact, these spheres have imploded into one another by virtue of the digital media, through which all forms of communication become financial transactions. This new semiotic-economic sphere today crucially relies on the reproduction of the ideals of communicability to which the social sciences and the digital humanities predominantly—though never entirely, because they can always also question such grounds—subscribe. Any general nostalgia for the origins of this social reality and attempts to “unearth” it are then the main mechanisms for the fragmentation and individualization of persons in this economy, also in the Netherlands. This is because both the “accuracy” and the “removedness” from the object of nostalgia is accelerated and intensified today; and Heidegger’s work indeed exhibits such a hint of nostalgia for a more authentic Germanic or Greek basis for thinking and ethics, even if it is done in a self-aware fashion. The “Two Worlds” report seems to be relieved that there is not some larger close-knit community of young people behind the Haren riot (2012, 14). The fact that the partygoers were *not* known to each other should have made the writers think about how a pervasive individualization, as a worrisome form of social fragmentation, appears to be at play here.

This “invitation” to use digital media for progressive analysis is therefore paradoxically an outflow of the duty of the digital humanities and social sciences to move society forward, and the culmination—in the sense of both *telos* and termination—of this humanistic duty ascribed to the contemporary tools of acceleration. Social sciences and humanities studies that mobilize digital or data mining tools are then an acceleration of the humanities insofar as they intensify its ideals, but also displace them; in other words, the ideal of total representation and visibility emerges as its own antithesis. The latter thus eventually produces a general incomprehensibility covered up by “recommendations” consisting of educating the police and parents about social media utilities, like privacy settings, and the government monitoring (and even intervening in) social media usage ever more intensively (“The Road to Haren,” 119 and 123; “Two Worlds,” 31). Another recommendation put forward is an ever-stricter regulation of alcohol sales and consumption, claiming that alcohol was a “vital factor” in the riot (“Two Worlds,” 32). We should note here likewise that fostering (superficial) *change* (with an eye to maintaining the basic economic status quo) is one of the key aims of the current neoliberal paradigm, but also of progressive intellectual movements that increasingly organize themselves through the media, like those

that were engaged for “Project X” Haren. Social science methodology around social media has for many years now emphasized the facilitation of collection and collectivity that these media provide for—whether this facilitation entails the creation of a more sociable community, or entails the creation of a coherent and understandable reality or society through data mining tools. It is therefore no surprise that mass and social media research constituted such a major aspect of the “Project X” Haren investigation, even though one could likewise hold that transportation research should have been a major aspect because most rioters took public transport to the small Dutch city.

In light of this, it might be revealing to trace back where, how, and in what forms the reliance on data gathering through various modern media have informed or run parallel to the development and goals of the digital humanities and social sciences—indeed, when questions of humanity and sociality became scientific questions as such. I lack the space to address this tracing in its historical totality here, but want to indicate for now that the above research assumption maintains that the social scientific and the digital humanities’ involvement with new media can, or will, facilitate a “changing society for the better.” Paradoxically, also its inverse, namely a straightforward rejection of these media—one need only to think of the recent arguments made by pundits like Evgeny Morozov in *The Net Delusion* (2011)—professes to the same logic, because it relies on a fantasy of autonomous agent-driven change for social betterment as well. Here too, the foundational split returns in the guise of a supposed choice for or against social media use.

Let me illustrate this with a quick example, after which this chapter will move on to present a brief alternative reading of the “Project X” Haren riots. The always possible confusion between form and content, or “superficial” aesthetics and “deep” essence that Heidegger uncovers in “The Origin,” gives rise to all kinds of interesting politicized arguments by digital humanities scholars. One such fascinating argument, which constitutes an exemplarily optimistic interpretation of computing, emerges in Steve Stagg’s “How Feminist Programming Has Already Happened: Exploring how feminist ideals are represented in existing languages.” This chapter is sharing this brief piece here not to poke fun at the suggestion that coding and algorithms can be “feminist” (why not, after all, if feminism is itself a profoundly slippery and unbounded territory), but in order to highlight how its confusion makes possible the contemporary production of liberal-humanistic arguments, and their complicity in functional managerialism, in general. In short, Stagg argues that the popular programming language Python

demonstrates a “feminist” logic because it works in a “non-binary” and “non-rationalistic” way (Stagg 2004, n.p.). This is according to him due to the fact that first, the binding choices in Python are only decided at runtime and not a compiling time (which is the usual way in which most object-oriented coding is executed because it saves calculation time). Secondly, Stagg argues that this “non-rationalistic” feminist logic emerges through the connotations of some of the commands and operators that Python uses, thus reading this programming language in an enchantingly poetic way. If one takes Stagg’s elegant argument at face value though, it appears to make a curious slip. Computer code is namely by its very nature rationalistic since it always follows a yes/no or 0/1 calculative automation; object-oriented computing has from its inception taken the logic as set out by a mathematical binary system first discussed by Gottfried Leibniz and implemented via software coding by John von Neumann (Heim 1993, 93). Such a system by definition leaves no room at all for fuzzy stuff, misinterpretations, or gray areas. Object-oriented programming languages like Python sprang from a rational worldview; in order to function they have to assume that the world of its computational objects is the total world. This is, of course, inherent in the very idea of cybernetics, the fundamental purpose of which, as I discussed earlier, was to banish noise or slippages.

One might nonetheless counter that Stagg’s piece is not meant to be factual, but should be read metaphorically. Indeed, one could always read any coding language as a metaphor for something or even as a poem (an interesting precursor could be what is called ASCII art); reading indeed always involves some kind of displacement. But this poetic reading would still not constitute that piece of code’s primarily *automated* politics, which operates solely on the functional or *executable* level. On the functional level of code, there is no “interpretation” by any subject reading a text; there is only one executable possibility, whereas our interpretation of a text differs with each and every reading. In other words, Stagg and those hopeful feminists who finally found a “feminist” programming language confuse the aesthetics of Python with its politics—a confusion that is also facilitated by the invisible and inaudible slippage between “language” (as literary text) and “language” (as computer code). Programming language is therefore also purposely invisible to the mere user because its very definition is automation, so that any coding malfunctions can only ever emerge as bad programming. In other words, coding and algorithmic functions exemplify the fundamentally stealthy ways in which contemporary technological power operates in general under speed-elitism, in which representation has become

the inverse or *negation* of “automated” reality. It is here that Stagg’s elegant claim becomes unwittingly malignant, because it serves in the end to obscure the profound complicity of computing technologies with the violence of speed-elitism. The perception of this complicity nonetheless cannot be completely stamped out from our understanding because this complicity *has* an identifiable founding moment which can be etymologically and historically traced back.

The rioters as technocratic “war machines”

Dwelling on the etymology of “data” and its kinship to that of the gift or dowry (Klein 1966, 468), as well as to “date” helps to highlight a perhaps uncanny quality of computer data that Stagg’s misreading, despite itself, gives rise to. This etymology reveals, in particular, the quality of displacement—derivation or allegory—at work in computer data mining, because it points to something being “taken away” from its proper time and place. What is more, its etymology reveals that this displacement harbors an excess (a gift) that continuously *haunts* data mining methodology as well as the contemporary economic and scientific endeavor in general, despite all well-meaning attempts to stamp it out. Baudrillard likewise proposes in “The Theorem of the Accursed Share” that the very quest to technologically eliminate unpredictability and negativity precisely results in their resurrection, as such negativity and unpredictability are endemic to any attempt at total systemization (1993, 121). Extending this claim, I argue that this excess currently reappears in the form of a sort of “accursed share” that the social sciences of the hopeful and the critical perhaps seek to purge from (Dutch) society, namely an *interpretative violence turned mechanical* that is today intimately entwined with modern technology.

With the consumption of political differences and controversy in the media that is symptomatic of speed-elitism in mind, I will now turn to an alternative reading of the “Project X” riots. Obviously, it would be a mistake to assign any kind of attempt at political organization to the rioters’ actions; any sort of sophisticated political analysis or statement indeed seems radically absent from the rioters’ mass and social media sound bites (“The Road to Haren,” 27–28). Also, in terms of their marginalization, the rioters were not disenfranchised workers or excluded poor migrants, but highly mobile and communicative gangs, tweeting, and texting their plans and movements via Blackberry, Facebook, and iPhone. As such, they represent political non-representation in combination

with technological privilege. We may conclude then that if these riots represent anything, it is the immorality of consumer capitalism and the ways it requires constant technological movement, violence, and transgression. This is not to say that social media did not play some kind of decisive role in the riots, but that to assign to these media the mere role of “instrument” misses a much more important aspect of how the riots might connect to the general restructuring of society. One could claim therefore that the riots were themselves an aspect of what Virilio would in rather militaristic terms call a situation of “total mobilization” under current technocratic conditions. Virilio’s *Speed and Politics* allows us to trace an important part of the historical backdrop of such riots to bourgeois industrialization as well as German fascism. This chapter reads Virilio here as to suggest an uncanny parallel between the riots and Joseph Goebbels’ successful attempt to move the masses by way of images, not texts, and instill in them a thirst for “plundering for plundering’s sake” (Virilio 1977, 5). Virilio illustrates that German fascism of the 1930s indeed promised personal means of transport to the masses by way of the Volkswagen of the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, a technology of acceleration and movement that would keep the people ready to be mobilized at any time. Under industrialization, the emerging economic tactic of intensive penetration, or what he in *Pure War* calls “endo-colonization” (Virilio and Lotringner 2008, 95), parallels a militaristic attempt, through altering logistics and circulation, to foster change while eliminating chance, as well as rendering the populace transparent. In many ways, the mass uprising paradoxically started to function as a “Removal of the masses . . . a permanent exploitation of the masses’ aptitude for movement as a bourgeois social solution” (Virilio 1977, 28).

Taking this premise from Virilio, I argue that, as progressively more populations become the objects or targets of the speed-elitist economic order, the Haren rioters inhabited this logic by themselves turning into unguided projectiles and loose cannons, targeting and transgressing a variety of physical borders throughout the city of Haren and causing their own version of collateral damage in an embodiment of what Virilio in *Speed and Politics* calls the global logic of “displacement without destination” (Virilio 1977, 40). The Haren rioting can then be read as the accident of acceleration exemplified on a small scale. To comprehend the riots as a mere local problem caused by a generational gap (“Two Worlds,” 24) and by alcohol consumption (*ibid.*, 26 and 32) ignores that this accidental violence has become the global world order’s essence in a telling reversal of the Aristotelian distinction between the accidental and the essential that Heidegger also discusses in “The Origin.” As Baudrillard describes it in

“The Implosion of Meaning in the Media,” it is the ubiquitous circulation of imagery in the media that has essence (or reality) and accident (or representation) implode into the media and in turn has the social implode into the masses (Baudrillard 1994, 80), so that the masses start to simply *display* the logic of a global order in which destruction has simply become the flip side of innovation. This chapter concurs with Baudrillard that if this riot activity appears irrational, then this is precisely because it mirrors the irrationality of that very order. The new and mass media have also an intrinsic relation to one another, because the rioters transformed themselves into a spectacle primarily *for* the media—and the Dutch news media indeed had a field day with the riots (“The Road to Haren,” 56)—because, even if they are that order’s disposable objects, one of their goals was simply *to be registered* or seen at all. Not surprisingly then, their “empowerment” through these media and transportation tools is caused by and was immediately followed by their very surveillance, incarceration, and demonization at the hands of the police and the Dutch state. Such demonization, in turn, once more serves to obscure the fact that the rioters simply mirror the technocratic state as well as global speed-elitism. As Virilio puts it somewhat opaquely in *Speed and Politics*: “These militant fanatics are only the logistical agents of terror, members of the ‘police’” (Virilio 1977, 20) since the “militarization of society makes every citizen a war machine” (Virilio 1977, 90) and machines, like soldiers, can be decommissioned at any time.

Thus, the Haren rioters exemplify the logic of speed-elitism by partaking in a near-pornographic mediated manifestation, by way of which speed-elitism “makes its enemies its best customers” (Virilio 1977, 65) through the consumption and dissemination of that spectacle as some kind of moral degeneration of youth today, as well as the mobilization of the Haren riot’s imagery in an utterly superficial and, at times, dangerously moralistic, quasi-political *spiel* in mass media and government debate. Moreover, as consumers of that spectacle on our television and computer screens—the riots were, as I mentioned, extensively covered in the mass media and on YouTube—we in turn implicate ourselves in the violence of speed through the technological consumption of destruction. Visual media after all exemplify how “the frontal view pulls the trigger” (*ibid.*, 124). This obsession with the spectacular image depleted of its radical content found its culmination in the highly aestheticized imagery that the “The Road to Haren” report generated of the rioters’ Twitter feeds (Boeschoten 2012). This imagery tells us nothing about the dire state of democracy and community in the Netherlands, and everything about the

supposedly sublime beauty of the new media themselves. It is telling here, also, that the “Project X” social media meme takes its cue from a movie by the same name, since “reality” here indeed increasingly gets *modeled* on the logic of the media (rather than the other way around under the older representative regime, in which the media are supposed to represent reality). “The Road to Haren” report in fact chides the movie content for letting the protagonists get off too lightly (2013, 10) while providing no interpretation whatsoever about why a large proportion of young Dutch moviegoers might be fascinated by the movie and its depiction of the authorities as dubious entities (2013, 9). “Blaming” the movie for falsely presenting a morally twisted plot therefore allows the illusion to persist that actual Dutch society is morally organized. The report also fails to think through the relationship between the immorality of technocratic capitalism and the ways in which such immorality is condensed into the movie’s characters, and also in the fact that the social media graphs and drawings appear as utterly devoid of morality. Baudrillard mentions in *Simulacra and Simulation* that it is “the social itself that . . . is [increasingly] organized along the lines of a disaster-movie script” (1994, 40); and while *Project X* the movie is supposed to be a comedy, it nonetheless tragically mirrors the disaster that is technocratic society.

Fatalities: The ghostly return of the humanist spirit

In light of this reinterpretation of “Project X” Haren, how could the social sciences and the digital humanities move away from their complicity in speed-elitism? Indeed, what kind of understanding might finally help us divert the negative fallout and social accidents of economic acceleration? It is useful at this point to return to the works of Heidegger, which exemplify the humanist *aporia* so pivotally. The interpretation of the media as progressively distancing or obscuring potential elements of experience that this chapter has mounted also echoes Heidegger’s reflections on the vicissitudes of calculation for thought and experience in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” as well as in “The Question Concerning Technology.” In the latter, Heidegger of course suggests that modern technologies increasingly conceal the never-neutral ways in which what is presented is fundamentally revealed through the never-neutral technological form. Heidegger asserts that contemporary technology marks the completion or death of philosophy in its logical culmination, the

techno-sciences, of which the digital humanities likewise take part, as we have seen above. In Heidegger's view, every conceptualization will end up as a mere calculated digit in the new cybernetic space of flows. Philosophy can become that culmination because it has itself always assumed the ideal of transparent communication through the belief that its concepts and models are transcendental truths. This completion of philosophy, according to Heidegger, hence means that "Cybernetics transforms language into an exchange of news, . . . scientific truth is equated with efficiency, [. . . and] the operational and model-based character of representational-calculative thinking becomes dominant" (1977, 434). In "What Calls for Thinking," Heidegger cautions that this kind of thinking, whether it takes the form of rationalist philosophy or social scientific empiricism, is in fact not thinking at all, but merely the unthinking performance of a predefined path of interpretation that has become ignorant of its grounding gestures that only allow it to "reveal" in ways reducible to the cybernetic logic. So, in order for digital media tools to appear as transparent or noise-free, so that the social sciences can "harness" them for their research, their fundamental aspects—namely the ways in which they are implicated in a representational regime intertwined with the modern economic and social organization, hierarchization, and classification of all of society's creatures—need indeed to be suppressed or set aside as secondary. This indictment reveals the problem behind Stagg's hopeful feminist renditions and the "Project X" reports' recommendations, which both still blindly profess to the idea that new and social media can be "used for the better." Alex Galloway also usefully argues that under the contemporary regime of incessant control and calculation any "visualization is first and foremost a visualization of the [media's] conversion rules themselves" (2011, 88). This chapter agrees with Galloway that such visualizations, like those provided by sophisticated data mining software, indeed lead to a "form of blindness" toward the technical apparatus as well as to the current mode of economic production (2011, 95).

However, the problematic that Galloway uncovers, is, if we follow Heidegger's line of thinking in "The Origin," similarly applicable to other representations and interpretations of data that are nonvisual; in fact, any claim to "deep reading" may be subject to such a contention—even those made by Baudrillard, Parikka, and Galloway themselves. They are, after all, analyses that seek to carry forward the liberal utopian hope for a more just social world, just like this chapter ultimately aspires to do. The paradox of the situation is, hence, that the aggravation of global violence and disenfranchisement today is an unfortunate

effect of—not in spite of—all the well-meaning academic engagements with data mining tools and other similar social science efforts. And yet, we *cannot help but enact* our responsibility today *through this very complicity*. Baudrillard in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* qualifies this contemporary paradoxical situation therefore as “fatal” not only because the digital humanities engage in the creation of fatalities by way of their “fatal speed,” but need themselves to (or have already) *become* the fatalities of their own analyses (2007, 74). Despite their relative ubiquity then, the digital humanities and social sciences, mirroring the subsequent worsening of the crises of capitalism, show themselves likewise to be “fatally wounded” in their simulatory and data mining efforts. It might be revealing at this late stage in the chapter to delve into etymology one final time. The English “speed” has its origins in the Germanic *spowan*, which means “to prosper” or “to succeed” (Klein 1966, 698). This, in turn, has its roots in the Latin *sperare* or “to hope.” The Western philosophical tradition indeed, as this chapter has illustrated, appears to find in the tools of speed a prime reason for hope. Interestingly, though, the Dutch saying *haastige spoed is zelden goed* combines two versions of speed, namely “haste” and “speed.” While this on the surface seems to be a pleonasm, the Germanic root of *haast* means rather “with force” or “zealous,” as well as “almost there” in its adverb form. This interestingly relates to how Heidegger, as John Llewelyn suggests in “Announcing the Other,” understands the word *Gegenwart* as a “waiting against” or as having an anticipatory quality in *Being and Time* (2004, 47). *Haastige spoed* can therefore be read as a “hurried hope that seeks to force fate,” a fate that connects the tools of acceleration back to the spirit of the humanities and social sciences.

So where does this ultimate confusion that lies hidden in Germanic languages (of which Dutch language and culture also derives) which Heidegger has propelled, or rather was being propelled to execute, ultimately leave us? If we follow Derrida’s claim in *Archive Fever* that the archive exemplifies our fear of death—that is, it is symptomatic of the desire for some semblance of everlasting, universal authority—and as much as the death drive always seeks to destroy what Baudrillard terms the “accursed share,” there must inevitably be a lot of destruction and repression going on in Dutch and Western European society. It is in this sense that data mining methodology in the humanities is an allegory of the tools it uses; this use maintains the fantasy of a total truth as well as the overall destruction of truth and the social, *and this can be shown*: this new political logic is becoming more and more pervasive today, and we as socially engaged academics hastily need to formulate an adequate response to this state of affairs.

Even so, we could conversely claim that the assessment of social fragmentation and the destruction of thought by critics like Heidegger and Baudrillard inhabits a nostalgia for an “original” collectivity and understanding, as well as an access to reality via more “direct” human experience that never was—a nostalgia that is therefore just as much an effect of new media’s sped-up aesthetics. Similarly, while Galloway and Parikka rightly critique the role of simulation in this new control regime, they also perform their academic duty to represent “the givens” (Galloway 2011, 87) more accurately. It is therefore finally the metaphor of *displacement*, not only in Heidegger’s work, but in *this* chapter that allows for such normative claims to be made; *as if* a corruption exceedingly infests and accelerates a more original, true, or authentic situation. The concept of speed-elitism functions as the primary metaphor or displacement, rendering the world both “closer” and “more removed.” So too, in this chapter, the *spirit* of the quest for truth remains forever irreducible to its formation. And so, the spirit survives, together with the unresolved ghosts of the riots, which the “Project X” Haren researchers, despite their commendable efforts, tried to lay to rest.

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