

Onopticon and Ontopolitical Mutation: The Political Technology Between Formal Openness and De Facto Contraction

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Abstract: *Contemporary digital power has transcended traditional surveillance mechanisms, entering a new phase centered on the political production of access topologies. This article conceptualizes this transformation through the paradigm of the "Onopticon." Rather than entirely eliminating options, the Onopticon operates as an ontopolitical regime that politically produces and manages the distance between formal openness and de facto contraction. By demonstrating how contemporary domination functions across interface, infrastructural, and institutional planes of closure, this paper identifies the distinct subject produced by this architecture as "Homovictimus." In this regime, where the classical liberal paradigm of negative liberty loses its explanatory adequacy, the article proposes a normative horizon of "Infrastructural Justice" based on the demand for legibility and the rejection of design asymmetries.*

1. Introduction: The Paradigm Shift from Surveillance to Access Thresholds

The operational logic of contemporary power no longer consists solely of observing the subject or extracting data from them. Michel Foucault's disciplinary analysis, Antoinette Rouvroy's diagnosis of algorithmic governmentality, and Shoshana Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism provide an indispensable foundation for understanding the surveillance and data-extractive strata of contemporary domination. However, this extensive literature falls short of centralizing a fundamental mechanism increasingly situated at the core of digital power: **the political production of access topologies**.

Power increasingly functions as a material architecture of possibility, prefiguring the options subjects will encounter, the flows they will access, and the institutional channels they will rely upon. Biopolitical logic has evolved into an **ontopolitical regime** that structures the preconditions of action. Here, what renders the regime *ontopolitical* is not the direct management of behavior, but the **management of the conditions of possibility for behavior**. The name of this logic of sovereignty is the **Onopticon**. Within the Onopticon, power relegates explicit prohibition to the background, prefiguring the horizon of action by calibrating the de facto friction costs of a formally open world.

2. The Specific Object of the Onopticon: A Typology of Closure

The specific analytical object of the Onopticon paradigm is the regime that, rather than obliterating choices entirely, **politically produces and manages the distance between formal openness and de facto contraction**. This regime can be empirically observed across three planes:

1. **Interface Closure:** Options are not technically destroyed; rather, the distribution of visibility and friction is reconfigured. The manipulation of default settings, the dominance of recommendation feeds, the marginalization of search functions, and the implementation of high-friction opt-out mechanisms constitute the objects of this plane.
2. **Infrastructural Closure:** The bending of probability gives way to physical bottlenecks. Through throttling and Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) interventions, the data flow capacity of the system is choked. Formal openness is preserved, while de facto access collapses.
3. **Institutional Closure:** This condition is not merely the integration of digitized tools into an institution; it is **the translation of access and capacity thresholds into an institutional form**. As observed in the paralysis of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Appellate Body, the institution is not legally abolished; however, by systematically blocking the appointment of judges, its operational capacity is reduced to zero through a designed "bureaucratic friction."

3. The Causality Scheme Between Explicit Bans and Friction

Why does power sometimes resort to explicit bans and, at other times, to friction? The Onopticon is not a universal law of nature, but a causality mechanism with defined boundaries. This mechanism relies on a three-stage scheme:

- **Low Cost $\rightarrow$ Explicit Ban:** In scenarios where political and legal costs are tolerable, power resorts directly to legal prohibition (the Panopticon).
- **High Cost $\rightarrow$ Friction:** In moments where an explicit ban would trigger a massive crisis of legitimacy or international backlash, power employs friction (the Onopticon) as an ontopolitical weapon by raising transit costs.
- **Deepening Crisis $\rightarrow$ Naked Force:** In situations where friction thresholds are breached and infrastructural closure proves insufficient, power reverts to naked physical violence.

The operation of this mechanism—to be deepened in standalone empirical field studies—can be exemplified through specific cases: In Turkey's 2017 Wikipedia ban, explicit prohibition was enforced due to a low-cost calculus; conversely, during the 2023 Earthquake, the intolerable public outrage that would result from a total communications blackout led the state to prefer throttling (the Onopticon) over a legal ban. Similarly, the United States' strategy of condemning TikTok to institutional friction through successive audits and divestment mandates, rather than enacting an overnight ban (which carries a high constitutional cost), is a direct outcome of this mechanism.

4. Homovictimus and the Regime of Conditional Belonging

The subject produced by this ontopolitical architecture is **Homovictimus**. This analytical figure is not the subject excluded from the system, but the subject **whose horizon of action is constricted precisely through the modality of their inclusion**. Homovictimus

experiences this constricted world—where transit thresholds are externally calibrated—as the natural domain of their own autonomy.

The distinct empirical case crystallizing this analytical definition is the sanctioning of International Criminal Court (ICC) Judge Nicolas Guillou by the United States, resulting in his effective exclusion from the global banking infrastructure (SWIFT, Visa). Guillou was not imprisoned; he was subjected merely to an infrastructural exclusion. This case crystallizes the reality that global infrastructures, which appear universal and neutral, are in fact **"regimes of conditional belonging"** capable of abruptly constricting a subject's horizon of action under specific conditions. Homovictimus is the subject who realizes only in moments of crisis that the integration they mistook for autonomy is, in reality, an asymmetric regime of access.

5. Boundary Conditions: The Panopticon as Reserve Physical Power

Not every instance of latency or friction constitutes an Onopticon. For a phenomenon to be classified as Onoptic, formal options must remain open while de facto access is constricted through a deliberate political decision.

Furthermore, as the causality scheme demonstrates, the Onopticon does not eradicate classical violence. In moments of deepening crisis, mechanisms of legal and physical closure are reactivated. Therefore, the Panopticon is not an obsolete regime that has been surpassed; rather, it is the **reserve physical power** waiting behind the Onopticon.

6. Conclusion and Normative Horizon

The Onopticon is the political production of the distance between formal openness and de facto contraction. In this ontopolitical regime, the classical liberal thesis of "negative liberty" (non-interference) loses its explanatory adequacy; power no longer touches the body directly, but rather shifts the ground upon which the body stands.

The normative horizon necessitated by this analytical closure is **Infrastructural Justice**. This horizon does not propose an absolute utopia of "zero friction"; rather, it is grounded in a demand for legibility—making visible the correlational logic by which a subject is slowed down—and the absolute rejection of design asymmetries that grant frictionless transit to privileged actors. Contemporary domination no longer operates primarily through explicit prohibition, but through thresholds of passage; in this new order deciphered by the Onopticon, power monopolizes not the visibility of the subject, but the **material design of the world itself**.

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