

THE ONTOLOGICAL MONOPOLY OF MODERNITY:

THE ANATOMY OF DOMINATION AND THE GRAND NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a structural critique of the postmodern thesis of the “end of grand narratives,” arguing that modernity is itself the most expansive and historically consequential grand narrative of all: an **ontological monopoly**. It develops the concept of the **Onopticon** to describe a form of domination that exceeds the classical Panopticon by embedding surveillance, selection, and coercion within infrastructures of circulation, access, and reproduction. It also proposes **Homovictimus** as a figure for the subject whose capacity for agency has been structurally compromised by infrastructural dependencies. The article analyzes how domination operates through the colonization of time (work and waiting), the subcontracting of intellectual production (critical reason as a “credentialed artisan”), and forms of infrastructural excommunication organized through mechanisms of inclusive exclusion. Rather than treating modernity as a period label, the article conceptualizes it as a material regime of closure that monopolizes the conditions of livable life and naturalizes its own historical necessity as destiny.

Keywords: Ontological Monopoly; Onopticon; Homovictimus; Infrastructural Excommunication; Biopolitics; Intellectual Labor

I. Introduction: The Illusion of the “End of Grand Narratives”

The thesis of the “end of grand narratives,” most prominently associated with Jean-François Lyotard (1979), initially appears to mark a decisive break with monocentric regimes of truth. It seems to suggest that humanity has emerged from the grip of unified legitimating frameworks, opened itself to plural worlds of meaning, and loosened history’s compulsory sense of direction. At the level of appearance, this diagnosis is not entirely mistaken. The grand historical, theological, and political blocs that once organized collective life do indeed appear to have fragmented, dispersed, or lost their authority.

What has disappeared, however, is not grand narrative as such, but the plurality of grand narratives. What has come to an end is not the narrative form, but the material viability of alternative narratives, ontologies, and modes of world-making. What remains is a grand narrative that no longer needs to present itself as one. It appears instead as neutral, technical, necessary, and universal. Its name is modernity.

The central claim of this article is therefore straightforward: grand narratives have not disappeared. Rather, modernity has become the most fully developed form of grand

narrative precisely by ceasing to appear as narrative at all. It operates not simply as a worldview, but as an ontological regime of closure that monopolizes the material conditions of livable life.

II. The Internal Architecture of Ontological Closure

Modernity is not merely an epochal designation, a cast of mind, or a historical phase. It is an ontological regime of closure that organizes the material conditions of the livable under a single rationality and imposes that rationality as natural, neutral, and inevitable. In this sense, modernity is not only a regime of knowledge that determines what counts as true; it is a historical monopoly that determines what counts as real, legitimate, intelligible, sustainable, and socially reproducible (Giddens, 1990).

Its founding ground lies in the articulation between the territorial-political consolidation of the nation-state and the circulation regimes of internationalization. Upon this ground, capitalist accumulation, bureaucratic standardization, technical rationality, and infrastructural dependency do not merely emerge; they intensify within a mutually reinforcing logic of closure. Modernity is therefore not the aggregate of discrete institutions. It is the historical name of an ontological monopoly that links different modalities of domination in such a way that alternative forms of life are not only subordinated, but rendered materially unbuildable, unsustainable, or unintelligible.

III. The Limits of Traditional Domination and the Boundlessness of Modernity

The distinction between traditional forms of domination and modern domination is structural rather than scalar. History contains countless instances of religious violence, theocratic tyranny, and juridical coercion exercised in the name of sacred authority. Yet even at their most severe, such orders did not succeed in binding the entire globe to a single spatio-temporal regime, standardizing the material reproduction of life on a planetary scale, and systematically narrowing the outside. They had borders, geographies, others, and lines of flight.

The modern ontological monopoly operates differently. It does not always dictate what one must believe; it determines the world within which one can live. To reject its myths is not thereby to stand outside its order. One may repudiate the myth of progress or remain attached to an entirely different metaphysical horizon. Even so, to live, to secure subsistence, and to reproduce one's existence in the most elementary sense requires attachment to the time schedules, bureaucratic architectures, and economic circuits of this regime of closure.

Modern domination is therefore not defined chiefly by the imposition of belief, but by the monopolization of livability.

IV. The Colonization of Time: Work and Waiting

One of the most visible mechanisms of modern domination is the colonization of time (Thompson, 1967). In everyday life, its most familiar name is *mesai*: regimented work time. This is not simply a technical organization of labor. It is the conversion of life into a measurable, divisible, and externally governable temporality. The human being ceases to inhabit a rhythm of their own and is recast instead as a unit whose attention can be scheduled and whose fatigue can be managed (Crary, 2013). One no longer lives the day; one surrenders it.

Yet the modern temporal regime does not operate only through laboring bodies. It has an inverse side: waiting. If work is the active mode of domination, waiting is its passive mode. The unemployed, refugees, prisoners, patients, and those stalled at borders do not stand outside the temporal order; they are subjected to its negative face. Work binds the subject to the system by putting them to use; waiting binds them to the same system by holding them in suspension. The waiting subject is not in a void. Waiting is itself administered. It is a mode of governance.

Modernity, then, does not merely measure time; it distributes time unequally. It allocates speed to some and suspension to others. It produces acceleration and stasis as differentiated technologies of rule.

V. The New Optics of Power and Infrastructural Closure: The Onopticon

Certain strands of postmodern thought mistook the disappearance of visible centers for the dispersion of power. But the center did not disappear; it became the ground. The growing invisibility of power does not indicate its weakening. It indicates that power has seeped into infrastructure and assumed an ontological form. The name I give to this new architecture of enclosure is the **Onopticon**.

The Onopticon is not simply an updated version of disciplinary surveillance. It names a form of domination in which coercion is embedded in infrastructure, environment, and the mandatory conditions of connectivity. In the Panopticon, as theorized by Foucault through Bentham (Foucault, 1975), the subject disciplines itself under the possibility of a visible or imagined gaze. In the Onopticon, by contrast, power no longer watches from a center. It becomes the material environment of life itself. Interfaces, payment systems, data flows, logistical chains, communication networks, and institutional gateways are not merely technical instruments; they are ontological apparatuses of obedience, selection, and exclusion (Zuboff, 2019; Han, 2015).

Under these conditions, domination no longer depends primarily on confining the body within walls. It compels inclusion by monopolizing circulation, access, visibility, transactability, and the means of reproduction. The distinctive force of the Onopticon lies not in punishment as such, but in transforming exclusion from a social loss into a condition of existential suspension. Surveillance ceases to be reducible to a gaze, power ceases to appear merely as command, and domination ceases to present itself principally as prohibition. All three are reconstituted as infrastructural conditions of life.

VI. The Liquidation of Agency and the Structural Victim: Homovictimus

The fiction that grand narratives have collapsed is accompanied by a second illusion: that each individual is the free agent of their own story. The architecture of the Onopticon does not produce autonomous subjects capable of acting on rational self-determination. It produces what I call **Homovictimus**.

Homovictimus does not simply designate the injured or victimized person. It names a subject whose capacity for agency has been historically impaired, whose ability to reproduce life has been systematically expropriated, and whose existence has been rendered dependent upon external networks. The victimhood in question is not incidental but structural. This subject is not a victim merely because it suffers coercion, but because it has been deprived of meaningful control over the basic conditions of its own existence.

Homovictimus is not an agent who constructs life according to autonomous principles. It is a fragile form of being that can endure only insofar as it remains articulated to market, bureaucratic, financial, informational, and security infrastructures. Its predicament is not exhausted by external compulsion in the classical sense. Rather, it consists in being forced to manage its own dependency, normalize its own enclosure, and rationalize its own submission in the name of security, comfort, visibility, or access. Homovictimus is not an anthropological essence. It is the historical consequence of an ontological monopoly that converts the subject into the caretaker of its own chains.

VII. The Material Regime of Critique and Critical Production as Credentialed Craft

This condition of structural victimhood engulfs not only mass populations but also the field of intellectual labor and critical production, which has historically claimed the capacity to diagnose the anatomy of domination. The bearers of public and academic critique no longer stand outside the system as vanguard agents. To a large extent, they have become dependent upon the very infrastructures they seek to criticize in order to circulate their work, secure recognition, and reproduce themselves. In that sense, they too increasingly assume the condition of Homovictimus.

The modern ontological monopoly does not merely suppress opposition; it organizes the material conditions under which opposition itself is produced. Wages, visibility, publishability, institutional legitimacy, and digital circulation all become conditions of possibility for critique (Bourdieu, 1988). Within this regime, the bearer of critical reason ceases to occupy the position of truth-bearing vanguard and is transformed instead into a **credentialed artisan** struggling to survive within the markets of academia, publishing, and attention structured by the Onopticon. This new role, which functions as a form of cognitive subcontracting, is not best understood as moral decline. It is the effect of structural compulsion.

This is why the kinds of organic alliances that could historically be forged between intellectual labor and broader publics have been profoundly eroded and become exceedingly

difficult to reconstruct. Power has so effectively enclosed subjects within individualized debt circuits and digital cells that critique no longer readily appears as a weapon capable of unsettling the system. It increasingly reappears as a consumable content form, circulating within the sanctioned boundaries of the very order it seeks to contest.

VIII. The Limit of the Onopticon: Inclusive Exclusion and Infrastructural Excommunication

The institutionalization of the Onopticon shows that power no longer operates primarily through brute force, but through what, in Agamben's terms, can be understood as a logic of **inclusive exclusion**, here displaced onto an infrastructural plane (Agamben, 1998). The system binds subjects to itself less by incorporating them than by threatening expulsion. The outside is no longer a space of freedom. It is a zone of ontological cancellation and social death.

A particularly telling illustration can be found in the case of French International Criminal Court judge Nicolas Guillou, who was effectively cast out of key circuits of global finance and mobility through U.S. sanctions (Le Monde, 2025). The significance of the case lies precisely in the fact that no imprisonment or direct physical violence was required. What occurred was an infrastructural form of coercion. Accounts connected to platforms such as Amazon, Airbnb, and PayPal were frozen; routine reservations were cancelled; and even non-U.S. financial actors became implicated through the dollar-centered transaction chain. This is a near-textbook instance of what Farrell and Newman (2019) call **weaponized interdependence**. Power no longer needs to seize the body in order to incapacitate the subject. It can do so by severing access to the infrastructures of circulation, payment, and reservation that make ordinary life operable.

The same logic can be seen whenever geopolitical decisions disable financial nodes located elsewhere through networked sanctions and infrastructural leverage. Classical domination required armies to cross borders. The Onopticon does not occupy territory in that way. It takes infrastructure hostage. Any node that fails to comply with the rules of the network can be isolated and neutralized with immediate effect.

IX. The Internalization of the Outside and the Monopoly of the Common

How, then, are we to understand informal economies, shantytowns, and semi-autonomous spaces that emerge within digital networks? The absence of an outside does not mean the absence of fissures. The crucial point is that the outside no longer survives as an independent ontological ground. Rather than abolishing it altogether, the modern ontological monopoly internalizes it as its own limit, exploits it, and turns it into a cost-absorbing buffer zone. The shantytown is not an autonomous world beyond the city; it is a threshold the city disavows yet cannot do without.

This regime of closure does not merely impose itself through coercion. It also presents itself as indispensable by producing minimal forms of commonality through pandemics, ecological destruction, and systemic crisis. The problem is not shared infrastructure as such. The problem is that the common is defined by a single rationality, that alternative constitutive principles are excluded, and that what is compulsory is presented as the only thing that is materially possible.

X. The Possibility of Resistance and the Praxis of Fissures

If every deviation can be internalized, every outside converted into an exception, and even the bearers of critique made dependent upon the material regime they confront, what does resistance mean? Any return to fantasies of pure exteriority would be mistaken. Resistance no longer consists in speaking from an uncontaminated outside. It consists in opening fissures that deactivate the necessity claims of this regime of closure.

The task is to reconstruct the boundaries of the livable around other principles: reclaiming time, defining labor outside the market, organizing care according to non-market logics, displacing bureaucratic recognition as the sole channel of legitimacy, and detaching technical infrastructures from private forms of sovereignty. Resistance begins wherever material and institutional counter-arrangements interrupt the ontological monopoly's claim to universal necessity. There may be no pure outside. The public intellectual may no longer function as a redemptive vanguard. But fissures remain: sites in which what presents itself as destiny begins to lose its hold in the practical collisions of life.

XI. Conclusion: Historicizing Destiny

This text, too, is a narrative. To deny that would be to evade the minimal honesty required of critique. What distinguishes the ontological monopoly is that it makes its own narrativity disappear. What distinguishes this text is that it does not. It does not speak from entirely outside the monopoly; it speaks from within its fissures. Its aim is not to install a new absolute truth, but to expose a historical closure that has come to function as if it were one.

Modernity is less a period label than a regime of destining: historically produced, yet naturalized as inevitable. The ontological monopoly works by cultivating the sense that there is no alternative. It does not need to persuade everyone that other ways of life are wrong. It is enough to habituate them to the conviction that other ways of life are materially impossible.

The task, then, is to strip this regime of its aura of necessity and to return what has been cast as fate to the domain of history. Only then does closure cease to appear natural. And only then is the ontological monopoly shaken at its core: when people begin to recognize that other forms of life are not only desirable, but materially constructible.

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