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DIGITAL NAZISM

The book burning phenomenon resurfaces in the technological age



Who has the power?

The consolidation of democracy and equal opportunities depends first of all on access to education, and then it depends on free and unlimited access to knowledge, information and culture. Since knowledge went from oral to written in its different forms, and very especially after the invention of the printing press, knowledge was no longer reserved for a few and became more and more public and democratic. However, throughout history there were groups that tried to impose their ideas, often in an evident way, causing fear and using censorship, but also very frequently through a much more subtle manipulation.

In this era of full access, the most democratic ever imagined, it is assumed that the user or the client has all the power. We can choose comfortably from an almost infinite offer, and receive a book (or any other product) at a very convenient price without even leaving our homes. But who is really in power in the digital age?

Just as in the “real” or “physical” world stores decide what to display in their windows, virtual stores can show, hide or eliminate certain products and content. The paradox is that we are perfectly aware of the first, but research indicates that most people ignore the second. Most of us believe that we enjoy freedom and unrestricted access, although this is not always the case. Shoshana Zuboff, author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* points out: “*We were so convinced that the interconnected world would give us more freedom, and we have so denied the power of public and commercial institutions that we couldn’t see it. When you*

believe something strongly, seeing data that contradicts it over and over again is not enough to change that belief.”

Networks, technology platforms and virtual stores obviously have their own agenda, and this agenda is not exclusively driven by profitability. In this sense, the most striking thing is that on certain occasions content considered as “inconvenient” can be punished with the most unknown form of censorship: the digital disappearance.



“Let’s forget everything, absolutely everything”

The digital age places us in an intermediate position between freedom and unlimited access on the one hand, and control, surveillance and manipulation on the other. Many times we are not aware of the power that large Internet companies have over us. One such company is Amazon: with its *Kindle* device, it dominates the digital book market. Anyone can self-edit his e-book and upload it to the Amazon virtual store so that it can be offered to users anywhere on the planet. However, Amazon also functions as a “gatekeeper” for the content it sells (more than half of the books sold in the United States are sold by Amazon) and it also has a history of removing books (remotely and unilaterally) from user’s *Kindles*.

The book has established itself throughout history as an emblem of knowledge, and resists as a format even in the digital age, despite the outdated announcements of its death. But also throughout history books considered “dangerous” have been persecuted for moral, religious, economic, political or scientific reasons, and these reasons have varied in different times and societies. Practically since the beginning of writing there has been persecution and censorship, and throughout the centuries these attempts to annihilate certain content presented barbaric episodes, such as the burning of books by Nazi Germany.

Different works of science fiction have anticipated the surveillance, censorship or manipulation societies that could be re-

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