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Infrastructures of dependency.

On the theory and history of clavicity.

The logo of the Bonn *Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies* shows a stylized chain. The very old technique of the chain is not only a practical tool, but probably *the* central metaphor of slavery and dependency – Marx and Engels famously claimed: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains"[1] (although the proletarians were no longer slaves in the strict sense[2]). The logo thus shows a central technical infrastructure of dependency, but unfortunately there do not seem to be any other projects in the cluster that pursue such infrastructures. So here is a brief impulse.

In order to operate as an infrastructure of dependency, a chain needs a lock and therefore at least one key. A slave must be chainable, but also un-chainable - but if he or she had the key themselves, they would not be dependent on the slave owner, but free. The infrastructure of dependency is distributed asymmetrically - one part is bound to the slave's body, another - the key - is transported by the slave owner. Asymmetrical dependence, according to my thesis, necessarily goes hand in hand with asymmetrically distributed technical infrastructures. Dependency is delegated, as one could say with Latour, to technical infrastructures that give legal institutions their power in the first place.[3] Law would be nothing without the possibility of a prison – and a prison needs doors with keys that are distributed in a certain way.

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[1] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto [1848], London: Pluto 2008, 84.
[2] See Stephan Conermann and Michael Zeuske (Eds.): The Slavery/ Capitalism Debate Global. From "Capitalism and Slavery" to Slavery as Capitalism, Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und Vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung 30, 5/6, 2020.
[3] See Bruno Latour, Technology is Society made durable. In John Law (Ed.) A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology, and Domination, London New York: Routledge 1991, 103-130. A chain is really a good example für 'society made durable'…

But the *clavicity*, the key-ness, does not only extend to keys in the narrower sense, but also to identity papers, for example. Only with such papers someone can cross borders legally, open bank accounts or get a job (besides the black markets, of course). For this reason, the so-called *sans papiers* often work in total dependency. As it says in an essay by Bea Schwager "Prekäres Arbeiten als Sans-Papiers im Privathaushalt" ("Precarious work as sans-papiers in private households") on so-called and globally very common "live-in relationships": "Here the dependence on the employer is great; any loss of employment also results in the loss of housing. For sans-papiers, this means an existential threat, as they cannot claim any state social protection and are also very restricted in their search for work and housing."[4] You can guess that under today's conditions, being a "free person" means: having papers. A person is therefore a living body that is linked to a state document via indexical media (such as biometric passport photos, fingerprints, etc.), as in the case of my passport. The passport document itself is technically highly protected, so that no one but the state authorities can produce or copy such a document - another technical asymmetry.[5] Person-being is performed by identifying oneself: for example at banks, when checking tickets or recently with regard to vaccination status etc.[6] Dependency can therefore mean that you have no access to certain technologies or that only third parties have access to them. Every reduction in infrastructure access is an increase in dependency. This is why an important operation of modern dependency production is to take away passports; since 2016 there has been a law in Qatar that "now officially [allows] employers to withhold the passports of their employees."[7]

With this in mind, it is interesting to read classical texts again. Just one example: In his fundamental-ontological exploration of "everyday existence" in *Being and Time,* Heidegger remarks, for example, "Everyday Da-sein always already *is* in this way; for example, in opening the door, I use the doorknob."[8] The ego of fundamental ontology obviously does not stand in front of locked doors, it does not need a key, the use of the handle is enough, the door is open and

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[4] https://www.denknetz.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/arbeit_ohne_knechtschaft_schwager.pdf. Accessed: 5.12.2023. My translation.

[5] See Jens Schröter, On the Media Logic of the State. In: Caja Thimm et al. (Eds.): Media Logic(s) Revisited. Modelling the Interplay between Media Institutions, Media Technology and Societal Change, London: Palgrave 2018, 159-172.

[6] See Jens Schröter, Sich ausweisen. In: Ilka Becker et al. (Eds.): Fotografisches Handeln, Marburg: Jonas 2016.

[7] https://katapult-magazin.de/en/article/aethiopische-sklavin-zu-verkaufen-bei-interesse-pn#haufig-werden-sie-im-haus-eingesperrt-und-in-den-meisten-fallen-wird-ihnen-der-reisepass-weggenommen. Accessed: 5.12.2023.

[8] Martin Heidegger, Being and Time [1927], trans. Joan Stambaugh, NY: SUNY Press 1996, 63.

the narrating ego assumes quite naturally that it has always been this way. Heidegger was not a dependent domestic worker, but a full professor in Freiburg.

And the history of clavicity naturally continues in the electronic-digital present with all its codes, passwords, access authorizations, blockchains and encryptions. As Gilles Deleuze writes in his famous *Postscript on the Societies of Control*: " Felix Guattari has imagined a city where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighborhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position-licit or illicit - and effects a universal modulation."[9] *Clavicity is a universal modulation of barriers*. And the question of such infrastructures of dependency is never just about the question of their use, but also about which forms of dependency are inscribed in their technical design.

My conclusion is that the production and stabilization of asymmetrical dependency is eminently dependent on technical-media infrastructures, which relate to two of the five perspectives in which the cluster examines asymmetrical dependency: on the one hand, "embodiments of dependencies" and, on the other, "institutions, norms and practices". The infrastructures are always simultaneously physical-material, institutional – and even imaginary, as the omnipresent chain and its incessant being torn apart show.

Pursuing the question of the history and theory of clavicity can be approached historically and media-archaeologically on the one hand, and praxeologically and media-ethnographically on the other - as Thomas Scheffer does, for example, in his study "Der administrative Blick: Über den Gebrauch des Passes in der Ausländerbehörde"[10] demonstrates - can be conducted. This research still seems to me to be a desideratum.

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[9] Gilles Deleuze, Postscript on the Societies of Control, October, Vol. 59 (Winter, 1992), pp. 3-7, here p. 7.

[10] See Thomas Scheffer, Der administrative Blick: über den Gebrauch des Passes in der Ausländerbehörde. In K. Amann & S. Hirschauer (Eds.), Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1997, 168-197. See also Heike Behrend, Rahmungen und Entzug des Gesichts: Zur Geschichte der ID-Fotografie an der ostafrikanischen Küste Kenias. In Herta Wolf (Ed.), Zeigen und/oder Beweisen? Die Fotografie als Kulturtechnik und Medium des Wissens, Berlin: De Gruyter 2016, 327-362.