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Instrumental rationality and power on nature.
From antisemitism to social networks

Abstract: The paper deals with the manifestation of mimetic tendencies within social networks. Retracing the dialectic between "technique" and "nature" outlined by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, the paper argues that such tendencies are not the absolute "irrational" outside, but the other side of the very specific form of rationality embodied by these technologies, which share the same contradictory features of the Western monopoly and financial capitalism. In the end, the paper would also inquiry the possibility of diverging the mimetic impulses from the regressive identification with authoritarian leaders toward progressive politics of emancipation.

> *In the age of the "three hundred basic words" the ability to exercise judgment, and therefore to distinguish between true and false, is vanishing (…). Everyone is labeled friend or foe. The disregard for the subject makes things easy for the administration. Ethnic groups are transported to different latitudes; individuals labeled "Jew" are dispatched to the gas chambers* (Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer)

1. Introduction

On January 2024, the Italian public opinion moved social media crusades against two women. One was against the very famous social media influencer Chiara Ferragni, who lost hundreds of thousands of followers, many sponsorships and even her husband, because she had promoted Christmas cakes to finance a child-hospital, which, in true, did not receive any contribute. The other made a very unfortunate in-owner commit suicide because the (false) accusation of lying on Facebook about an argument she had with a customer who had offended a disable child.

These are only two of billions of similar social media storms where somebody is suddenly deified by the same People who, just one click later, will enjoy to smash the new idol down. These two cases, moreover, show, on one hand, an astonishing mass-scale self-blindness to trust in, and then being disappointed by, billionaires whose job *is* doing spectacle; on the other hand, an aggressive mass-sadistic pleasure to take a woman back to her nothingness and invisibility. Together, they show the striking contradiction between the actual outcomes and the original social net-

work promises. Just two decades ago, in fact, the new peer-to-peer communication was launched to set people free from the traditional, centralized mediation, pointed out as one cause of the horrors of the Nineteenth Century, to improve democracy, freedom, consciousness, dialogue and friendship among different population and individuals[1].

According to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, this contradiction between so advanced product of human intelligence, on one hand, and massive irreflexive reactions, on the other, cannot be explained neither with the excuse of the wrong usage by uneducated and irrational users, nor claiming some conspiration by undefined elites. In their theory of mimicry[2], they refused such abstract opposition between progress and regression, nature and society, reason and irrationality, to determine these concepts through their contradictory unity. In this way, they showed that barbaric killings enacted by oppressed masses against the most undefended and culturally represented nature-alike – i.e. minorities like the Jews, women, animals – are still possible at the highest stages of civilization.

It is worthy to inquiry if social networks are actually repeating the same constraining dialectic they had, in the beginning, promised to break. It is the premise to not accept uncritically the promise of liberation through technological developments and to look, act, call for paths of political action of emancipation.

1   See A. Baricco, *The Game*, Einaudi, Torino 2018. Still now, Meta, owner of Facebook, wants "to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. Our products empower more than 3 billion people around the world to share ideas, offer support and make a difference". See: https://investor.fb.com/resources/default.aspx.

2   It is known that the opposition between instrumental (subjective) reason and objective reason was Horkheimer's concern, while Adorno mainly was committed to Roger Caillois' studies on "*le mimetism*" and Sigmund Freud's "death impulse". See T.W. Adorno, *Roger Caillois, La Mante religieuse. Recherche sur la nature et la signification du mythe*, in Id., *Vermischte Schriften II. Gesammelte Schriften*, bd. 20-31, hrsg. R. Tiedemann, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1986, pp. 229-230; and T.W. Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, in Id., *The Culture Industry Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein, Routledge, London 2020. The refusal to use the death impulse in social theory has a long history, from the Freudian revisionists, like E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, Holt McDougle, New York 1994, to, more recently, N. Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering in the Biopolitical Times*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2009. The latter argues that mimicry is not a natural behaviour but the capitalist reification of the natural world, first of all of animals. Consequently, she states that the Frankfurt Scholars naturalized an historical process. These arguments, however, reject *a priori* the possibility that the capitalist reification may be the prosecution, on a higher stage, of pre-social tendencies. Differently, M. Maurizi, *Beyond Nature. Animal Liberation, Marxism and Critical Theory*, Haymarket, Chicago 2021, shows that Frankfurt critical theory joined the cultural transformation of nature with the naturalization of social history. The latter is still "second nature" because humans have not fully realized yet their *natural* potential to consciously set themselves *and* non-human world free from their own natural violence.

2. Instrumental Rationality and Mimicry

The most dreadful "element of antisemitism", Horkheimer and Adorno write in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is the mass-scale of the "blind lust for killing […] whom are both conspicuous and unprotected"[3]. It would be a rationalization, they say, to search only for economic or political explanations. In fact, if "its usefulness for the rulers is evident […] as a distraction, a cheap means of corruption, a terrorist warning", "common people" have no economic or political expectations, while they pursue only the "luxury" of killing freely[4].

Then, the critics faced with the terrible hypothesis that civilized humans may kill neither because manipulated from the outside, nor because motivated from the inside by rational goals, but for pleasure as such. Furthermore, economic or political forces would not shape society without something else, namely blind, unconscious impulses. Among them, the impulse for destruction.

Such impulses are said "blind", in terms of lack of human rational goal, like natural world is usually depicted, but they are not "natural" in terms of innate. In fact, the authors highlight that "there is no authentic anti-Semitism and certainly no born anti-Semite". Yet, they add, "the call for Jewish blood has become second nature"[5], a nature produced by historical society.

Because of these contradictory features, phenomena like mass-antisemitism shake the traditional, sharp separation between nature and history. A dialectical understanding of their relation is needed and the concept of mimesis is meant to provide it.

Generally speaking, for mimesis is meant "a tendency deeply inherent in living things […] to lose oneself in one's surroundings instead of actively engaging with them, the inclination to let oneself go, to lapse back into nature"[6], to imitate and passively identify with it.

In the following, the authors separate two possible ways to satisfy this tendency.

The first, is the mimetic identification of the living with the "mere nature" or the "immobile nature"[7]. It is the regressive impulse of the living to identify with its contrary, the dead corps, the stiff stone, falling back into the earlier inorganic stage of its own evolution.

In origin, it is an inherited instinct very useful for self-preservation. Under threat, the living loses all control on its own body, whose muscles, organs, parts, tense up, accelerate, "obeying to fundamental biological stimuli […]. For a few

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3   T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, Verlag, Amsterdam 1947; eng. tr. by E. Jephcott, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford University Press, Standford 2002, p. 140.

4   Ivi, p. 139.
5   Ivi, p. 140.
6   Ivi, p. 189.
7   Ivi, p. 148.

moments they mimic the motionlessness of surrounding nature"[8]. Self-reducing to its own past, the body anticipates its future death and the fear causes a preventive surviving reaction. It is through this dialectic of life and death that the living learns to keep, and then to constitute, its own self: "the tribute life pays for its continued existence is adaptation to death"[9]. Because of its origin in the fear of dying, the authors call this manifestation of mimicry "terrified mimesis"[10].

However, the same process proves that natural beings are much more than mere dead things, namely a living territory of endless changes and individual differences. Respect to it, the terrified regression to death turns out to be a reduction, a simplification, an *abstraction* from the mutable, unstable character of the living: "when mobile draws closer to the immobile, more highly developed life to mere nature, it is also estranged from it"[11]. If so, there may be also the tendency to change the self into another one according to the changes of the world, like a permanent non-identity, a continuous dis-identification.

Human societies did not completely break with these natural tendencies, while they have inherited and developed them further.

Gathering and hunting societies and their magic wisdom show an "organized manipulation of mimesis"[12]. Magic "is concerned with ends"[13] like modern science, but unlike it, magic believes to take control over natural forces not separating a permanent subject against the objectivity, but through the mimetic identification with the differences of every single phenomenon. For example, the shaman changes its masks according to the animal he/she wants to scare, control, kill. There is no (self)consciousness of any rigid separation between human societies and non-human world: in this immanence, hunting is as much a productive activity as a barely organized ritual where humans and non-humans are both involved, even though the latter are the sacrificed victims.

Respect to this earlier stage, the "condition of civilization" is, instead, the social "ban" upon "mimetic behaviors"[14]. To be clear, the prohibition is not upon mimesis as such, but upon the mimesis with the non-identity of the world, so upon the transformation of the self-identity. This is the premise of the interiorization of the

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8   *Ibid.*
9   *Ibid.*
10   Ivi, p. 150.
11   Ivi, p. 148.
12   *Ibid.*
13   Ivi, p. 7.
14   Ivi, p. 148. A contemporary example of this social ban is provided in K. Barad, *Nature's Queer Performativity*, in "Women, Gender & Rsearch", n. 1-2, 2021, pp. 25-53; tr.it. di R. Castiello, *Natura e performatività queer*, in K. Barad, *Performatività della natura. Quanto e queer*, Pisa, ETS 2017, pp. 113-115. Barad points at the contradiction of public opinion on homosexuality which is condemned as unnatural behaviour because associated to animal behaviours, so to nature. The same moralism commands the separation from nature for the sake of the true "nature of things". Barad defines this contradiction "illogic", as if contradiction was not the logic of our society.

impulse to imitate the dead nature. In fact, the most celebrated conquests of civilization, such as rational labour, the Self-consciousness and the abstract thought, are collection of differentiated activities under a stable identity, resisting and opposing to all kind of distractions coming from internal or external stimuli: "all distraction, indeed, all devotion has an element of mimicry. The ego has been forged by hardening itself against such behaviour"[15]. The newly born stable "inside" gives room to a stable and controllable "outside". Odysseus is the archetype of this Civilized Subject who has learnt to control its inner world (passions, desires, images, thoughts) in order to pursue self-preservation through self-domination and the domination on the outside[16].

Under this light, civilization is the *Aufhebung* of nature: it is the negation of the uncontrolled mimesis, which *also* implied the possibility to diverge, in order to interiorize *only* the natural tendency to get rigid and stable. As a consequence, the instrumental rationality, which is the ability to choose the best means for a precise goal, is the fruitful regression to nature. The last result of its development is automation. An automated process occurs when different elements (instruments, materials, humans, and so on) are firstly separated and later coordinated rigidly to accomplish a goal which is embodied by their organization. Self-reflection and goal-oriented subjects are no longer needed to accomplish the final goal. On the contrary, the subject has only to adapt to the outside in the most reactive and immediate way possible to prevent any possibility of contingency, chance, divergence, which may interrupt the continuity of the process if not the final realization.

From this point of view, then, the blind self-preservation is as much at the origin, as at the end of civilization. Its last result is the human life as *blind* nature, a *Second Nature* product of history.

> The mathematical formula is consciously manipulated regression, just as the magic ritual was; it is the most sublimated form of mimicry. In technology the adaptation to lifelessness in the service of self-preservation is no longer accomplished, as in magic, by

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15   T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 148. The idea that labour needs a stable Ego recalls K. Marx, *Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, in Id., *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 9, ed. by Institut fur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung Berlin and Institut fur Marxismus-Leninismus, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1990, in part., pp. 187-188. According to Marx, the difference between human (rational) labour and "primitive instinctive forms of labour" is neither just "that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality"; nor the use of instruments which makes humans "a tool-making animal"; but also "that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose", despite all distractions.

16   In T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259, note 5: Odysseus "notes the maids' nightly visits to the beds of the Suitors" but, instead of acting, he "brought his fist down on his heart and called it to order. 'Patience, my heart!' he said". The authors comment: "the subject, still split and forced to do violence to nature both within himself and outside, 'punishes' his heart, compelling it to be patient and denying it direct satisfaction for the sake of a more distant future. Beating one's breast later became a gesture of triumph: what the victor really expresses is that his victory is over his own nature. The achievement is accomplished by self-preserving reason".

bodily imitation of external nature, but by automating mental processes, turning them into blind sequences. With its triumph human expressions become both controllable and compulsive. All that remains of the adaptation to nature is the hardening against it. The camouflage used to protect and strike terror today is the blind mastery of nature, which is identical to farsighted instrumentality.[17]

However, according to the critical theorists, this was not the only *way* to develop human reason, nor the one "chosen" by rational subjects because of the "best" to guarantee the self-preservation of the whole humanity. If what pushes the living toward the imitation of death is terror, among humans terror is more than a natural fact: it is socially mediated. Civil society has been the continuation of "the threat from nature as the permanent, organized compulsion"[18]. Domination (*Herrshaft*) is a "natural category" only because humans are natural beings who share with the rest of nature its natural violence; but among humans this violence is socialized, organized, stabilized into a fixed hierarchy where organized rulers have become able to self-control their own violence in order to accomplish the goal of their own self-preservation in a new way: through domination over inner and external nature.

Under this light, civilization has been – and still is – a practice and a project of domestication or naturalization of natural beings through violence and terror, i.e. of their reduction and self-reduction into something dead alike, just a raw material and an instrument for production. "Civilization is the triumph of society over nature – a triumph which transforms everything into mere nature"[19].

Nonetheless, the cultural constitution of natural beings does not mean that presocial tendencies disappear. They are modified, indeed, but they also counter-react and follow their own developments.

In fact, domination changes qualitatively the impulse to fall back into nature. Violence banishes the immediate identification with the outside and has the impulse look for satisfaction with the *images* of such prohibited reconciliation: the image of the uncontrolled relapse, uncontrolled mimesis coincides with the image

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17   Ivi, p. 149. Luciano Floridi, *Etica dell'intelligenza artificiale. Sviluppi, opportunità, sfide*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2022, p. 34, states that these features also belong to AI, which separates "the capacity to work out a problem or to execute a task from the need to be intelligent in doing it" (my eng.tr.). Furthermore, it is particularly interesting that, in 1997, as reported in K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 2007, pp. 365-369, the writer and conservationist Kanine Benyus defined the new post-industrial discipline of "biomimicry" as "an emerging discipline that seeks sustainable solutions by emulating nature's designs and processes" rather than extracting and separating from nature, like in the industrial age. More importantly, many biotech companies are using biomimicry arguments to state that their bio-engineering practices are the same of what nature does on its own, so they are "natural" and beyond any social, ethical political concerns.

18   T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

19   Ivi, p. 200.

of liberation from instrumental domination. This image changes the immediate need and satisfaction into the specifically human desire and pleasure. From now on, *human* "nature" does not only strive for self-preservation, but also for the reconciliation, the identity, which means pleasure *without* rational purpose. Culture does come *from* this repressed natural desire as its sublimated satisfaction and then, even if in this sublimated form, the image of the liberation of nature still haunts the civil consciousness[20].

However, because of its features, such image of liberation conjures ambiguous feelings. The memory of the lost immediate identity is an imagination which anticipates both the satisfaction and the scaring consequences of it: punishments, if not death[21]. Without reflection, what *seems* to be just different from the established form of reason appears to be an "uncontrolled nature", source both of *attraction* and *repulsion*. It is a "rationalized idiosyncrasy"[22]: a bodily and apparently immediate, but in true socially mediated, disgust not for death, but for the non-identity of the livings.

Another consequence is that violence itself can become a source of pleasure, pursued *for its own sake* without any real need or actual threats.

In fact, if the only satisfaction available is the sublimated image of the uncontrolled mimesis, the Self can get this image reducing the otherness to such spontaneous and uncontrolled state he/she desires through the violence over it. The anatomy table, the electric chair, the gas chamber, are places where the Self can project its own repressed desire of liberation on the uncontrolled tensing, screaming, dying body of the other which, in turn, reflects the image which is desired by the impulse. Keeping the other separated and subjected, the subject never accomplishes what desires the most – the unity with the other – but only the repressed way of such satisfaction.

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20   See the difference between scientific and philosophical concepts in T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 16. Slightly differently, H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization. Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud*, Beacon Press, Boston 1974, believed that the image of liberation does not necessarily come from an external repression, like in the Freudian sublimation, but from an inner dialectic of Eros, able to "self-sublimate", "self-limit" on its own the need for an immediate satisfaction, in order to improve its own satisfaction. On this idea, Marcuse built his vision of a society whose labour and values could be attractive for natural impulses.

21   T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 24: "For civilization, purely natural existence, both animal and vegetative, was the absolute danger. Mimetic, mythical, and metaphysical forms of behavior were successively regarded as stages of world history which had been left behind, and the idea of reverting to them held the terror that the self would be changed back into the mere nature from which it had extricated itself with unspeakable exertions and which for that reason filled it with unspeakable dread. Over the millennia the living memory of prehistory, of its nomadic period and even more of the truly pre-patriarchal stages, has been expunged from human consciousness with the most terrible punishments. The enlightened spirit replaced fire and the wheel by the stigma it attached to all irrationality, which led to perdition".

22   Ivi, p. 151.

3. Fascism and Mimicry

This form of dialectical relation between reason and nature characterizes a society dominated by private owners whose force is more or less equivalent, who have to self-control and to arrange some agreements to defend their authority from the oppressed majority[23]. Automation is a product of their competition, but it also makes self-dominated, competitive and independent Egos unproductive for self-preservation. Looking closer, civilization has finally created an *external* organization of things that imitates what civilization wanted to escape from: dead mechanisms. At the same time, technique promises to free from the same fear it generates, because it also makes self-preservation through immediate mimicry possible[24]. However, within domination, technological developments cause a further centralization of capitals into few hands of oligopolists, who need to reshape the whole society under their interest to fight for the existence in the new global market[25].

One condition to react against this progress of the domination is, contradictorily, its historical premise: the Ego. The Self, in fact, also means the capacity to *negate* the immediate identification and adaptation with the object. Self-reflection opens a distance and eventually a tension if not a complete diversion, such as it would be cooperating against the rulers. Once instrumental rationality has been automated, self-conscious individuals are not just unproductive, but dangerous for domination in itself. "Now that self-preservation has been finally automated, reason is dismissed, by those who, as controllers of production, have taken over its inheritance and fear it in the disinherited"[26]. Moreover, because of instrumental rationality does not require self-reflection, it becomes not just a useful instrument of production of goods, but the main way to expropriate the Self-s from their reflectiveness. This is why the *totality* of society must be accorded to the instrumental-dead-form.

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23   See also M. Horkheimer, *The End of Reason*, in "Studies in Philosophy and Social Science", a. IX, n. 2, 1941, pp. 366-388.

24   T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 29: "The thing-like quality of the means, which makes the means universally available, its 'objective validity' for everyone, itself implies a criticism of the domination from which thought has arisen as its means […]. In the form of machines, however, alienated reason is moving toward a society which reconciles thought, in its solidification as an apparatus both material and intellectual, with a liberated living element, and relates it to society itself as its true subject" Consequently, in ivi, p. 33, "it is not the material preconditions of fulfillment, unfettered technology as such, which make fulfillment uncertain […] The fault lies in a social context which induces blindness".

25   Between the Thirties and the Forties, the members of the Institute debated on the transformation of economy and class relations following the crisis of 1929. On their different positions, see: G. Fazio, *Ritorno a Francoforte. Le avventure della nuova Teoria critica*, Castelvecchi, Roma 2020, pp. 89-91, and L. Scafoglio, *Forme della dialettica. Herbert Marcuse e l'idea di teoria critica*, manifestolibri, Roma 2009, pp. 75-83.

26   T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25. The loss of reflection automizes the thought into schemes of reaction. Thinking for labels becomes a common feature of authoritarian as well as "democratic" capitalist societies. See the chapter *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* in ivi, pp. 94-136.

Fascism is primarily what organizes this process of destruction of the Self-s joining advanced rationality and physical violence. All hidden killings, tortures, gassings, are scientifically projected and organized by bureaucrats in comfortable offices. Techno-rational and physical violence work together to atomize the individuals, because terror is the best way to reduce to, or to make the individuals self-reduce to, just "mere nature", i.e. to abandon their identity to save their immediate physical existence above all. This is granted by the immediate adaptation to the rigid, dead, mass-collective; this one is nothing but the collection of previously separated atoms each one using and competing against the others to accomplish one goal only: survival.

The novelty and the real secret of fascism is that now terror works through the enthusiasm of whom, in the end, gets (self-)reduced to a dead thing.

This is also explained by the hatred accumulated all along the history of civilization against its premise: the repression of mimicry and other impulses by a self-controlled Self. When self-repression no longer brings any benefits, neither a concrete small property for some, nor some imagined future compensations for the most; and when domination needs atomized and automized individuals, the repression of mimetic impulses has neither inner nor external reasons to exist anymore. On the contrary, unleashing impulses against the Self would precisely subject the individuals to the establishment. But the new *domination* would be established through the actual *liberation* of "natural" impulses. This creates a false, but attractive, reconciliation between reason and nature, domination and liberation: "fascism is also totalitarian in seeking to place oppressed nature's rebellion against domination directly in the service of domination"[27].

Moreover, this process changes the mimetic impulses further. Within the rigid collective, the free, uncontrolled mimesis gets frustrated again and again. The impulse turns into hatred and there is no longer any Self to control it on its own. Hatred has to be civilized: it is necessary to address it to an object. This "mechanism needs the Jews" as the "release valve"[28] for repressed and blinded impulses.

The chosen object is not casual, at all. It must be something that, for historical reason and careful manipulation, brings somatic or cultural features which recall the desired "uncontrolled mimesis". Among the civilized, these features activate the "rationalised idiosyncrasy", the need to bring closer the desired object rejecting it. The exercise of violence is the synthesis. The subject enjoys its direct violence on the body of the other because and until it is reduced, through direct violence, to a dead material which the killer, the hunters, has already turned him/her-self into. The oppressed of civilization, then, become the instrument to widen the highly rationalized form of civilization upon, on one side, whom still are, or seem to be, free from domination because they are not completely subjected to instrumental rationality; on the other side, upon their own impulses, which are now goal-oriented for the sake of domination.

27   Ivi, p. 152.
28   Ivi, p. 140.

Then, once naturalized practically – i.e. reduced to dead things – women, colonized, minorities, non-humans, can become source of civilized, historical *destructive pleasure* which imitates the features of society: it gets totalitarian, limitless, universally abstract, just as the universal expansion of automized instrumental rationality.

In the end, uncontrolled natural, blind, irrational violence, is not as much the origin as the result of that Reason which had promised to free from it.

4. Social Networks and the mimesis of the mimesis

To many, ours is an age of "digital surveillance" which develops further some features of the administrative society described by Adorno and Horkheimer[29].

Economically, the new technology has not given birth to cooperative economies of gifts or to free competition, but to Big Data financial monopolies. These enterprises also centralized the technologies to reshape the world at their image, while deploying the living and inorganic energy on global scale.

Politically, like in the past, this technology has not spread democracy, but, so far, leaders, usually authoritarian, who promise to free *their* people from the same establishment they have agreed with earlier and later their "democratic" elections.

Finally, this new power works through the immediacy of compulsive, irreflexive, emotional, spontaneous, inter-reactions between the users who participate willingly and enthusiastically to the production of data and authoritarian leaders. It is a critical duty to wonder whether it is the repetition of the fascist "satanic synthesis of reason and nature – the very opposite of that reconciliation of the two poles that philosophy has always dreamed of"[30], or not.

This age shares other features with the birth of fascism. At first, it is usually forgotten that social networks socialization has been possible on the premise of the violent destruction, indirectly by global markets and directly by State repression, of experiments of direct and equal relations born during and after the '68 within the working-class movement and the new leftists' movements. A radical suppression sold by the spokesmen/women of the upper classes as the liberation of the entrepreneurial, creative, autonomous capacity of the individual repressed by social relations as such.

Another feature, is that social networks spread and grew in the aftermath of a financial crisis, the one of 2007-2008, when such neoliberal subjectivity was harshly contested like fascism used to attack the liberal one.

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29   See S. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, Profile Books, London 2019. On the economic, political and social implication of the digital platforms, see: M. Pasquinelli, *The Eye of the Master: A Social History of Artificial Intelligence*, Verso, London 2023; N. *Srnicek, Platform capitalism, Polity Press*, Cambridge 2017; Y. Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism*, Vintage, New York 2024. For a broader bibliography, see the article by V. Specchio *** in supra/infra***

30   M. Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, Oxford University Press, New York 1947, pp. 122-123.

Social networks embody this history of violence, promises of liberation, failures of them.

On one side, their success would be inexplicable without its promise to bring individuals into a broader community, once it is harder and harder to find it elsewhere. But, to be accepted, individuals are required to perform entrepreneurial capacities to self-produce their own image within the highly competitive global market of profiles. Social acceptance depends on the performance of the "neo-liberal" autonomous Subject.

On the other side, social networks layout fixes the social relation into an abstract form which destroys the concrete richness of the individuals and obliterates the differences among them. In fact, living, dynamic, various relations are reduced to abstract categories universally valid for everyone: thought and language lose their ambiguousness to fit three-hundred letters; the whole range of affections is simplified under the unambiguous category of "friendship"; pleasure is flattened to the iper-subjective and egocentric "like" which makes any dispute impossible. What was the "inside" world of the Self is now exteriorized, but in a very reified way: it has become data, ready to be understood, classified, compared, traded through the machines. There is no subject requested, but only reactions of immediate adaptation to what is already there.

Then, the violence of the abstraction coincides with social networks frame in itself. Together with it, it also comes the primitive anxiety of reason toward the concreteness of the otherness. In fact, experiencing something non-identical is prohibited since negation as such is negated: concepts such as *enemy* or *dislike* do not exist at all; whatsoever is not accorded to the user likings is preventively censored by the algorithm. The construction of the Ego needs the absolute prohibition of the Otherness. Consequently, there is neither of them.

Following Horkheimer and Adorno diagnosis, the destruction of the Self may explain some of the enthusiasm for social networks. The rationalization of life makes living according to social request without any fatigue, without self-control, possible. The individuals find prescribed desires, feelings, thoughts already there, objectivized and they only have to click on and to choose what kind of Self to be. It is satisfied both the anxiety to answer the social duty to be a self-entrepreneur, and the hatred against the neoliberal subject, because social networks ask not only to build a Profile, but also to *kill* it continuously. The prohibition to look for your *own* is now the indictment to *kill* your Self, an attractive relapse into "nature".

Here we can see a new feature of the social media abstraction, reduction to "mere" nature. Social networks grounds on earlier stages of reification of the social and individual body. Then, now the sublimated image of the uncontrolled mimesis is obtained less from the direct reduction of the concrete body of the other, than from updating the *image* of the Self: compulsively and un-controllingly re-destroying and re-creating it become source of dead-mimetic pleasure. It is not the earlier mimesis, but the new mimesis of the mimesis[31].

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31   The connection between social networks and Western finance capitalism goes beyond the ownership, affecting their common dynamic. Today, finance works less to move money to-

In conclusion, commanding to make an Ego as much fragmented, unstable, weak, fragile as possible, social networks spread the terror coming with every domination: annihilation. Sense of insecurity, fear, frustration and hatred are the hidden secret of their apparent happiness; these feelings easily ground authoritarian, racists, patriarchal politicians and the attacks against all those appear to be happy without fatigue, unlike everybody is allowed[32]. The promise of ultimate satisfaction is delayed further and increases the frustration until it finds its *actual* body: in the self-destruction through drugs, alimentary disturbs, suicides, mass killings and finally war.

5. Beyond terrified mimesis: the Erotism of Politics

Together with the rise of authoritarianism in all the Western countries, we currently witness some facts that give a glimpse on the possibility that desires for freedom and solidarity with human and non-human beings have not completely integrated and domesticated. Beyond the West, many populations are trying to emancipate themselves from the domination of Western Imperialism calling for an autonomous Sovereignty. Even inside what is the best instrument of current integration, namely the social media sphere, the self-reduction to death is not the only possibility. In fact, to get it, images, videos, audios, have to circulate. It may also happen an immediate identification and solidarity with the sufferance of the oppressed, as proved by the worldwide protests against the barbaric Israeli genocide of Palestinians and by the active censorship on these contents by the same social media.

One teaching of the recent failure of many leftist populist movements, is that communication is not sufficient to turn affections of rage and solidarity into a stable and effective political movement. Social media in particular seems to be useless if not counterproductive to mediate between feelings and politics[33]. Their

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ward concrete production of useful value than to make new money from money. Money never finds a body because it has to self-perpetuate in the abstract form of the debt. See M. Hudson, *Finance Capitalism and its Discontents. Interviews and speeches 2003-2012*, Islet, Dresden 2012 and Id. *The Destiny of Civilization: Finance Capitalism, Industrial Capitalism or Socialism*, Islet, Dresden 2022; M. Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 2008.

32   E. Fromm, *op cit.*, retraced the relation between sense of fragility and impotence and authoritarianism. See also T.W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswick, D. Levinson, N. Sanford, (ed. by), *Authoritarian Personality*, Harper & Brothers, New York 1950. Chiara Ferragni was harshly attacked by the right wing with the argument that she (and her husband) belongs to the useless parasites of society, like migrants are usually said to be.

33   In the aftermath of global market crisis, many Left populist movements have tried to channel the widespread refusal of the establishment toward leftist reformism. Today it seems that they have exhausted their original enthusiasm. Some have said that they did not commit to root their organization within the territories because they believed that a good communication was sufficient to di politics. I wonder if this limitation was also due to the rationality of the digital instruments they used so massively.

technology is a *material* force whose design strongly contrasts the development a collective reflectiveness. Only very simplified categories work within social media, like "the People"; "the 99%" against "the 1%"; the "Global South" against the "North", and so on. They are not sufficient to comprehend those differences and similarities necessary to point out the historical condition of the oppression and, then, of the emancipation of the oppressed.

True struggle for emancipation still needs a theory and an organization "from below" grounded into the very materiality of the bodies which gather, meet, contrast, study together during assemblies, strikes, happenings, and so on. It is in this bodily dimension that individuals can mediate their empirical needs with the ones of the others[34].

Following Herbert Marcuse, the bodily dimension of politics could also diverge and self-sublimate the individual *erotic* from the hedonistic pleasure dominating our age toward radical politics. According to *Eros and Civilization*, Eros is the impulse to create "free and lasting existential relations"[35] in order to protect and enhance life. A politics with a bodily dimension *and* erotic goals – such as peace among humans and with nature, abolition of alienated labour, of gender and racial inequality – would be attractive for *this* "natural" impulse. In turn, if Eros is tied to its twin, Thanatos, the death impulse may also be turned from searching peace beyond life to accomplish it into life, going *against* those economic, political cultural forces which have interest in promoting war, destruction, exploitation of life.

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34   See H-J. Krahl, *Costituzione e lotta di classe*, PGreco, Milano 2023.
35   H. Marcuse, *op. cit.*, p. 198.