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The Dark Side of Google: Pre-Afterword – Social Media Times

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Ippolita

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Ippolita¹

Performance Societies in the Clouds

Many years have passed since Ippolita first addressed the need to distinguish between the Free Software movement and the Open Source movement.² Although both movements are associated with a certain ‘freedom’, the ‘freedom’ proposed by the Free Software movement is very different in nature from the one proposed by the Open Source movement. The former is more ideological, whereas the latter focuses on defining the best way of promoting a product in an open manner. In other words, it completely follows a market logic. The Open Source movement has adopted the playful attitude of hacker peer sharing and uses it in a profit-oriented logic of work and exploitation. In so doing the movement has neutralized peer sharing’s originally revolutionary potential.

The subsequent analysis will show that Google, which is a hegemonic attempt to organize ‘all the world’s information’, progressed in a similar fashion. This argument will address how the logic of open source, in combination with the Californian philosophy of academic excellence found in Google’s motto ‘Don’t be evil’, is merely an excuse to place itself under the banner of capitalist abundance, turbo-capitalism’s illusion of unlimited growth and extremist anarcho-capitalism. Google sells the myth that *more, bigger, and faster* always equates with *better* and that the ‘I’m feeling lucky button’ will immediately and effortlessly satisfy all our desires with a simple click of the mouse. In other words, the company creates the comfortable illusion that you will be taken care of if you create a Google account, that there’s nothing else you need.

Unfortunately, claims about informational totalitarianism are not as ridiculous as they may sound. Although it has been established many times that there is nothing *more* to produce and, more importantly, that unlimited growth is a chimera (even in the digital world), run-ups to the next useless and shiny gadget continue to appear. Our weary world could use the blow that comes with the uncomfortable acknowledgement of

1. The following text is the new forward to the translation by Patrice Riemens of Ippolita’s *The Dark Side of Google*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2013.

2. Ippolita, *Open Non è Free: Comunità Digitali tra Etica Hacker e Mercato Global*, Milano: Elèuthera, 2005.

limited growth. We must start looking around, looking at each other, and exchanging what we need. We must imagine and build something meaningful together.

We also need to understand that IT is not merely a technique to manage information in an automatic way. IT is increasingly seen as a panacea for solving social problems (from delinquency to the crisis of traditional politics). In fact, *automation* easily degenerates with this delegation, sliding very quickly from a technical register to a social register. Instead of offering precise tools to solve specific problems, automation becomes a universal medicine that presents itself as working regardless of human intervention and will. However, society and sociability, such as politics and power management, are not problems to be solved once and for all: they are constitutive elements to face and deal with as part of a meaningful existence. Yet this shift from the utilitarian to the social occurs because IT's inherent logic, cybernetics, is based on a system of retroactive adjustments: the effects generated by the adoption of a particular technological tool directly influence the very perception of the surrounding environment – physical, social, psychological. The cybernetic IT systems continuously reshape their very foundations by being transformed into ideology, which is actually an output of these technological beginnings.³ To illustrate this, think of how Google uses this recursive logic as an extraordinary machine, constituted through its own use by users. In this sense IT can be seen as an 'autopoietic' complex of machines that accumulate all the basic information entered on the web by millions of users every day. And it is not only Google that applies this recursive logic; Facebook, Amazon, and Apple also exploit these same processes.

When these 'mega machines' – consisting of a datacenter and the very best coders – had only just started to emerge, after being safely locked up by a NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement), one of the first problems they encountered was that they had to be filled with something. The content did not matter much, as long as the costs remained low and, if possible, free. A new and relatively cheap type of industrial production was born, yet the question had become, how could these databases actually return fabulous profits for their owners?

By this time the net had emerged. Slowly, broadband connections were becoming less asymmetrical (mainly due to investments and the incentive to connect and bridge the digital divide, which meant a loss of the public sector), rates were down (although remaining unjustifiably high), and the upload capacity had significantly increased. Consequently, it was at this point in time that the solution to the mega-machines' problems was revealed: the data centers could be filled by pouring into them the online contents of users – all of the data they had assembled via their computers, smartphones, and cameras. This solution meant that the 'free market' was introduced: everyone would finally be able to publish! This development led to the birth of a new myth: the false promise of unlimited growth in the Era of User Generated Content. The ideology of this era proposes that the margins are huge, that the process of the 'webification and cloudification of everything' has only just started, and that its prospects are fabulous. The 'cloud' of cloud computing can increase by many orders of magnitude.

3. This description is a very brief summary of Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela's idea of autopoiesis (from *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. 42, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980). Here, we can imagine the 'internet' like a 'living organism' in Maturana's terms.

As a result, what we now face is one of the most effective Weapons of Democratic DistrAttention that has ever been developed: the administering of gratification for users who cannot wait to post, tag, comment, and link, not only to their own photos, videos, tweets, and texts, but also to those of their friends in the great *mare nostrum* of social networks. However, what is often forgotten is that this sea is actually not at all *nostrum* ('ours'), since it is almost always someone else's space, whether that of Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, or the next digital aquarium to entertain and nurture net-fish. We are happy as long as we possess the latest expensive tool for self-denunciation and as long as we can always be online and connected. Soon we will all make our purchases with some 'smart-stuff' – thereby forgetting credit cards – because we always want to know what we are interested in, what we like, what we think, where we are, what we do and with whom. And since the devices are getting smaller and less capacious, it is easy to predict that an explosion of the storage of online personal data will soon take place.

From the File to the Cloud

If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.
– Tomasi di Lampedusa⁴

Today web applications are able to replace almost all software created for the computer. The very idea of a personal computer has ceased to exist now that everyone is able to have his or her own personal web space. Ten years ago users were still struggling to understand how to manage file systems. Today, users are completely unaware that they are under the thumb of the dispersion of their online content.

Hardware devices now almost exclusively serve to provide access to the web and its services. As users we do not 'own' anything, because everything is shared with the large corporations that provide us with services free of charge. For the common user, the computer as a physical entity has faded into the impalpability of cloud computing. Like Olympic gods, the informatics of domination that rule our lives stay in the clouds. This 'evolution' reflects a precise technical and economic goal, namely, that the web must become the main environment for IT development. Key elements of this evolution are cloud computing, the smartphone, tablet, e-reader (or mobile devices in general), browsers, HTML5, and social networks.

One of the most interesting innovations associated with mobile devices and the web in general is the disappearance of the concept of files and file systems. On desktop systems we have grown accustomed to working with folder and files. Our documents are files, images are files, and all of these files are organized in folders. Often the links between different types of files and applications are very clear: a word processor creates, displays, or edits textual files, while an image viewer handles image files.

However, for mobile devices with access to content on the web, this organization into files and folders is close to meaningless. Instead of files and folder, these devices

4. Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Everyman's Library, 1998, p. 22.

speak of services or features. This development is undoubtedly interesting and not devoid of a dark side. What happened to music files is perhaps most evocative. In a desktop environment – before the birth of applications such as iTunes – audio files (often with confusing names) were typically placed in folders or collected in a playlist. Music programs read these audio files or playlists and so allowed us to listen to the music. However with the birth of programs (capable of self-generating playlists and music libraries, and of categorizing audio files into virtual folders, collecting them by author, year, and album), the ‘file’ for music has disappeared. Once uploaded on the device, music ceases to exist as a file (for the user at least) and ends up inside the mysterious cloud of music libraries from programs such as iTunes.

The next step was the online audio library, from which it is no longer necessary to download audio files through P2P networks (thereby avoiding ‘cybercrime’), because applications now offer us everything we want to listen to directly on the internet. Libraries and their content are all available without many limits, so there is no need anymore for files that are actually stored and cataloged on your device. Examples of these online audio libraries are Spotify and Grooveshark.

This loss of ‘stored’ files in online audio libraries also extends to other types of files. Pictures and videos are immediately uploaded onto social platforms, and textual documents are stored in office suites and made accessible online by different services for which you no longer have to install any programs. The cloud offers services, space, sync, the myth of the 99.99 percent uptime – basically everything that our devices cannot ‘physically’ have, unlimited and almost always for free.

Cloud computing is trivialized in a series of buzzwords, such as SaaS (Software as a Service), DaaS (Data as a Service) and so on. The cloud has in fact become the very virtualization of a ‘feature’ offered as an online service. Everything is up and running somewhere in the clouds of the web, ready to be used. Everything changes so that nothing changes. While the way in which we make use of data has changed drastically (think of the amount of data we handle, its quality, and the devices we use to access big data), the main managers of these clouds are still the usual suspects: Google first and foremost, and also Amazon.

However, besides making use of cloud computing, Google has also entered competition with mobile devices. The advent of smartphones and tablets with internet access has revolutionized the mobile market, and it gave birth to a new mass ritual, namely, ‘Connectivity Everywhere’, and the mantra ‘Always On!’ The smartphone has become a status symbol to the point of unleashing wars for the hegemony of the market. Together with iOS, Google’s Android has emerged as one of the major competitors.

Android is an operating system built on a Linux kernel and distributed under the open source Apache license. Note how we use ‘open’ and not ‘free’, because the Free Software Foundation GNU’s components and libraries used by GNU/Linux OSs have actually been replaced by BSD-based ones. Android has been chosen by several hardware manufacturers and is therefore available on different models that often compete with each other. It could thus be argued that Android has become a *de facto* standard, in a similar way to how the Windows operating system for desktop became a standard. The only basic difference is that, thanks to the open source license, manufacturers can

create custom flavors of Android for their hardware. Along with the Android operating system – and in addition to having acquired the manufacturer Motorola – another important element of Google’s entrance in the mobile market is its own specific smartphone, the Nexus. In contrast to Android, iOS forms a proprietary and closed operating system, specifically designed by Apple for its mobile products, iPhone, iPad, and iPod.

Besides numerous and frequent legal battles over patents, the scenario in the mobile market is further complicated by the joint venture Nokia-Microsoft with Windows Mobile, and also by the former leader of the mobile market RIM, which continues to plod along with Blackberry. One of the most representative examples of a gigantic, Asiatic corporate capitalist is the aggressive Samsung. This Korean company has begun the most profitable electronic conglomerate in the world, which in large part can be attributed to their tablet and smartphones using Android. Finally, Chinese players such as ZTE and Huawei are also gaining a foothold in the war for hegemony of the mobile market.

Bearing in mind the strong competition that surrounds the mobile market, it is easy to understand the browser instrument’s importance as an environment for development. Google released the first version of its Chrome browser in 2008 and was early enough to catch the trend that would soon become dominant: web services. Once again, Google found itself in the lead position.

Unlike Mozilla Firefox, whose innovations are for a large part linked to the methodological structure of work and cultural heritage of open source, Chrome contains only technical innovations. As sons of Californian turbo-capitalism, Page and Brin staked everything on speed. The result with Chrome is a phenomenal JavaScript engine and the division of each web page loaded as a single running process. In contrast to other web languages, JavaScript describes the ‘logic’ of sites and applications. The better its performance, the greater the speed of execution of the service we are using.

HTML5, W3C: Standards, Architectural Dominance, and Control Methods

In the highly complex world that is the internet, some elements need to be shared in as universal a manner as possible. In order to make computer processes communicable, common rules, conventions, and alphabets are necessary. This is why standards have been established over the course of years. Think of the HTTP protocol born at the end of the 80s, which enabled machines and humans to access the web. Without HTTP, the World Wide Web would not exist and – although many are eager to innovate – no one has the slightest intention of changing it. Not even the nerd supremacists of Silicon Valley, who are on the payroll of the most visionary anarcho-capitalists.

This is in sharp contrast to the changes that have been made in HTML (essential for web pages) and which have become ground for some of the most important battles for architectural dominance the computer world has ever fought (but not won). The evolution of HTML is managed, along with other basic standards, by the W3 Consortium, one of the supranational institutions responsible for making suggestions and recommendations on what the web should be.

The W3C tasks are organized into different working groups. Each group makes drafts of specifications and recommendations for each individual project. To become a recommendation, a draft must have at least two independent implementations (meaning no

code is shared) that are meaningful, fully functional, and already used by a considerable number of users. It therefore depends for a large part on Google whether HTML5 or other specific recommendations become W3C standard. However, it should be noted that Google develops its Chrome browsers on the same WebKit rendering engine that is used by Safari, Apple's proprietary browser. Google is also the main funder of the Mozilla Software Foundation, which develops Firefox, based on the Gecko rendering engine. Now that the Opera browser has switched to WebKit, Gecko-Mozilla remains the only alternative, together with Microsoft's Internet Explorer, to implement new standards.

This quick rise behind the scenes of the web is a brief example of what Ippolita means by analyzing the technocratic systems on which the informatics of domination are based. From the moment that (mobile) devices began multiplying, laptops have been emptied of software and data, and now that the craze of everything 'social' has exploded, it is easy to understand how browsers and HTML are of primary importance for building a worldwide computing hegemony – both from an economic and political point of view.

Open Is Not Free, and Published Is Not Public

And here we are today. Unlike the times in which Ippolita was one of the few shouting about how we don't have to put everything on Google – because the delegation of our data and trust (even if semi-unconscious) marks the beginning of domination (in this case, technocratic) – today many voices have been raised against the social networks and the whole Web 2.0 tale, accusing them of violating the privacy of users.⁵

The techno-enthusiasm is dismissed as a false revolutionary ideology, because however social the internet as a movement may appear, this is overshadowed by its elitism: how contradictory and fideistic! Commentators such as danah boyd point out that Facebook in particular is a project based on the ideology of *radical transparency*, because it is in its nature to strive for publishing everything indiscriminately.⁶ It should not be forgotten, however, that Facebook's first venture capital financier, who came from the Paypal mafia, was intertwined with military and civilian intelligence services, offering political support to U.S. right-wing libertarians (e.g. people who believed Bush Sr. to be a 'moderate'). As Tom Hodgkinson already commented in *The Guardian*, these are people who define themselves as 'anarcho-capitalists'.⁷ Umair Haque even dares to notice, from the privileged surroundings of Harvard, that perhaps the 'bubble' of social media also exists from an economic point of view: so far no one has shown that social media have contributed to selling customized products through personal advertising.⁸ In the meantime, various scholars have accomplished more extensive pieces of analysis and criticism. We remember Siva Vaidhyanathan's thorough *The*

5. Giles Slade, *The Big Disconnect: The Story of Technology and Loneliness*, New York, Prometheus Book, 2012. See chapter three in *The Dark Side of Google: 'Trusting Machines'*.

6. danah boyd, 'Facebook and Radical Transparency: A Rant', 14 May 2011, <http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2010/05/14/facebook-and-radical-transparency-a-rant.html>.

7. Tom Hodgkinson, 'With Friends Like These', *The Guardian*, 14 and 16 February 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/jan/14/facebook>.

8. Umair Haque, 'The Social Media Bubble', Harvard Business Review blog, 23 March 2010, <http://blogs.hbr.org/2010/03/the-social-media-bubble/>.

Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry).⁹ Evgeny Morozov's *To Save Everything, Click Here* has rightly focused the debate on solutionism and internet-centrism, fideistic acceptances of the so-called inevitable 'technological revolutions' taking place.¹⁰ These attitudes described by Morozov claim to be scientific and objective, but instead are highly ideological, endemically spreading now in too many private and public speeches. But Morozov lacks a broader theoretical discourse on power, based on the practices of technocratic delegation that users perform in everyday life.

Beyond both concrete and rather unrealistic proposals for fighting this social media bubble (e.g. mass 'suicide' on Facebook, the failed Diaspora project to rebuild a social network for free, complaints and petitions to various authority figures and guarantors who are unable to even supervise themselves), it is actually someone such as the techno-enthusiast Jeff Jarvis who puts his finger on the problem: the public. Similar to how 'opening code' does not equate to 'making it free', 'publishing content' does not equate to 'making it public'. On the contrary, with Facebook (although G+ or other social platforms work in the same way) it becomes clear that things actually work in the opposite way. Everything that is posted becomes the non-exclusive property of the company and can be resold to third parties, as can be (re)read in the TOS (Terms of Service). In the clouds of social networks, then, publishing does not mean public. For almost all web 2.0 applications, publishing means 'private' – a corporation or a private company owns the content. Every time we access our online profiles (our digital alter egos), we work for these corporations for free. By serving us with increasingly invasive and targeted advertisements, the sites' algorithms try to make money on our backs – on our digital bodies.

Ippolita's harsh concerns about Google's totalizing ambitions seem all the more urgent when we consider the case of Facebook. Yesterday's champion in 'invasiveness', Google, almost pales in comparison to the champion of social control today. The way that Gmail uses advertising, the power of geolocation in Google Maps, the successes of Chrome as a browser and of the Android OS, or even the most controversial projects, such as Google Books, which has stunned the entire publishing market, seem almost harmless when compared to the capacity of Facebook to expand a consensual method of social control. After all, Google is an Enlightenment dream; a dream of global knowledge characterized politically more by liberal than conservative tendencies. Facebook, on the other hand, which we expect to deliver consistently despite a lot of interplanetary gossip, has a political connotation that is clearly reactionary. Facebook works because more than a billion people are on it, an incredible power, but to do what? We still don't really know. (Ippolita wrote extensively about Facebook in *Nell'acquario di Facebook*, to be translated and published in English as *In the Facebook Aquarium*.)¹¹

Of course we should not forget that networks have played an important role in the 2008

9. Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

10. Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here*, New York: Public Affairs, 2013.

11. Ippolita, *Nell'acquario di Facebook*, Milano: Ledizioni, 2012. Spanish translation: *En el acuario de Facebook*, Madrid: Enclave de Libros, 2012. French translation: *J'aime pas Facebook*, Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2012.

revolt in Iran and in the uprisings of most countries in North Africa, as well as in Asian dictatorships and the Arab world in general. Facebook has been very helpful for the Indignados, and Twitter and Foursquare for Occupy Wall Street. These and other private instruments will probably be used again in revolts for freedom that are yet to come, and we hope that these will be more and more numerous. However, this is not a good reason to link social networks to democracy, freedom, and equality. Social networks do not make revolutions – it is people who make them. As the controversial WikiLeaks and Anonymous cases have clearly shown, if they want, governments and established powers may stifle any initiative branded as subversive, especially when it comes to matters of direct action that strongly depend on digital technologies.

Social networks are not necessarily free, autonomous, and self-managed. We use them and create them to try to expand the possibilities of autonomy, but we cannot truly think that for-profit companies provide free of charge tools to access a world of freedom and equality. The use of technologies depends on the people. In itself, no technology guarantees anything. The methodological approach that we have practiced so far suggests that we should evaluate not the ‘what’ but the ‘how’ – that is, the way in which technological tools are created and modified through use and the methods by which individuals and groups adapt and change their behavior. It seems clear, then, that the same reasoning applies to social networks as to any other social value: the necessary consistency between means and ends. We are facing an anthropo-technical turning point.

The situation is critical. However, this story is not a new one, and we are not at a hazardous point in this situation. While following discussions on any technological buzz, from the iPhone to iPad, Android to Windows 8, Facebook to Twitter, we have to laugh at the ingenuity of gurus, enthusiasts, and ordinary users – a bitter laugh, from Italy. In this country it has always been clear that it will not be the so-called democratic institutions that will guarantee our rights. Nor will it be the machines of this or that multinational company with the consecrated status of Goodness and Progress for All that will give us, free of charge, a world of freedoms. Italy continues to be the political laboratory of the future; it is the only Mediterranean country in the G8. Here in Italy, a movement that started online on a private blog has won a quarter of the electorate in 2013, and it now proposes itself as a force for renewal, much in line with the new digital movements whose major vocation is claiming to represent the 99 percent (Indignados, Occupy Wall Street, Pirates). Politics are already a technocracy, and proposals for technological democracy, web 2.0, or what have you, are increasingly enmeshed within this technocracy. Who creates and manages these tools of democracy? Are they the nerd supremacists on the payroll of anarcho-capitalists? How can repentant soldiers, technocratic geeks, or whistleblowers constantly on the run inspire the struggle for freedom? The sad stories of oppression suffered by Manning, Assange, Snowden, and many others, otherwise similar, are only the first chapters in a saga that promises to be detrimental to civil liberties. The technical skills and the geeks’ enthusiasm by themselves are not enough to ‘do the right thing’, because deliberation, morality, and aesthetics are not technical matters: the better algorithms will not automatically create better societies, and radical transparency is a totalitarian nightmare.

Participation Myth Corollaries: We Are the 99 Percent

Digital activism could be framed as an interesting corollary to the online mass par-

ticipation myth, and the claim that ‘social networks fueled revolutions’ is part of that same narrative. Of course people use what is available to them to communicate, and Facebook, Twitter, and Foursquare have been very important tools for movements as diverse as the Arab Springs (Egypt above all), the Indignados (Spain), and Occupy Wall Street (U.S. and elsewhere). However, we would like to emphasize an aspect of these movements that relies more on ancient rituals than on the ‘digital networks connected us’ rhetoric.

Ippolita shares the idea that

[s]ocial media have been chiefly responsible for the construction of a *choreography of assembly* as a process of symbolic construction of public space which facilitates and guides the physical *assembling* of a highly dispersed and individualized constituency.¹²

The key question is how these media were used to ‘get physical’. How, in the modern theater of the social internet, do various technical layers contribute to social performance? How do so-called leaderless movements distribute power by channeling individual emotions in a collective emotional choreography? These self-named leaderless movements hide the importance of organization and have increasingly become emotional management. However, the true leaders of social networks are the technical managers, because they can control the information flow. Technocracy is here. The choice for a specific communication platform is not neutral either. The main communication platform of the aforementioned Italian ‘Five Star Movement’ is hosted on the private, individual blog Beppegrillo.it. Technical procedures to be posted and shared are the key to power articulation in these kinds of digital movements, as was shown by the insistence of the German Pirate movement on Liquid Feedback tools of interaction.

We are certainly not the only ones to proclaim the notion that ‘what is true today, was true yesterday’. You must be able to imagine your future in order to understand the present. We need to be more contemporary to our times, that is to say *untimely*, or in the words of Agamben, ‘contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time’.¹³ By recalling the past and creating a collective story (since memory is a collective tool), nothing is ever repeated. However, the differences are similar, and the insipid soup of yesterday, a little pimped up, may be dished out as the radical innovation of tomorrow.

For this reason, we leave intact the escape routes identified in *The Dark Side of Google*.¹⁴ Although things have changed, we want to remind ourselves about what has happened. For example, the logic of the trusted network that we identified in FOAF (Friend of a Friend) was realized in a different manner and eventually publicized by Facebook. Indymedia has run its course, and the dreams of digital democracy are embodied in new movements. If what we ‘imagine’ is reflected by the advertising on TV or on other

12. Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, London: Pluto Press, 2012.

13. Giorgio Agamben, ‘What Is the Contemporary’, in *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 45.

14. Ippolita, *The Dark Side of Google*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2013 (2007). See chapter seven, ‘Technocracy, Allogocracy’.

devices, or by the ‘freedom of choice’ for hundreds of thousands of apps for iPhone, or by the possibility of having more than a thousand ‘friends’ on Facebook, then maybe we have insisted too little on the need to desire and imagine something better. Yet alternatives to Google already exist; think of self-managed servers like Autistici/Inventati, Riseup, or Lorea. Of course, they are not *free as in beer*, but they are *free as in freedom*. Treading the never-ending paths of freedom may cost a lot, but at least you have a choice, and it allows you to undertake what you desire.

So far we have described what Donna Haraway calls the ‘informatics of domination’.¹⁵ The method that has been built (cartographic, interdisciplinary) is necessarily partial and sometimes lax, but at the same time it has allowed for problems with the technocratic delegation to emerge, long before it became obvious. Jamaican slaves used the saying, ‘pull a straight lick with a crooked stick’. We like to imagine escape routes, then try to sell them; we imagine and build appropriate tools to achieve our desires. We should make them available to an audience that is made up of people, instead of publishing them through the depraved megaphone of an intrusive corporation’s wall. It is as McLuhan already claimed: ‘the medium is the message’.

Many of us are in the same situation; we are not cooperating since we don’t want to participate in the crowdsourcing of the masses of social media. Social networking services have the compulsive urge to touch up your profile in such a way that it will stand out from the others. However, these ‘touch ups’ are not real differences; they are only slight variations within predefined categories (single? married? friend?). This has resulted in the formation of groups who are friends because they say that they like the same thing. In other words, it has resulted in a homophile self-imposition. Diversity appears in the approval of tastes and behaviors. Even so, as Lucius T. Outlaw enlightens us in *On Race and Philosophy*, human biodiversity, as races and ethnicities, is a valuable difference.¹⁶ We carry on in step and apply this difference, following Braidotti and Haraway, to the entire human-tech machinic systems.¹⁷ The more differences there are, the more valuable the system will be. If genetic variability is a value, so should be the variability of the code. The value of difference is not a principle quantity. More does not mean better, and more objects or friends does not mean greater freedom of choice.

We note that in analyses of networks (including social networks), terminology is usually heavily militarized. However, if we return to the ‘material’ in a more narrow sense, it should be noted that computers themselves are constructed with semi-conductor minerals, which are extracted from areas that are in constant conflict over those minerals (e.g. Congo), for that very reason. Globalization of goods is mainly the globalization of exploitation. We should not look away from the fact that our cool and ergonomic tools are produced by masses of Asian workers, especially Chinese, who are forced to declare in their contracts that they will not commit suicide at the factories they work at. Thanks, guys! The global market digests all differences. Meanwhile, when we are

15. Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, in Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991, pp.149-181.

16. Lucius T. Outlaw Jr., *On Race and Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 1996.

17. Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’; Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2002.

purchasing the latest technological nonsense, we can perhaps gloat over how some skimpy tree was planted to offset emissions of CO₂. Green capitalism, however, remains as mad as any productivist ideology. No one is pure, and we are all involved. However, despite being immersed in this technological world, we should try to keep a distance from it and defamiliarize ourselves in order to write some kind of ethnography of social media. This should not focus on how social media work (there are enough how-to's and manuals on that already), but on the reasons why we are in this situation, and how we can influence it by injecting diversity, chaos, and germs of autonomy. We are compromised and involved, but this does not mean we have to accept everything uncritically. If we start from the collective findings, we can derive individual conclusions in a process of estrangement that proceeds from the inside out (rather than from the unfamiliar to the familiar, as happens in classical ethnographic observations). We are the savages, and we need a decidedly subjective look. We do not need the supposed objectivity of an outside observer.

Fortunately, the myth of scientific objectivity survives only in the inferior and vulgar. It has been more than a century since the hard sciences have taken the path of relativism, and it is time now that the 'human sciences' should follow them. We need radical relativism in order to observe our habits and behavior from the outside and to understand what we are doing. We have to make our actions concrete, and we have to be able to communicate them effectively in a public space, a space that must be preserved, renegotiated, and built relentlessly. In order to stop officiating at the rite of the mass of dominant technologies, we need to build new and conscious social rituals.

This is the whole problem then: the foundation of power and its transformation into domination. How do you create a device capable of not succumbing to the power of the sacred? There is a reversal of the sacred: the profane, the iconoclastic moment of carnival. Once you have built your little Olympus, you must renew it by following the correct rhythm. The autopoiesis processes we foster are the embodiment of this sense of continuous renewal.

Do you have any ideas? We have a few, so let us know!

lppolita.net

info@lppolita.net

September, 2013

Per una corretta autopoiesi (For a proper autopoiesis)

Download *The Dark Side of Google* for free from <http://networkcultures.org/publications>.

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