

Digital capitalism, subjectivation... and the end of resistance?

Capitalismo digital, subjetivação...
e o fim da resistência?

Nuno Oliveira

Abstract:

The paper examines how technological systems and digital capitalism have led to a deep integration between the market and individual/collective identities, and how processes of subjectivation are increasingly mediated through technological devices. The paper discusses the work of Lazzarato and Reckwitz, who provide a comprehensive analysis of the new social and political symptoms arising from digital capitalism and the production of subjectivity. The paper argues that Reckwitz's diagnosis should be complemented by recognizing the mutual reinforcement of singularization and standardization dynamics. Individuals actively participate in and reproduce dynamics of repetition, standardisation, and the pursuit of instant gratification and maximizing potential choices. Finally, we discuss some forms of resistance that are theoretically on offer, raising the pessimistic question of whether such resistance is still possible and by what means.

Keywords: digital capitalism, subjectivation, singularisation, standardisation

CONTACT: Nuno Oliveira
CIES - ISCTE-IUL
nuno.filipe.oliveira@iscte-iul.pt



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Resumo:

Este artigo examina como os sistemas tecnológicos e o capitalismo digital levaram a uma profunda integração entre o mercado e as identidades individuais/coletivas, e como os processos de subjetivação são cada vez mais mediados por dispositivos tecnológicos. O artigo discute o trabalho de Lazzarato e Reckwitz, que fornece uma análise abrangente dos novos sintomas sociais e políticos que surgem do capitalismo digital e da produção da subjetividade. O artigo argumenta que o diagnóstico de Reckwitz deve ser complementado com o reconhecimento do reforço mútuo das dinâmicas de singularização e padronização. Os indivíduos participam ativamente e reproduzem dinâmicas de repetição, padronização, assim como a busca pela gratificação instantânea e pela maximização das escolhas potenciais. Finalmente, discutimos algumas formas de resistência que estão teoricamente disponíveis, levantando a questão pessimista de saber se tal resistência ainda é possível e por que meios.

Palavras-chave: capitalismo digital, subjetivação, singularização, padronização

Introduction

The integration between the market and identities has never been as complete as that made possible by the new technological systems. Marcuse (1991 [1964]) and the Frankfurt School greatly emphasised the links between technological development, the instrumentalisation of the individual and their reflective capacity and, in a particularly Marcusean sense, the standardisation of human complexity. To a certain extent, the analogy drawn was that of machinisation, with one-dimensional man submerging his faculties in the domination of technological rationality. This idea of a radical distinction between an untouched communicational rationality and a colonising instrumental rationality was obviously explored by Habermas (1987). However, what happens when the instrumental rationality of markets and technology becomes the only condition for the subsistence and reinforcement of communicative rationality?

It is worth remembering the nature of the dissociation between these two rationalities suggested by Habermas. Starting from the critique of instrumental rationality, or rationality concerning ends (*Zweckrationalität*), according to Weber's analysis of social action, communicative rationality would introduce the intersubjective aspects of human action; such that, as opposed to the objectification of social relations typical of instrumental logics, we would find a dialogical type of rationality, i.e. discursive, whose validity would derive from the search for consensus (normative and

evaluative) in the various areas of human interaction and not in the objective exercise of domination. For the sphere of shared values, communicative processes and the meanings with which we recognise our actions, Habermas recovers the Husserlian term “life-world” [*Lebenswelt*] and predicts that, in conditions of late capitalism, this is being colonised by instrumentally-dominant technological rationalities.

The new technosystem, to use Feenberg’s definition (2017), inverts this classic distinction (classic in the sense of developing the critique of technology inherited from the Frankfurt School) and makes technology the place par excellence for the social production of intersubjectivity. Identities - both individual and collective - i.e. being a subject, in other words, the processes of subjectivation, increasingly exist through technological devices. This has led some authors to speak of a technological (or digital) literacy without which we are unable to live in today’s world (Petrina, 2000; Delanty & Neal, 2021).

Since post-structuralism, the idea of subjectivation has been associated with that of subjection. Foucault’s introduction of the term “subjectivation” captures the emergence of subject positions and the productive effects of power in the production of individuality. In this way, Foucault (1995) points out the grey area that exists between the idea of subject autonomy and the heteronomous function of disciplinary power. The ethical, but also social, tension between the two opens up a space of resistance that is actualised, among other forms, in the technologies of the self. But what happens when the technologies of the self and their implementation infrastructure become the vehicle for reproducing productive power over subjectivity?

In this text, I intend to reflect on these current transformations, drawing on the themes of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), the social demand for visibility in the society of singularities (Reckwitz, 2020) and the digitalisation infrastructure of the self, which has direct effects on forms of subjectivation. Although neoliberal subjectivation has been analysed under the most diverse names, such as hypermodern individual (Aubert, 2005), individual by excess and by default (Castel, 2009), or liquid individual (Bauman, 2000), the digitalisation of the self poses different challenges to the subject, even within the structure of neoliberal society. These contemporary challenges are not inseparable from the devices of digitalisation; and because of this, they force us to think about the subject, and the processes of subjectivation, beyond the traditional sociological formulations of the self-sufficient subject of the theorists of reflexive individualisation (Giddens, 1990; Beck-Gersheim, 2002). Similarly, the notion of a subject disconnected from the social, self-centred and without the capacity for general sociability, is not a convincing reading. Firstly, because the “cultural machine” (Reckwitz, 2020) of social media blurs the modern distinction between private and public, and opens up both dimensions to the need for an audience. Finally, and against Reckwitz’s idea of singularisation through the generation of unique profiles, I suggest that singularisation and standardisation exist and reinforce each

other in common processes.

Diagnosis

Much attention has been paid to the liquefaction of relationships and social bonds (Bauman, 2000; Elliott, 2016), which is contrasted with reflexive individualisation (Giddens, 1990; Beck & Beck-Gersheim, 2002). Strictly speaking, both perspectives agree that something fundamental has changed in our relationship with the world in late-modern society; that our identities are no longer fixed to traditional statuses and now require *DIY* work, self-construction and reconstruction. The distinction between the two perspectives lies in the qualification of the consequences of such a transformation. If, for the theorists of reflexivity and reflexive individuality, the liberation of our capacities that were once tied to fixed norms is a gain of late modernity, for the theorists of the liquid society, the liquefaction that requires the reconstructive effort of identities is the cause of anxieties and pathologies. In fact, the deterritorialisation they are forced to undergo implies a fundamental change in our relationship with time, that of instantaneity, which requires a cognitive and perceptive effort never experienced before. The theme of social acceleration, as described by Rosa (2015), has every place in this diagnosis, whose most disturbing revelation is that our stability only subsists in acceleration, what Rosa calls “dynamic stability” and which Adorno (2000: 39-40), in his *Lectures, referred to as* the principle of capitalism’s survival through permanent expansion. In short, liquefaction, reflexivity and acceleration are the dynamics to which our current self is subject. And subject is appropriate here insofar as it is a question of moulding our subjectivity through those three impositions.

However, there is a dimension that I believe has been neglected in this literature. In addition to the consequences of acceleration for our identities, i.e. for building and sustaining our self, both in cognitive terms and in terms of practical social competence, there is a new social category that needs to be added - visibility.

Let’s go back to the idea of recognition, as conceptualised by Honneth (2007). According to this author, recognition is a fundamental part of sustaining our identities and our selves. The denial of recognition can lead to conflict (in the collective case) or individual pathologies. In a critical and Hegelian sense, a lack of recognition is a way of damaging individual identity, depreciating self-esteem and despising the humanity of each person. And because of this, recognition has an ethical component that structures the three spheres of recognition, as Honneth conceives them: love, rights and solidarity. The first is provided by the family and friendship circles, and deals with the emotional structure; the second is the recognition of legal institutions, especially in terms of avoiding discrimination; finally, solidarity, which comes from recognising individual capacities as a member of the societal group.

The theory of recognition has obvious Habermasian resonances; and, going even further back, the Parsonian inspiration is clear. It is no coincidence that one of

the main points of criticism has been the excessive normative emphasis of Honneth's perspective. Firstly, because these are ethical spheres, and the theory of recognition, in the wake of critical theory, thinks of the world as overcoming the pathologies and distortions caused by capitalism, but with a strong emphasis on intersubjectivity. However, this insistence has been criticised by various voices (Thompson, 2019; McNay, 2008) for neglecting both the operations of power and domination and the embodiment of this same power in the *habitus* of individuals, closely following Bourdieu's theory. A more insistent criticism is that which has confronted Honneth's idea of recognition (but also Taylor's, 1992) with that of redistribution, where political philosopher Nancy Fraser stands out in a dialogue she has sustained with Honneth (see, in particular, Fraser & Honneth, 2004). All of these areas, however significant they may be, always evoke an emancipatory path, be it more economic, in the order of redistribution, as Fraser wants, or more ethical, in the order of recognition, as Honneth wants. But what happens when the horizon of the discussion ceases to be the ethical or economic emancipation of the individual and becomes the resources and concrete practices of the individual, in other words, the technologies of the self, in the production of digitalised subjectivation?

Here I follow Brighenti (2007) in his apologia for visibility as a social category. It is clear that the visible has been problematised in numerous ways, generally in its association with power asymmetries. On the one hand, we can cite Foucault (1995) and the panoptic paradigm for disciplinary society; on the other, the spectacle as alienation, in Debord (1971), where the themes of consumerist massification and the fetishisation of commodities are the guiding lines of criticism of capitalist society. I believe, however, that none of these conceptualisations of visibility do justice to the current phenomenon. First of all, because while Debord's critique stands up to what he points out is the incessant proliferation of images mediated by advertising or, more generally, by the culture industries, it is difficult to keep up to date when it comes to diagnosing the uncritical passivity of individuals and the false sense of connection through communication. Of course, we can't blame Debord, because his analysis of the 1960s was quite correct for the time and remains relevant in many respects.

However - and herein lies the fundamental difference - for the situationist critics, and even more strongly for critical theory in general, the proliferation of images manifested by the culture industries, where these were not just entertainment, but ideology masquerading as entertainment (Adorno, 1991 [1972]), was indelibly linked to the atomisation and passivity of individuals that was characteristic of the "solitary multitude", as Riesman (1950) called it. The traces of a passive and indistinct atomisation shaped by the entertainment industry, which would strip man of his autonomy and creative capacity, were part of the diagnosis of the time.

This image began to be replaced in the early 70s. At the opposite end of the spectrum, another diagnosis of the time suggested that the consumerism and improved standard of living engendered by capitalist development would give rise to a society

of hedonists, concerned above all with the authenticity of individual experiences and the exploitation of pleasure. This ethos, according to this reading, would fatally compromise the capitalist ethos as seen by Weber, i.e. organised around strict conduct and institutionalised normativity (Bell, 1976). As a result of this disjunction between hedonistic impulses and Protestant demands, the world of work, and therefore the spirit of capitalism, risked being delegitimised.

At the same time, the theme of narcissism as a culture is well expressed in Lasch's (1979) book *The Culture of narcissism*. For Lasch, the radical transformations in North American society, especially in the family, and the concomitant increase in individualism, would have unleashed not the hedonist, but the pathological narcissist. The consequences of this pathology were the obsession with celebrity culture and the prioritisation of image over substance.

Both works focus exclusively on structural transformations and their psychological consequences in the United States of America. However, what both Bell and Lasch sought to do was analyse the first impacts of a more profound change in capitalism and its spirit: the emergence of a neoliberal society. Boltansky and Chiapello (2005) tried to show that neoliberalism didn't only have consequences for the organisation of work and economic trends in their aptly titled "Le Nouvell Esprit du Capitalisme". While the two previous works were markedly pessimistic, Boltansky and Chiapello's survey is ambiguous. Contrary to the conservative pessimism of the previous authors, the new spirit of capitalism freed itself from bourgeois values and, with declared irony in the face of the most defeatist predictions, absorbed the explosion of creativity, autonomy, individualisation and innovation that both Bell and Lasch thought were buried under the thoughtless and directionless emptiness of a society made up of hedonists or narcissists. However, this liberation was not without its price, materialised in insecurity and the impossibility of planning for the future.

What these authors were defining was something whose contours began to become visible with post-Fordism; I'm referring to a neoliberal subjectivation. This is not the place to define neoliberalism, because there are definitions that are more economic (Brenner, Harvey, 2005), more political (Jessop, 2002; Ong, 2006; Peck & Theodore, 2015), more cultural (Jameson, 1991) and, not least, more sociological and institutionalist (Crouch, 2011; Campbell & Pedersen, 2001). In other words, the analyses come from angles that are as varied as they are complementary. In any case, what Zuboff (2019) calls surveillance capitalism, shedding light on one area of the process, but which others have labelled "digital capitalism" (Stab & Thiel, 2022; Sevignani, 2024; Tornberg, 2023), marks a fundamental change in the structure and resources within neoliberalism. The focus on digital capitalism has fostered an interest in the new modes of subjectivation it produces, along with the transformations of the public sphere it induces.

Digitalisation infrastructures

Perhaps the most complete analysis of the new social and political symptoms has come from the pen of a philosopher (Lazzarato, 2014) and a sociologist (Reckwitz, 2020). In his *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, Lazzarato introduces the concept of capital as a “semiotic operator” that challenges the representational notion of the sign (or symbols, equally). In the context of the digitalization of the economy and digital capitalism, subjectivity has become a commodity.

Lazzarato calls for a new theory to explain how signs operate in the economy and in power structures, influencing material flows and the functions of machines. He challenges the traditional signifier-signified dualism, proposing that signs act as “sign operators” with direct impacts. In other words, the immense semiotic apparatus required by digital capitalism produces material and, more importantly, behavioural realities.

One of the most widespread examples of a “sign operator” would be the brand of a product and the way it is branded in the media, both traditional and social; with particular emphasis on the fact that our self - read: our identity - is manipulated and presented using mechanisms that mimic those of marketing.

On the other hand, Andreas Reckwitz’s (2020) book “The Society of Singularities” offers an in-depth exploration of the world of contemporary visibilities and affective markets. Firstly, the notion of the society of singularities should not be confused with Deleuze’s idea of singularity¹. Rather, the society of singularities is a society where the unique, the particular, the exuberant, are not just subjective drives, but have become social expectations. In this context, the subjectivation of the individual necessarily involves the demand for a performative self, which needs an audience(s) and whose authenticity is the measure of its acceptance in the digitalised and knowledge economy. In Reckwitz’s apt words, our lives “are not simply lived; they are carefully selected (curated, in the original)”.

To what extent does the logic of singularisation differ from the individualisation of which Giddens and Beck spoke? Firstly, because in the sense in which we use the term - singularisation - here, it goes far beyond individuals and extends to objects, spaces, temporalities and collectives (Reckwitz, 2020: 5). It is therefore a structural change in societies where the logic of producing the general is replaced by the particular across social relations and distributions. But Reckwitz doesn’t shy away from analysing the direct impacts that such a mutation has on the dynamics of subjectivation. To simplify Reckwitz’s complex argument, it is structured around three axes: self-actualization; hyperculture; singularisation.

We’ll briefly discuss each of them. Firstly, the challenge to self-actualisation is based on the postulate that motivated beings are better able to integrate the chal-

¹ We won’t go into this in depth here, something that Reckwitz himself refuses to do, emphasising that the way he uses the concept is entirely sociological.

lenges of the world. The expression had scientific backing through Maslow's positive psychology (1954 cit in Reckwitz, 2021: 116); but it has expanded to forms of self-actualization that are linked to the authenticity of experiences or their rarity. This is where the idea of hyperculture converges, a market-like space where cultural goods - ranging from works of art to the territories where you choose to live - acquire value according to their potential to compete for visibility, attractiveness and innovation. The hyperculture generated by globalised cultural capitalism privileges the exclusivity of experience or the identity symbolised by that experience. Both the obsession with self-actualization, with finding our true selves or being authentic to ourselves, and the kaleidoscope of cultural goods that promise to satisfy this, necessarily lead to singularisation. Allow me to quote at some length:

This process involves singularisation, because subjects don't strive for what is uniform or standardised, but for what is individual, special and not interchangeable - from particular neighbourhoods to tailor-made professional activities. The late-modern subject can only find fulfilment in the singular, in what is experienced as singular. And only what is experienced as singular (and not as something monotonous or standardised) seems authentic (Reckwitz, 2021: 117).

In this context, Reckwitz (2020, 2021) proposes three dynamics that are intrinsic to singularisation. On the one hand, late-modern subjects do not coincide with the extramundane behaviours of which Weber speaks when referring to certain religions. Self-actualization is accompanied by a desire for status, and in this sense, it is a self-actualization that is intended to be statutorily successful. In other words, people actively invest in their status by using the various forms of capital at their disposal. On the other hand, this self-actualization only gains value on the market of affections if it is performed. In other words, the optimisation of the self has to be backed up by the attractiveness it exerts in the various arenas where it seeks visibility. This is why Reckwitz analyses in detail the ambiguities and negative effects that the cultural structure of subjectivation in today's society has on individuals. I won't explore here the reasons Reckwitz identifies for why such a structure systematically causes the three pathologies he lists: depression, anxiety and aggression. The explanation is complex and cannot be taken *prima facie* with the simplicity that is offered here. However, it is worth noting that the damage they do to the mechanisms of subjectivation is fundamentally emotional. For this reason, the solutions proposed by Reckwitz to resist this cultural structure, which produces subjectivation, appear either as repetitions of existing historical dynamics, or as banalities resurfaced through this same "cultural machine". Without going on at length, the solutions advocated include a

de-economisation of the social, which leads to a recovery of the welfare state; access to psychoanalysis as a way of dealing with the paradoxes of subjectivation, which is an idea that we find at the heart of Habermas' work, if not in Freud; and finally, in order to contain this "self by excess" created by the cultural machine, a surrender to forms of Western Buddhism. It is precisely the lack of solutions that shows how such innocuous forms of resistance - such as those proposed by the author - can be extracted despite an excellent diagnosis.

However, I believe that it is precisely in the insistence on singularisation as a process disembodied from the dynamics of standardisation that we must complement Reckwitz's diagnosis. What I am proposing is that the dynamics of singularisation are not detachable - quite the opposite - from the colonisation (to use a well-known Habermasian term) of the logics of standardisation. On the contrary, they are mutually reinforcing, as I will try to show below.

Infinite repetition

The theme of repetition has been glossed over in countless theoretical, political and philosophical contributions. In a brief overview, it includes the idea of difference in repetition contained in Nietzsche's eternal return and recovered by Deleuze in his becoming-being. However, the point here is neither philosophical nor metaphysical - it is practical. First of all, it should be made clear that the notion of repetition that I associate with the cultural structure of late-modern society has nothing to do with the well-established concept of reproduction in sociology. In the latter sense, reproduction means the social process through which culture is reproduced between generations, through the socialising work of the main institutions, invariably imposing the cultural patterns of the dominant (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). In its structural-societal dimension, we would speak of social reproduction when not only culture, but also structures and institutions are reproduced through the generations. This is not how we understand the phenomenon of repetition.

On the other hand, it's not about phenomenal repetition, in the sense offered by ethnomethodologists, as reiterated and standardised practices that cognitively shape our actions. It should be added, however, that any one of them remains fundamental to understanding the functioning of societies and the actions of their individuals. However, repetition, in terms of the current historical situation, is of a different order.

Repetition is, contrary to Deleuze's premise, an illusory differentiation. It exists in contemporary societies in all social spheres. From the economy to aesthetics to politics, everything is a variation on the same elements, which remain identical to themselves despite the change of actors. In other words, the practical premises are iteratively identical, in an endless compulsion.

From pop music to political rhetoric, the repetition of the same formulas structures the framework of meanings. What is relevant is that under the guise of this repetition of the formula, usually a formula that works in various contexts and is

therefore reproducible in a wide range of social situations, is that it promises an unprecedented diversity of choice. The game is based on this premise: selection is presented as unlimited and therefore the capacity for choice is perceived as endless. However, what underlies it is the false novelty of the repeated formula.

If we investigate the narratives that are being offered to us at breakneck speed, we realise that almost all of them start from the same premises and invariably find similar solutions. It's obvious that it's not possible to produce such a large number of narratives, whose purpose is to be systematically replaced by something new, without falling into insanely repetitive behaviour.

If we take into account the myriad audiovisual production centres - in music, television, marketing, etc - we see the same phenomenon. There is no doubt that there is a paradox here: it is through the voracious differentiation of the offer that the reproduction of the same is generated. Such a process can be seen in cultural products as diverse as talk shows, morning programmes on the most listened-to radio stations, news blocks, music production, and an infinite number of consumer objects (cultural and non-cultural).

But this urgency responds to a dissemination machine that needs to fill in the gaps in order for its existence to last. This is why there is an optimised match between the excess of creations (which are not creative at all) and the appropriation of this excess by the mediapolis dissemination machine, as Silverstone (2007) puts it. Here too, repetition is dressed up as the promise of the new. Curiously, when the formula is successful, the bet is on mimicry that is refracted by countless dissemination platforms. For example, the talk shows that we watch every morning have the same format and use the same thematic order on every television channel in the world. The competitions that seek to discover spontaneously-generated stars are the same in China, the United States and Portugal. Likewise, their participants are expected to mobilise the same scripts and performances.

The much-vaunted reference to the "world of strangers"² is just a convenient pretext. The most widespread phenomenon of the "excessive self" society is precisely that of levelling any potential strangeness at known formulas that can be immediately integrated into our cognitive structure. This is why the odes to diversity appearing worldwide are fundamentally a palimpsest for a world in which imitation and redundancy are the most common cultural and social forms. So, there's nothing unknown about the strange. And nothing diverse, apart from the multiple ways in which mimicry can create substitutes.

Organisations, for their part, have become the realm of the ancillary. We are surrounded by useless acts and objects. A proliferation of unnecessary objects and signs

² The reference appears in a multitude of works and commentaries on today's society. I'll mention just a few declinations of the same principle here. We find expressions as varied as "Ethics in a world of strangers" (Appiah), "In the land of strangers" (Ash Amin), "Strangers at our door" (Bauman, 2016); "Strangers in our midst" (Miller, 2016). This is just a pale image of the spread of the idea of the "unknown", of the strange, because it is present in our discursive universe on a daily basis.

has accompanied the marketisation of the social bond and institutional belonging. Meaning is constructed on the horizon of what is dispensable. We have too many words, surplus connections, activities multiplied by the identical. Organisations are the social context in which these procedures are implemented and reproduced. In order to justify their productivity, work groups and teams have become specialists in duplicating activities, solutions and procedures. Absolutely functional formulas and models are replaced because the logic of multiplicative productivity demands it. In this way, for no immediately discernible reason, mechanised habits are displaced into new cognitive territories where a new learning process is imposed. Ideology provides the justification according to which we are condemned to keep pace with innovations if we don't want to be overtaken technically and labour-wise. However, as the system is organised through blind multiplication, falling behind is a constant part of the routine of participating in organisational systems.

However, we are still left with an inescapable feeling of the uselessness of this systematic innovative drive. In work teams - which themselves multiply at the speed of thematisation - the pressure to innovate is built into each member simply because they belong to a work team. Permanent vigilance seems to hang over the heads of the members, even though hierarchical systems have been replaced by much more flexible, heterarchical forms. But if it's not the stern gaze of the direct boss that creates anxiety, what is it?

The dominant gaze, or rather the gaze of those in control, has been replaced by an invisible hierarchy that is perhaps much more effective and forceful. The parameterization of work, emotional and educational practices, etc., through increasingly sophisticated and present evaluation systems, means that the subject is constantly self-monitoring. In fact, they become their own greatest censor. What Zuboff (2019) calls "surveillance capitalism" is nothing more than a broad set of coordination, rectification and reproduction practices incorporated into capitalist exchange mechanisms. Under the guise of indeterminate choices accessible to individuals, resulting from the expansion and intensification of interdependencies between structural places, surveillance capitalism increasingly seizes the (still?) private share of personal lives. In other words, through devices that create intensified visibilities (Foucault, 1995), such as Facebook, Instagram, or purchases on platforms with a high concentration of the commodification of life, such as Amazon, the behaviour and cognitive capacities of individuals are surreptitiously tracked under the guise of permanent communicational connection and equality in the mechanisms of identity construction. To put it more succinctly: individuals participate in such devices on the assumption that they have equivalent and unambiguous access to the communicational and biological means that construct identity and the various ways of belonging to the world. This appearance of mobilising and managing complexity, inscribed in our own beliefs and practices, allows us to choose (?) to participate in this same organ-

isation of behaviour without being aware of its consequences. But is the act really so unconscious, almost akin to the discourse of false consciousness, as critics such as Zuboff (2019) or Lipovetsky (2017) would have us believe? For the latter, for example, “surveillance capitalism” takes the form of “seduction capitalism” where seduction techniques permeate not only hyper-consumption practices, but also those of hyper-identification. However, there isn’t really an antagonism between the two forms of capitalism as envisaged by these two authors. On the contrary, if surveillance capitalism, according to Zuboff, stems from a pattern of scientificising practices in the sense of their organisation and consumerist standardisation (the chapter dedicated to Skinner and his studies on human behaviour is illustrative of this), seduction capitalism, in Lipovetsky’s sense, stages the total personalisation of consumer practices, the original individualisation of desires, permanent diversification as a system of involvement. Lipovetsky’s characterisation is entirely appropriate to the conditions of the social organisation of taste when we look at the proliferation of streaming platforms (for music, films, series, games, etc.), the excess supply - and rivalry - between brands. But perhaps we need to sociologise his vision a little and resort to understandings that are now considered classic. Against the total exposure to the new, in which taste is entangled in individualised choices that are not disputed by collective belonging, we can perhaps think of this capitalism of seduction as riddled with the same asymmetries, and even antagonisms, that we infer from his classic interpretation.

Having said that, we should be wary, in both their versions, of bringing the practices of the individual closer to the idea of false consciousness. For both Zuboff and Lipovetsky, the individual is a “cultural dope” - to borrow an expression from Garfinkel (1991) - who acts like an automaton, either caught in the behavioural trap or in the incessant seduction of marketised capitalism. Instead, I propose that we see any of these practices as reflections of a deeply involved, immersive and, above all, conscious activity on the part of individuals. All we have to do is think that for every consumer enraptured by the first fruits of consumerist seduction, there is a producer who is actively and daily involved in creating that same effect. And this applies to both the most trivial and the most technical and specialised occupations. There is no outside place for involvement in capitalist productivity. And this, in turn, does not exist as the false consciousness of a class, in the sense of a system of ideas that would reverse the real interests of the process of capitalist reproduction, whether for a dominant or dominated class (Marx, 1982 [1859]). In the same way, there is no (dialectical) resolution of this reversal of interests, in the case of the dominated class, or ignorance of their real situation, in the case of the dominant class. This is why the attempts by great thinkers like Žižek or Badiou to “wake up” the masses are unfounded. If the work of decoding the relations of capitalist domination (even if they are now no longer restricted to “material relations”) were effective and effi-

cient, the construction of a new code, such as that of the authors mentioned, or that of Reckwitz, would be enough.

But this is not the case. Because, whether we are aware of its existence or not, with a greater or lesser degree of concern about its consequences, we are, with greater or lesser involvement, daily agents of its reproduction. I use the word agent to emphasise that our involvement is active, i.e. it is not only subjective, as the application of the notion of action (Weber) would suggest, and much less pre-reflective, as might be considered if we were to resort here to the idea of habituated practice (Bourdieu, 1977). In the sense used here, our involvement is intentional and predicative. This means that it forms part of our projects and defines who we are. Competition, or multiple competitions, have been incorporated into the most banal practices: from sporting activities between friends, to the obligation to exceed objectives set by organisational departments. We live in a society in which competition is the horizon of meaning in our daily practical lives.

And this is where the project of self-promotion is linked - what, to quote Reckwitz, I called - to structures and dynamics of compulsive repetition.

Is resistance still possible?

The first thing we have to reject is the notion that something outside commands personal actions. This “outside”, which takes on the dimension of an impenetrable Moloch in the version of surveillance capitalism, must be rejected as a good perspective for the re-emergence of bureaucratic structures. And this despite the fact that the exposition elaborated here is in many respects faithful to the thesis of surveillance capitalism. For example, it is agreed that contrary to the randomness promised in the processes of the marketisation of life, we are witnessing the complexification of the mechanisms for creating certainty and the routinisation of behaviour on an unprecedented scale. What Zuboff (2019:) calls “instrumentism” as a project of total certainty; in absolute contradiction to the idea of freedom and contingency of market forces. The problem is when the mobilising factor is referred to a phantasmagorical category called “the surveillance capitalists”. Much of Zuboff’s project has affinities with the Marcuse of the 60s. She herself does not deny her debt to the master of the thesis of technological domination. In fact, the premise is quite similar: technology in itself is not the problem; it’s the uses we make of it that turn it into a mechanism of domination. Therefore, just as Marcuse still had the inevitability of false consciousness, Zuboff also has something similar that places us all as victims of the behavioural manipulation orchestrated by the “surveillance capitalists”. But since we are all victims of these manipulative processes, who are the manipulators? We learn that Google and Facebook have a privileged place in the constitution of the nightmare (I leave out Microsoft, although the author includes it, because I have some reservations about putting it in the same category). The point, however, is that without the participation

of individuals, manipulation is no longer possible; we could even say that individual material constitutes the fuel for the giant machine of surveillance capitalism to run on. But are we really so innocent as fuel?

We work hard, sometimes as consumers and sometimes as producers, to reproduce surveillance capitalism. In reality, we work actively in pursuit of instant gratification, the greatest potential choice, what the new generation of millennials, less inclined to contemplation, call “goal diggers”. The pun is full of resonance, not least because the gold diggers of old often suffered from what has aptly been dubbed “gold fever”. The search for the precious metal was so obsessive and disturbing that their behaviour was feverish. Aren’t we, or rather our goal diggers, in the same obsessive frenzy in pursuit of results? If fulfilling goals is the new gold, it’s because this fulfilment of the task doesn’t end there. Achieving goals has its equivalent in material benefits - not just subjective or emotional ones - but also in terms of exposure, self-promotion of the self; ultimately in terms of valuing and making that self visible.

According to an external survey by Deloitte, 84 per cent of millennials in the United States in 2021 said they were suffering from burnout in their current job, compared to 77 per cent of all respondents. It doesn’t matter which age cohort you belong to - two thirds of the workers surveyed suffer from burnout. So where is this “general intellect” that Hardt and Negri promised as a solution to the problem of imperium? In other words, its overcoming by the “common” as the new telos of the “general intellect” foreshadowed in Marx’s *Grundrisse*. Two critical aspects of Hardt and Negri’s reading should be emphasised.

Firstly, the commonality of the multitude is in reality a social fiction. For Hardt and Negri, the multitude is not made up of individuals, but rather of singularities (apud. Deleuze...). In their relations of communication and co-operation, these singularities produce the social. However, the authors say, under current conditions, the production of the social is in excess of any institutionalisation that could reduce it to a unit: neither a people (a unitary political reality subjugated to a nation and therefore to a sovereign plan), nor a mass (an undifferentiated and atomised reality), they are a multiplicity of creative singularities. For the authors, the multitude is no longer delimitable according to modern institutional categories. In this sense, “the multitude produces monsters, hybrids and anomalies”, which, although they disturb the production of the social, tend towards self-organisation. As Žižek (2009: 141) says, this conception reproduces “the post-Hegelian matrix of the productive flow that is always in excess of the structural totality that tries to control and subjugate it”. And he concludes, redefining the order of causality, that we are dealing with the excess of the capitalist network over the productive flow of the multitude.

Secondly, it is absolutely a priori to consider that networked knowledge is emancipatory in itself. The authors assume, wrongly as far as we are concerned, that the commons will free our drives and affections from capitalist competition. The objectivisation of relationships envisaged by Simmel (2004), in which the total person-

ality was not called upon to participate, is currently unjustified. This idea is more appropriate for bureaucracies, but with the new immaterialities in the labour market, hyper-diverse capitalism demands that the total personality enter the relationship. In fact, it opens the Pandora's box of total involvement of the psyche. And in this sense, rather than the need to regulate this distance in relationships of interest, we have its total fusion; the psyche is called upon to intervene with all its impulses and fantasies. Negri and Hardt can only be wrong when they see emancipatory capacities in the *general intellect*. What happens, however, is different: through the networks that produce individualised knowledge about the individual - such as Facebook or Instagram - there is a total fusion between objective competences and personal issues, to speak like Simmel. Hyper-diverse capitalism demands it, and the emancipatory capacity of the general intellect, of networked knowledge, which goes by the name of multitude, can be, and is, a mere reproduction of the spiral that sucks the most recondite corners of the psyche into the instrumental relationship that seeks to multiply profit. Negri and Hardt would have realised this if they had continued their reflection during the explosion of social networks. Perhaps they didn't because they realised that their model was fundamentally mistaken, and that the diagnosis put forward by Reckwitz or Rosa (2021; 2013) is much better suited to contemporary society than the Marxian "allgemeiner Verstand" now embodied in the immanent form of the "commons".

However, neither the cultural solutions proposed by Reckwitz, nor the great immanent revolution coming from the digital world, prophesied by Hardt and Negri, serve as a guide for change. On the other hand, the proposals for a return to the community have a fascistic timbre that is embodied in the re-emergence of the far right, its programmes and symbols. Behind the loud calls for a homeland and an original purity lie exactly the same mechanisms of accelerating capitalist dynamics that Rosa (2013) talks about and that we have characterised here in some of their aspects. They are just rhetorically diverted towards false objects, in other words, using an expression by Coser (1965), they are unrealistic conflicts.

The other resistance on offer is that of countering the movement, something that was proposed in Taguieff's book "Résister au bougisme" (2001), where the criticism of technological and economic globalisation, in what the author calls "bougisme", stems from an attitude that unthinkingly values the movement and change that accompanies the techno-commodification of global neoliberalism. A return to community and strong democracy seems to be the solution advocated by the author.

The problem, in my judgement, is that there is no longer an outside to resist. Never has the implication and interchangeability between the place of producer and consumer been so complete and extensive as it is today. Whether it's the projection of a historical subject such as class, or the imaginary institution of new hierarchies that foster autonomy and self-government (Castoriadis, 1975), these are mere misconceptions in the face of the total implication of the subject in its "forme enterprise", to use an expression by Foucault (2011:148); in other words, making the

market and competition the formative power of society and the subject.

On the other hand, the “social question” has been appropriated by right-wing conservatism, in a mystification of labour problems underpinned by total adherence to the mechanisms of the “entrepreneurial subject”, i.e. neoliberalism. However, it seems that those who would be the victims of the irresolution of the “social question” are the first to reject the possibilities of thinking about redistribution and a return to security, opting instead for an uncritical adherence to the privatisation of the social. The reason seems relatively simple: people don’t think like critical theorists, but act like accumulators of likes in the infrastructure of digitalisation.

Foucault (2010) describes the mode of governmentality of “subjects” who must think and produce themselves as actors in their own attributions, so that domination arises from the subjects themselves (self-exploitation, self-domination). The actions of the user, worker and consumer are invested with knowledge, practices and norms - whether sociological, psychological, managerial or disciplinary - that request, encourage and motivate the production of individuals, as entrepreneurial selves.

The most effective resistance would be resistance to ourselves. Resistance to our narcissistic compulsion in attractiveness markets (which are by no means exhausted by beauty!). Attractiveness markets aim for recognition, but it’s a specific model of recognition, a model dictated by visibility and the search for a permanently extended audience. They are also markets that, as Reckwitz (2021: 99) puts it, have a “Winner-take-all markets” structure, leaving a multitude of “default individuals” around them, in Castel’s (2009) apt phrase. However, why resist ourselves if primary narcissism - the so-called *amour propre* that is indispensable for a healthy development of the ego - can only be guaranteed by the machine of valorisation and visibility that is the digitalisation of the self?

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