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WHO AM I? SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE SOCIETY OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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WHO AM I?

SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE SOCIETY OF ACCOUNTABILITY

By

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Abstract

The doctoral thesis *Who Am I? Subjectivities in the Society of Accountability* aims to demonstrate that accountability is one of the most powerful processes of subjectivation in our contemporary era. The background is constituted by ordinary daily practices, born from the propagation of digital media in the last twenty years. Accountability is defined as the peculiar anthropotechnic that derives from the extension of the subject in the form of the account. Account is defined as every extension of the subject in the digital world, so that these extensions are univocally attributable to a singular physical body of a singular human being. The concept of subjectivity is considered as outlined by Michel Foucault in the period 1977-1984. The dissertation also aims to demonstrate that the society of control, investigated by Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, finds its present fulfillment in the form of the society of accountability. Accountability is considered in three moments, connected by a circular movement instead of a causal sequence. The first moment describes how dispositives act on subjects. The scene of address is constituted by the request of performativity made by dispositives to the subject. This request takes place in the account, to be understood as the interface between dispositives and subjects. Secondly, the same process is taken in consideration from the point of view of the subject, who is

invited to answer the question: Who am I? Thus the subject understands him/herself as a subjectivity without ground, because the hermeneutics of the self, derived from dispositives, finds the foreclosure of the referent as its foundation. In a third moment accountability is considered from the point of view of the statements (*énoncés*). The conversion of statements into information, and the statistical inferences operated on it (basically, the processes related to big data), are the focus of this moment. The outcome of this analysis is a second hermeneutics of the subject, characterised by the discourse of the master. Convergences and divergences between this (digital) hermeneutics, the Christian hermeneutics derived from the confession and the Cartesian moment are explored in order to outline the actual accountability as pastoral power and discourse of the master at the same time. In conclusion, accountability is considered as a possible ethics. If anomie and anonymity are excluded as far as they exclude the scene of address, and consequently the very possibility of existence of a *bios*, the valorisation of opacity is identified as the grounding of a possible ethical action based on freedom, an exercise of freedom to be understood as resilience to the complete panoptical visibility and the consequential proceduralisation of the scene of address.

List of Contents

Not predicting, but being attentive to the unknown knocking at the door.

Gilles Deleuze

To Mia and Novak, kids.

Introduction

The Banality of the Digital

This thesis is about ethics and, specifically, about the ethical issues generated by the digital world that the contemporary human being faces nowadays. The preliminary assumption that fuelled this research when it started some years ago, was that an anthropological change has taken place, and that the cause of this anthropological change was situated in the eruption of the digital medium, and in all of the brand new practices that it had generated. Now, only a few years later, the preliminary assumption about this change has been completely revised. In fact, through the careful reading of Michel Foucault,[1] I decided to abandon the cumbersome, and not very fruitful adjective "anthropological" in favour of a new approach based on a different conceptual research tool: the practices of subjectivation. The initial question, therefore, moved from: *Which anthropological change has been generated by the digital world?* to *What processes of subjectivation arose from the practices induced by digital media surrounding the contemporary human being*?

However, research willing to answer this question risks being almost endless. The pervasiveness of the digital medium in our contemporary

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[1] Michel Foucault is discussed so widely throughout this dissertation, that it is not considered appropriate to give here any reference.

world is too extensive and its features too various—indeed a sharp eye can see the presence of the digital medium in every moment and every aspect of the daily life of the contemporary human being—that the purview of this dissertation cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of the digital. A lifetime would not be enough.

Consequently, the field of research was reconsidered and differently outlined. This review has led to the identification of a specific practice of subjectivation among many possible practices, "accountability".[2] The notion of accountability has allowed the setting up of a plane of immanence[3] deeply connected to the digital world. A series of operational concepts has been placed on that new plane of immanence in order to produce an isomorphism between the general context of the research, its object of investigation and the specific method applied. The text that follows argues that accountability is one of the main operative processes of subjectivation in the contemporary world, thus the subtitle of the dissertation proposes that the contemporary era should be defined as *society of accountability*. The society of accountability hence follows the disciplinary societies of the 19th century and the recent society of control, rooted in the second half of the 20th century. Proving that we live in the society of accountability is one of the primary aims of this

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[2] The reason why accountability has been taken into account instead of other practices is fully explained in this dissertation.

[3] The notion of plane of immanence is here derived from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1996).

dissertation. The writer, who is not a native English speaker, has had the task of working out a polysemic and elusive concept such as accountability;[4] for instance in the first chapter of this dissertation the term is stressed in order to build a possible analogy between the nouns accountability and account (in a digital sense). Due to the absence of appropriate literature on the digital account, the analogy is only partially demonstrated. Nevertheless, the reader is asked to accept this analogy, at least in terms of postulate or heuristic tool. The benefits deriving from this analogy will be further explored in the following chapters.

The beginning of this introduction states that this research deals with ethics. The text that follows doesn't aim to provide a strict definition of ethics, such as the one deriving from the classic tripartition between politics (state affairs), ethics (the community affairs) and moral (the individual affairs). Ethics is here understood as the set of processes of subjectivation generated from the relationship between the single human being and the environment that surrounds him or her. Elements of this environment are: other human beings, the living world, the not-living world and technology. Consequently, the ethics that this dissertation discusses is consequently the relationship between the individual and the ecological *niche* he or she inhabits. Within this niche—the second

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[4] Please note that the Romance languages do not have a specific word to translate accountability. In fact, within all the Italian and French publications taken into account in this dissertation the word is never translated.

purpose of this dissertation—a specific focus is placed on all forms of

relationships that involve, in any way, the digital medium.[5]

One will find quite often the expressions *processes of subjectivation* and

contemporary age in this text. As for the second term, this dissertation is

the output of a research developed at the beginning of the third

millennium and related to what is happening in the current context, *here*

and now. This research does not deal with essentialism and invariance; it

is expression of the *épisteme*[6] of this time, in which it resides and from

which it is derived. This approach led to two methodological problems.

The first concerns the content of the research. Since contemporary

technological acceleration will soon cause many digital objects to

become obsolete,[7] selecting references in the digital world is quite

difficult. While waiting for the appearance of the next big thing on the

horizon, social media—which has dominated the digital practices of the

last decade—has been selected as privileged object. But only a few

references about specific cases will be provided. They will be

appropriate, precise and detailed so that a future reader of this

dissertation can still understand the text's references.

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[5] The meanings of digital medium and digital world are clearly illustrated in the first
chapter.

[6] The épisteme is a basic notion of the Foucauldian production (Foucault 1982, 2002a).

[7] Two examples, paradigmatic for this obsolescence, are: the decline of portals (in
vogue in the Nineties) and the collapse of *Second Life*, which no more than ten years
ago was supposed to be a second world, similar and fascinating as the physical one.

The second problem relates to the setting of the research: the contemporary age. When Kant writes *An Answer to the Question: "What Is Enlightenment?"*(2010), he revolutionises the philosophical method because, instead of an investigation about what is universal or immutable, philosophy for the first time attempts to offer an answer to the question: *What do I have in front of my eyes, here and now?* In other words: *What is the present time in which I live?* The present time provides some additional methodological difficulties compared to what is invariant in time, because the writer lives in the present time. In a certain way, *the writer is the present time*. What kind of perspective can be assumed that will allow the researcher to describe that in which the perspective itself is immersed?[8] We will leave this question open for the time being, as it will reappear several times during the dissertation.

The processes of subjectivation are the first roots of this research. These processes result from the set of practices that a human carries out in relation to the environment that surrounds him/her, in order to establish him/herself as a person: a self-definition and differentiation from the others. The subjectivations—which are always single and plural at the same time—are ongoing and unstable processes that make each human being what he or she is. These definitions of the human being are never sharp, essentialist or immutable. On the contrary, they are always tied to

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[8] The question can be expressed also in this way: *How can the fish know the water in which it swims?*

the *here and now* that everyone experiences in a given time: this peculiar thing is happening to me here and now, but the processes of subjectivation could make me different in the future. And the processes of subjectivation are never distinctly divided, but constantly intersect with one another in the modelling the subject: my use of public transportation, my workplace that I travel to with this public transportation, the lectures I deliver at the academy where I teach and the education that led me to the books necessary for this research. These things are all forms of a relationship with the environment that generates the subject. Always fluctuating and unstable, it is the one who is saying: *I*.

No process of subjectivation is harmless and without consequences. However, I do not aim to establish any categorisation about values in this dissertation and will avoid defining good or bad processes of subjectivation. Yet a thesis that deals with ethics cannot avoid the matter of freedom, a question that is deeply tied to the contemporary age. This dissertation does not seek to offer a comprehensive illustration of the principle that human beings are supposed to be suffocated by dispositives that model him/her in the new millennium—a scenario in which the ethical imperative of freedom resonates repeatedly. A psychiatrist like Miguel Benasayag emphasises the sadness—in the form of despair and disintegration—that characterises modern human beings, especially the adolescent (2003). Peter Sloterdijk has titled his recent book *You Must*

Change Your Life (2013), an invitation to perform freedom. Giacomo Marramao (2012) illustrates that the fracture generated by the difference between the ground we walk upon, always local, and the world of signs that we inhabit, increasingly global, is an issue that creates an abyss of sense—even amplified by digital medium. Gilles Deleuze wrote about thirty years ago: 'It is in man himself that we must liberate life, since man himself is a form of imprisonment of man' (1988, 92).

The notion of a society of accountability seeks to test this theoretical denial of freedom (with all the consequences deriving from this denial), to first assess whether the denial of freedom is really happening, and secondly to ascertain which strategies of freedom can be brought into play. The act of reading is sometimes suggested as solution, for example. Michel Houellebecq makes the protagonist of *Whatever* (2011) dream of a life dedicated to reading. The a-topic space of the act of reading— which isolates the subject from the ecological niche in which s/he lives— looks like a partial and inadequate response to the problem, but it is interesting that it is expressed as a potential answer. Likewise, another answer is the contemplative freedom of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who is lying on a boat lulled by the waves on the lake of Biel in Switzerland completely abandoned to his *rêverie* (Rousseau 2011, reported in Sloterdijk 2015). Sloterdijk (2011) also suggests the state of apparent death as a possible solution, as practiced by Snow White and all philosophers who abstract themselves from the contingent and wander

around in the hyperuranium. The act of reading, rêverie, attests to apparent death: certainly an interesting practice, but hardly workable and, above all, only a partial response that is far from daily practices. In fact, daily practices are something else, the processes of subjectivation at work in the contemporary era are different (nobody is supposed to know anyone that when asked: *Who are you ?* would answer: *I'm a person lying on a boat and looking at the sky*). So the question that guides this research could be expressed at this point as follows: *What processes of subjectivation allow a practice of freedom, within the set of practices induced by digital media that surround the modern human being?*

To answer this question, a fundamental overview shall be outlined. Thus the basis of this research is the banal, the everyday, and the known. Nietzsche (1997) observed more than a century ago that one is so used to the "known" that it no longer creates wonder. What is known is the usual, something that is more difficult to recognise, that is: something that is more difficult to consider as a problem, as foreign, distant, located outside. Of course extraordinary events sometimes occur (although an Italian writer, Ennio Flaiano, stated: *The meaningful days of a life are four or five; others make up the numbers*), and only exceptional events are deposited in the memory. But they are not relevant in this research, which instead investigates the insignificant. Why? Because it is the trivial and banal that give shape to everyday life. Everyday life determines the trivial—and the subject usually has no consciousness of the power of the

trivial. Thus, the banal, which models and conditions everyday life comprises the fundament of this research. And, in the realm of banal, the unnoticed and ubiquitous ordinary practices induced by digital media are investigated. Following Arendt (2010), the aim of this dissertation is an analysis of the banality of digital.

Subject and Power

The digital is perhaps trivial, but it is definitely not innocent. Innocence is not understood here as pertaining to the moral sphere. On the contrary, the lack of innocence is due to the close link with relations of power. In order to explain the relations of power—and thus to provide one of the conceptual milestones of this dissertation—it is useful to briefly outline *Subject and Power*, the transcript of a conference held by Michel Foucault in 1982, which was immediately published in English in the compendium *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Dreyfus 1983). In this text, subject and power are argued and twisted in a way that undergirds this research, and will provide important context for this survey on accountability.

As the text was one of the writings from the last years of Foucault's life, the author himself provides us with an analysis of his intellectual journey.

After the famous opening words 'the ideas which I would like to discuss here represent neither a theory nor a methodology' (208), Foucault exposes the general sense of his entire research: 'My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. My work has dealt with three modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects'[9] (208). At the beginning of his career, Foucault sought to understand 'modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of science'. This phase was followed by a time in which he focused on what he calls "dividing practices" (between normal and crazy, sick and healthy, criminal and just). The third moment of investigation, which Foucault claimed to follow when he convened the conference *Subject and Power*, is 'the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject'. (208) He concluded this introduction by saying: 'Thus it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research' (209).

In the following paragraph the French philosopher has the need to justify how power and the subject are related, why in a survey on the subject the theme of power should appear. Foucault says: 'It soon appeared to me that, while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very

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[9] This statement is a clear answer to all the superficial readers of the French thinker, who have accused him of frequent discontinuity in his conceptual development. The reply provided by Foucault is peremptory: his purpose was the constant investigation of what one calls the *subject*.

complex' (209). Hence the inquiry about the subject cannot, according to Foucault, be reduced to a theoretical investigation that includes the question—already Socratic, Cartesian, Kantian—: *What is the subject?* but it must take into account the reality of relations of power that innervate the subject. Knowledge and power come to be two sides of the same coin.

Foucault does not aim to provide only a conceptual definition of power. He seeks to analyse power in the forms in which it is practiced in order to bring to light an economy of power, as well as to understand power in both a theoretical sense (what it is) and practical sense (how it is exercised). The French author detects a crucial historical moment in the development of the practices of power at the end of the 18th century. [10] He claims, 'from the same moment—that is, since the development of the

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[10] Some years before this work, Foucault was already explaining his own articulated notion of power: 'Now, the study of this micro-physics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to 'appropriation,' but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege,' acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. This means that these relations go right down into the depths of society, that they are not localized in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes and that they do not merely reproduce, at the level of individuals, bodies, gestures and behaviour, the general form of the law or government; that, although there is continuity (they are indeed articulated on this form through a whole series of complex mechanisms), there is neither analogy nor homology, but a specificity of mechanism and modality.' (1995, 26–27)

modern state and the political management of society—the role of philosophy is also to keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality. Which is a rather high expectation' (210). Why does Foucault take political rationality as a ground for the study of the role of power in the processes of subjectivation? At the time of the conference, he had just devoted a couple of courses at the Collège de France to examining this conjunction (2009; 2010), in order to understand how, at the end of the process triggered by the political rationality, there is the ordinary life of all human beings. The political economy of the state had created a certain type of societies—disciplinary societies—in which individuals are subjected to laws and norms that shape them. Those laws and norms and regulations generated microphysics of power that builds the ordinary. Foucault describes the return of the ordinary: 'Everybody is aware of such banal facts. But the fact that they're banal does not mean they don't exist. What we have to do with banal facts is to discover—or try to discover—which specific and perhaps original problem is connected with them' (1983, 210). The French philosopher clearly states in the following paragraphs that it is not the political rationality itself that must be to be placed in question: the fact that one had Auschwitz must not lead to execrate the rationalisation itself, or even to the prohibition of reason (an attitude that would only be a source of sterile irrationalism). He otherwise suggests a possible alternative method of investigation that may escape the above-mentioned risk:

I would like to suggest another way to go further towards a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. (210-211)[11]

Although Foucault has established the relationship between the subject and power, and it has been identified a field—or historical moment—for research, which is represented by the advent of political rationality about two centuries ago, the urgency of this investigation has not yet been explained. Foucault briefly argues for the need for further study: 'I think we have to refer to much more remote processes if we want to understand how we have been trapped in our own history' (210). In this passage the key word is trapped: the condition of prisoners. Even if a kind of pessimism lurks beneath Foucault's discourse, a historic trap is nonetheless to be understood here—both in a contingent manner (relative to this historical moment), as well as in its absolute sense. Is it possible for an individual to escape the historical time to which s/he belongs? Furthermore, is it possible to bring to light practices of freedom that allow one to evade getting ensnared in this historical moment? This is

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[11] This assumption is one of the guidelines of this research. Accountability is seen as a specific process of subjectivation, and the field in which it is applied is the digital world.

both the profound ethical question that Foucault proposes in this short

essay, as well as the ambition of this dissertation.

After a few passages dedicated to the analysis of some possible forms of

resistance to power, Foucault then outlines the question of the subject in

a famous passage:

> All these present struggles revolve around the question: Who
> are we? They are a refusal of these abstractions, of economic
> and ideological state violence which ignore who we are
> individually, and also a refusal of a scientific or
> administrative inquisition which determines who one is. (…)
> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life
> which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own
> individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law
> of truth on him which he must recognize and which others
> have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes
> individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word
> *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence,
> and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-
> knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which
> subjugates and makes subject to. (210)

Here Foucault summarises three years of courses held at the Collège de

France. The answer to the question: *Who are we?* is never innocent.

Whether the individual is conscious of it or not, the answer to this

question is constituted by the outputs of the regimes of truth that act on

the subject and of the dispositives by which the subject is modelled. The

state in first place, furnished with the rationalising violence that it bears;

but also family, school, work: any element inside the position in which

the subject lives. The verbs used by the French philosopher are quite

drastic: *mark, attach, impose*. Operated by the forms of power, the

regimes of truth tend to crystallise the individual as an understandable

subject, recognisable by him/herself and others, substantialised. In other

words, easily quantifiable and quantified: a subject that is easier to make

predictable and, therefore, to govern. If a complete disappearance from

the regimes of truth is impossible,[12] understanding them, which could

possibly provoke a detachment from the power relations that innervate

them, stands as an ethical imperative. Thus, at the end one finds a subject

who cannot be completely subjected (by forms of power, regimes of

truth), but who can utilise practices of freedom as a form of

resilience/resistance to actual forms of subjugation. Foucault's

conceptual acumen has earned him a position as one of the most

important philosophers of the latter half of the 20th century. His thinking

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[12] In this point Foucault differs from contemporary authors like Jürgen Habermas and Jean-Paul Sartre. In a very pertinent comment about Habermas, Foucault says: 'The idea that there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints or coercive effects, seems utopian to me. This is precisely a failure to see that power relations are not something that is bad in itself, 'that we have to break free of.' I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible.' (1997, 298) And then, questioned about Sartre: 'Power is not evil. Power is games of strategy. We all know that power is not evil! For example, let us take sexual or amorous relationships: to wield power over the other in a sort of open-ended strategic game where the situation may be reversed is not evil; it's a part of love, of passion and sexual pleasure. And let us take, as another example, something that has often been rightly criticized—the pedagogical institution. I see nothing wrong in the practice of a person who, knowing more than others in a specific game of truth, tells those others what to do, teaches them, and transmits knowledge and techniques to them. The problem in such practices where power—which is not in itself a bad thing—must inevitably come into play is knowing how to avoid the kind of domination effects where a kid is subjected to the arbitrary and unnecessary authority of a teacher, or a student put under the thumb of a professor who abuses his authority. I believe that this problem must be framed in terms of rules of law, rational techniques of government and ethos, practices of the self and of freedom.' (298-299)

is able to connect two radical questions that the individual might pose to him or herself and arrive at the same conclusion: *Who are we?* and *How do we live our world?*

This possibility to combine such different questions would seem unreasonable, if Foucault hadn't argued shortly thereafter that the Western world has subsumed in the power of the State a form of power older than the state itself: the pastoral power of Christianity. For all human beings and for the single individual, *omnes et singulatim*:

> This is due to the fact that the modern Western state has integrated in a new political shape, an old power technique which originated in Christian institutions. We can call this power technique the pastoral power. (…)
>
> This word designates a very special form of power.
>
> 1) It is a form of power whose ultimate aim is to assure individual salvation in the next world.
>
> 2) Pastoral power is not merely a form of power which commands; it must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock. Therefore, it is different from royal power, which demands a sacrifice from its subjects to save the throne .
>
> 3) It is a form of power which does not look after just the whole community, but each individual in particular, during his entire life.
>
> 4) Finally, this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people' s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.
>
> This form of power is salvation oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblative (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked

with a production of truth—the truth of the individual himself. (Dreyfus 1983, 213-214)

This dissertation aims to show that accountability is a contemporary form of remediation of pastoral power. If not all features of pastoral power can be retraced in accountability, the question of the production of the truth of the subject,[13] the need for accounting of this truth and the ability of directing consciousnesses are proper elements of accountability. Found in the digital world, these elements provide a fertile ground for growth.

Workplan

This dissertation comprises an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. The chapters are meant to be read consecutively, even if each one maintains a form of autonomy that aims to exhaustively explain its content.

The first chapter is devoted to the building of the scenario and is divided into three parts: the world of reference, the object of analysis and the Foucauldian toolbox that will be applied. The world of reference is the digital world. The first section will provide an overview of a text that has been the foundational paradigm of this world: *Being Digital* by Nicholas Negroponte (1995), which at the time of writing of this dissertation will

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[13] 'Tell me who you are: this is the spirituality of Christianity' (Foucault 2001, 621 [my translation]).

be twenty years old. In parallel, a partial history of digital media over the past twenty years will be summarised, witnessing at the end the quantitative explosion of this world.

Thereafter, the chapter will explore various theories about digital media. *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Bolter and Grusin 2000) and *The Language of New Media* (Manovich 2001) will provide some basic notions to understand the digital world. While Manuel Castells is the deputy role to provide the tools of analysis of a subset of the digital world (*The Internet Galaxy* (2003)), Roy Ascott will shed light on the digital world as a set of behaviours (Ascott and Shanken 2007). With its location of narrative in the digital environment, David Eggers' novel *The Circle* (2013) will provide a counterpoint to theoretical analysis in this chapter. In the second part of the discussion of the digital world, the field of concrete practices will be explored and analysed according to different methods of discipline. Sherry Turkle (1997; 2005; 2012) and danah boyd (2015) will provide a means of social analysis for the understanding of contemporary digital practice, with particular emphasis on adolescents and digital natives. Derrick De Kerckhove will allow the analysis of our being digital in the light of the principle of connectivity. In this phase some key words will emerge to define our relationship with digital media: publicness, curiosity, immediacy, participation, connection.

After providing an overview of the digital world, the second part of the scenario will introduce and explain the concept of accountability. Accountability is a polysemic concept, ambiguous and complex. The etymology of the word will shed light on several possible ways to understand this concept. The clash of accountability and the digital world will see the birth of the notion of digital accountability, a form in which accountability is practiced in the digital world. Accountability is then defined as a possible anthropotechnic, according to the definition provided by Peter Sloterdijk. The framing of the accountability as anthropotechnic will allow us to consider this practice as fundamental in the contemporary era.

As third element of the scenario, to complete the conceptual tools for the continuation of the dissertation, a brief but thorough explanation of Foucault's toolbox is provided. The concepts of subject, dispositive and care of oneself will be defined and subsequently operatively adopted in the pursuit of this research.

Once the scenario is explained and the conceptual toolbox is defined, the following chapter, entitled "The Scene of Address," is based on a first investigation of the issue of accountability. The purpose of this chapter is to address accountability in terms of the relationship between the subject, the account and the other. The starting point is Judith Butler's text *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). Unlike Butler, who follows Friedrich

Nietzsche in the reconstruction of the genealogy of the account (Nietzsche 2014), the hypothesis put forward here, already partially exposed in the introduction, is that the account has a Christian origin in the confession. If the account is constituted as production of statements, their production is investigated from the point of view of the relationship between *poiesis* and *praxis* (Arendt 1998; Virno 2004). The analysis of the genealogy of the accountability from the Christian confession will be derived from the work of Michel Foucault, who in the course *On the Government of the Living* (2014a) has investigated the origin of the Christian confession. At the end of this chapter, using the paradigm of Christian confession, the relationship between subject, account and truth will be grounded.

In the following chapter, "The First Hermeneutics of the Subject", the subject will be investigated from four point of views, according to its modality of being on social networks: the unscreaming subject, the free subject, the disembodied subject and the coherent subject. These four declinations of the subject aim to illustrate four main discourses about the presence of the subject on social networks.

While the third chapter seeks to define the presence of the subject on social networks from the point of view of the subject, the fourth chapter, "The Second Hermeneutics of the Subject", illustrates the same presence from the point of views of dispositives. The analysis of Big Data will

shed light on the fact that the subject can be accounted in a different way, namely: as a quantified subject. The quantified subject is the human being interpreted by the digital machine in terms of numeric symbolisation. As the chapter unfolds, a critique of the quantification of the subject will be offered. Michel Foucault and Edmund Husserl will provide the tools for demonstrating that the quantified self is the last stage of a vision of the human being inaugurated with René Descartes in the modern era. The critique of the quantified self will be based on a review of the digitalisation of the human being as new discourse of the master. Consequently in the following chapter, "The New Panopticon", accountability will be seen as the present form of the panopticon.

Conclusions are dedicated to the exploration of some possible lines of flight from the panopticon. Since a contemporary ethics can be defined only from the relationship with this panopticon, entropy will be verified as a possible common ground for every ethical behaviour in the digital world. Some possible subjects will be outlined in order to show how entropy can be linked within accountability: the untimely subject, the moveable subject, the friend, the subject exploring the body without organs. These figures will allow the reader to answer the question driving the entire dissertation: which hypotheses of freedom can be formulated in the contemporary digital world?

1 Scenario

1.1 Being Digital

In the play *Millenovecentonovantadieci*, Italian comedian Corrado Guzzanti performed one short, ridiculous and very famous sketch. He asks: 'If I had this new medium, the ability to convey a huge amount of information, in a microsecond, to an Aborigine living at the opposite side of the planet ... but the problem is: Aborigine, but you and I ... what the f.ck should we say each other?' (Guzzanti 2007).

The question raised by Guzzanti is still tremendously current today, twenty years after the explosion of the Net and almost thirty years after the invasion operated by binary code throughout the houses of the western world. The present work does not aim to propose a historical reconstruction of the spread of the digital medium, about which there are already several very qualified references. Because an operative definition of the digital medium shall be provided, here the digital medium is defined as any medium that implies binary code for the storage, processing and transmission of information, according to the Jakobsonian analysis of communication. The digital world refers to the set of ecological niches in which human beings and the digital medium are present at the same time and in the same place. Sometimes a narrower definition of "digital world" will be implied: the kind of environment

where the digital medium has a clear supremacy over other media (paper, electronic, even orality).

Given these definitions, the field taken into consideration by this dissertation is the ordinary world where the Internet is the most important means of communication, the processor is the primary tool and the memory has a material substrate made by silicon. If the origin of this digital world must be told, its beginnings should be situated between the Sixties and the Seventies, with the first implementation of the ARPAnet and the Italian physician Federico Faggin's invention of the microprocessor at Intel. If this is the beginning of the digital world, the following chapters of this story would be the diffusion of the personal computer in the consumer market during the Eighties and the creation of the HTTP protocol at the beginning of the Nineties, which made the Net accessible to the entire world.[14] The Nineties saw the advent of a new technological paradigm based on the digital medium, which became transparent to the whole world: the Internet and personal computing broke through the consumer market, and the Western world entered a new era that was superimposing onto the electronic one. If globalisation was already understood from the point of view of the media theories (Lévy 1999; McLuhan and Powers 1993), globalisation and the Net at that moment seemed to be two sides of the same coin: the human being

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[14] More comprehensive and precise references can be found in Castells (2003).

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was invited to interface and communicate with any other being in the human world. Within this context enthusiasm for the new medium exploded.

One feature of the new digital medium fascinated most: the horizontality of communication. If the traditional medium succumbed to a rigid hierarchical structure, characterised by a one-to-many communication, which historically had been a powerful tool in the hands of totalitarians and also a means of soft persuasion in the hands of Western democracies (Wolf 2001), the new digital medium seemed to offer a promise of liberation. As Negroponte said in one of his fundamental works, inflated by a critical optimism towards the new digital medium: 'On the Net each person can be an unlicensed TV station' (1995, 176). In this text, which is rooted in a strong sense of messianism and liberally interspersed with verbs conjugated in the first person plural (*we will*), readers were offered a bright future built by the digital medium, and they were asked to reflect upon questions about the interaction between computers and human beings, where the accent was on the computer instead of the human being. Among these naïve considerations, it seems interesting instead to underline a further step, whose purpose—at first glance—reveals a sinister aspect that will be argued later: 'Being digital will change the nature of mass media from a process of pushing bits at people to one of allowing people (or their computers) to pull at them' (1995, 84). Moved by this revolutionary inspiration, the past was sounding ugly and

outdated[15] compared to the magnificent and progressive future offered by the digital medium.

The magazine *Wired* took on the role of the herald of the digital revolution, uncritically giving voice to any innovation introduced by the digital medium into the human environment.[16] Its former director Kevin Kelly became the prophet and the proponent of a confused political theory: digital socialism, a kind of merging of politics and digitalism, socialism and capitalism. The bestsellers of that time loved to cite the word *revolution*, which for instance appears in the titles of Rheingold's two fundamental works: *Virtual Reality: The Revolutionary Technology of Computer-Generated Artificial Worlds—and How It Promises to Transform* (1992) and *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (2003). Web 2.0 appeared later: a world where friendly interfaces allowed any Internet user to post content on the network, giving voice to his/her own identity and erasing any gate-keeping of the content—like mass communication systems—or technological gate-keeping (as in the first phase of the network, where at least the user had to know some coding).[17]

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[15] 'The digital superhighway will turn finished and unalterable art into a thing of the past' (Negroponte 1995, 224).

[16] The role that *Wired* plays has never diminished, and it can still be checked by simply reading daily headlines (WIRED, 2015).

[17] The epitome of the sensationalism of this time was the famous cover of *Time* devoted to the person of the year 2006: *You* (Wikipedia, 2006). The tagline on the cover read: 'Yes, you. You control the information age. Welcome to your world'. About YouTube, Lovink commented: 'YouTube's slogan, 'Broadcast Yourself,' is put into action by less than 1 per cent of its users. In this Long Tail age, we know that it's mainly about 'Broadcasting to Yourself'. The Internet is used mainly as a mirror. In a macroeconomic

As with the advent of mass communication, the world was divided into
apocalyptic and integrated masses (Eco 2000), in which the latter had a
clear upper hand over the former. In this context, the political needs of
liberation, which found international visibility during the rallies that took
place in Seattle in 1997, perfectly fit with the novelty of the new
medium. While Hardt and Negri's work became the Bible of the these
movements (2001), the concept of general intellect that both authors
argued in philosophical terms at great length—exposed briefly and
elliptically by Marx in the *Grundrisse*—seemed like such a well
calibrated anticipation[18] of the Net that many authors saw in the Internet
a tool for social liberation.[19]

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sense, it's about the millions of films watched every day, which provide Google
(YouTube's owner) with a treasure trove of user data. What is your 'association'
economy worth? Am I really aware of why I'm clicking from one clip to the next? If
not, we can always reread our own history on YouTube. We can find out everything—
but mainly about ourselves: what the most popular channel is, which friend has watched
this video' (Lovink 2008, 11).

[18] 'Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting
mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into
organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are
organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge,
objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social
knowledge has become *a direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the
conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general
intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of
social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as
immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process' (Marx 1973, 706). For an
exhaustive understanding of the use of the notion of the general intellect versus the
dominion of cognitive capitalism, see Vercellone 2007.

[19] Of course some contemporary approaches to this theme are more articulated. The
artist Hito Steyerl, who coined the concept of the poor image, elaborated one of those,
which is still the most convincing. The poor image is a low quality and corrupt image
that is generally used by users via illegal downloads. However, this lawlessness, which
frees the poor image from the market system, opens the possibility of a democratisation
of content and at the same time offers new creative possibilities generated by a kind
manipulation of it (such as the world of mashups). As Steyerl says: 'The economy of

While a rupture with the past and liberation from the present mass mediatic yoke were the two reasons that widely thrilled proponents of the digital world, some voices began to argue in detail some of the issues raised by the advent of the digital medium by providing less inaccurate historical and theoretical frameworks. Pierre Lévy's text *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (1999) led to the emergence of the notion of collective intelligence, a concept which was collocated into the historical level of human evolution and which was equipped with an in-depth analysis of the functioning mechanisms of the digital medium.[20]

Manuel Castells realised a monumental analysis of the individual in the network society (2009), but at the same time he understood that a new culture—the culture proper of the network—was emerging. Thus in his analysis, the Spanish sociologist investigated the origins of the ideology of freedom that dominated the discourse of the network, and—outside of any hypothesis of a radical break made by the network— identified an object, namely the network culture, which he characterised by four influences: the meritocratic culture; the hacker culture; the culture of the virtual community and the corporate culture. With Castells, after the

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poor images, with its immediate possibility of worldwide distribution and its ethics of appropriation and remix, enables the participation of a much larger group of producers than even before' (2013, 40).

[20] Notions like noosphere (Teilhard de Chardin 2008) and global village (McLuhan 1964, 1993) are obvious predecessors.

dominance of some naïve dualisms that conceived of the network and open source as revolutionary tools against the neoliberal context, dualisms that had found a theoretical framework in the model of the cathedral and the bazaar theorised by Raymond (2001), the digital medium began to be understood more in its forms of connection with the past than as a form of absolute otherness in relation to it.

In 2000 and 2002, two works were published that became fundamental references for future digital studies. The first, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Bolter and Grusin 2000), asserted that every medium is the remediation of other media (following McLuhan 1964): in this sense any medium is affected by an ontological singularity, and also the digital medium is then connected with the rest of the mediatic apparatus. In this work, the remediation process is read by the categories of immediacy and hypermediation. The first eliminates the need for any trace of authorship and opens the user's own point of view to a second interactivity; immediacy is based on transparency and hides the interface in the background. On the contrary, hypermediation makes visible the presence of other media, and it is the category with which one can establish the connections between the different media.

In 2001, Lev Manovich published *The Language of the New Media* (2001), which articulated an analysis of the relationship between digital media and contemporary culture. Manovich's first assertion is that the

computer has a specificity compared to its context: while the printing

press influenced media distribution, and photography influenced only one

type of cultural communication (still images), the media revolution made

by the computer has influenced all levels of communication. The digital

medium then arises as a meta-medium, able to encompass all other media

(Manovich 2001, 23). The main features of new media outlined by

Manovich are: numerical representation, modularity, automation (that

excludes intentionality), variability and transcoding (which consists of a

mutual influence between culture and computing). The importance of

Manovich's work is based then on the dismantling of some previous

assumptions concerning the question of the organisation of information.

Manovich in fact shows that in the digital medium two opposite modes of

data organisation coexist side by side. The first is the hierarchical file

system, which reduces the world to a logical order and hierarchy,

wherein each object has a distinct place, defined and structured. The

second is the World Wide Web, in which all objects are equally

important and everything, according to Ted Nelson's original definition

of the network, can be connected to anything else.[21] In his description of

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[21] What Manovich describes, but does not have the courage to analyze in these terms, or simply ignores, is what Foucault defines discourse. The analogy between Manovich's analysis and Foucault's notion of discourse is evident here: 'In semiotic terms, the computer interface acts as a code that carries cultural messages in a variety of media. When you use the Internet, everything you access— texts, music, video, navigable spaces—passes through the interface of the browser and then, in its turn, the interface of the OS. In cultural communication, a code is rarely simply a neutral transport mechanism; usually it affects the messages transmitted with its help. For instance, it may make some messages easy to conceive and render others unthinkable. A code may also provide its own model of the world, its own logical system, or ideology;

the interfaces,[22] Manovich shows how they act as representations

according to which one organises data in special forms that are made

accessible in particular ways. The result, demonstrated by Manovich, is

that interfaces are not at all neutral, but they favour some particular

models of the world and of the human being. This assertion made clear

that no network is originally innocent, but—like any other human

creation—it is articulated from its inception in relations of knowledge

and power.

Alongside these studies that privilege the ontology of the digital medium

and its relationship with the cultural context,[23] a number of authors began

to work on the user's position in this new media context. If we find the

description of the processual aspect of any kind of screen in Caronia

(2012), so that there would be continuity between television and

computer, Ascott provided a basic insight on the computer early on. As

Ascott says in a work originally published in the Nineties: 'The computer

is not primarily a thing, but a set of behaviours. Its purpose is not only

computation but transformation' (Ascott and Shanken 2007, 225).

Ascott's invitation is thus to pass from the dimension of ontological

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subsequent cultural messages or whole languages created using this code will be limited
by this model, system or ideology' (2001, 76).

[22] The definition of interface given by Lévy is applied here and subsequently: all media
materials that enable interaction between the universe of information digitised and the
ordinary world (Lévy 2001).

[23] A work that adequately summed up a vast number of studies at the beginning of the
new millennium is *The New Media Reader* (Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort (eds) 2003).

analysis of the digital medium to investigating the new experiential dynamics that it opens.[24] The numerical computation performed by the computer is only one side of the processes operated by it, which is inseparable from environmental change introduced by the machine. If the computer provides a new set of behaviors,[25] it follows that aesthetic apparatuses, which shed light on the relationship between the human being and the environment, should change: 'The new aesthetic deals with forms of behavior' (2007, 375).[26] Especially within the French culture, some positions critical of the new contexts emerged, highlighting the dangers arising from the explosion of the digital world—comparable to those risked by human beings after the invention of the atomic bomb[27]— or resuming the possibilities of perfect crimes operated even by the old media, like in Jean Baudrillard (2008).

Furthermore, American scholarship reveals a sociological approach interested in answering the question of what users do with new media. Turkle, after her seminal work in the Nineties that investigated the forms

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[24] In this sense Ascott comes close to Foucault's analysis of the processes of subjectivation, even if just rooted in the field of digital media.

[25] Some years later, it is interesting to consider how the set of behaviors have become a set of habits.

[26] An author who thoroughly analyzes the dynamics of the relationship between new media, the individual and society is Casalegno (2007), who coined the concept of cybersociality. The cybersociality is the presence of the biological substrate in the cybernetic forms of relationship produced by the new media.

[27] See for example the work by Paul Virilio *The Information Bomb* (2006), in which the insight, already Mcluhanianan, of the instantaneity conveyed by the electric medium is eviscerated in environments both electrical and digital.

of identity triggered by the arrival of the digital medium (1997), has now undertaken an extensive analysis of the forms in which the digital medium is used in the new millennium, and sheds light on an atomic-sised and—at the same time—distributed subject who is in contact with new media (2012).

Firstly, Turkle points out the ability of the subject to adapt to the new context introduced by media, in which simulation plays an important role: 'Immersed in simulation, it can be hard to remember all that lies beyond it or even to acknowledge that everything is not captured by it. For simulation not only demands immersion but also creates a self that prefers simulation. Simulation offers relationships simpler than real life can provide' (2012, 285). A first element, for which the subject's adaptation to new media has been so rapid and fruitful, is the simplicity of new social media itself, which provides a simulated and simplified form of existence.[28]

And one of the factors of new media's success is the possibility of existing regardless of the content. As Turkle writes, analysing instant

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[28] Jaron Lanier exposes the same idea even more radically. He keenly points out, for instance, that the possibility of changing the height of an avatar also changes one's self-esteem (2011). Lanier, who was a pioneer of coding in virtual reality, has become twenty years later one of the fiercest critics of the positivist vulgate about new media. The main argument brought forward by Lanier is that software exerts domination on an ingenuous subject, who does not see the cage in which the computer imprisons him and all of the obligations that arise from this captivity. He also describes information, in all its aspects, as an alienated form of experience (Not a Marxist, Lanier assumes that alienation operates here as subsumption and impoverishment of experience under the constraints of invisible factors).

messaging: 'IM does not require "content." You just need to be there; your presence says you are open to chat' (198). The poverty of information is, however, bypassed by the overload of emotional tones present in the moment of messaging: 'Texts fill a moment emotional, insightful, and sexy' (168). Social media then shifts from being a means of disseminating information to the role of a tool for the emotional affirmation of the existence of the sender; in Jakobsonian terms, one sees a clear prevalence of emotional work and effort on the referential and poetic functions. As Turkle observes, in new media it takes a reversal for which 'Things move from "I have a feeling, I want to make a call", to "I want to have a feeling, I need to make a call"' (2012, 176). The overall discourse of Turkle should be read, moreover, according to a scenario in which new media would manifest a human side, too human (in the sense that Nietzsche attributes to this concept) of the subject. Starting from the premise that 'On Second Life, a lot of people, as represented by their avatars, are richer than they are in first life and a lot younger, thinner, and better dressed' (1), the immediate conclusion that comes intuitively to the American author is that 'Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities' (1).

Analysing then new media in functionalists terms, in order to answer the question of what people do with new media, the conclusion is that new media makes possible the compensation of the difficulties, vulnerabilities

and lacks one is forced to endure in real life.[29] As it is stated in the text: 'People talk about digital life as the "place for hope", the place where something will come to them' (Turkle 2012, 153). New media are conceived of as a place for hope and desire, the desire '... to live your life that will enable you to love your life' (2012, 158). A basic vulnerability that new media allows us to bridge is anonymity. If the individual feels a social lack—the lack of attribution and construction of identity resulting from confrontation with others and relationships more generally—new media provides a continuous reaffirmation of one regardless of the presence of the other. As Turkle observes, a great feeling of well-being comes from being immediately responsive to the stresses from the environment, whether by individuals or by the machine: 'The self shaped in a world of rapid response measures success by calls made, e-mail answered, text replied to, contacts reached. This self is calibrated on the basis of what technology proposes, by what it makes easy' (2012, 66).[30]

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[29] Nicoli finds in this regard some significant key terms for Facebook: shame, seduction, confession and suicide (2010, 150).

[30] This long quote from *The Circle* by Eggers (2013) is a perfect illustration in narrative form of Turkle's assumptions: 'Mae's new feeling of competence and confidence carried her through the week, and given how close she was to the top 2,000, she stayed at her desk late through the weekend and early the next week, determined to crack through, sleeping in the same dorm room every night. She knew the upper 2,000, nicknamed T2K, was a group of Circlers almost maniacal in their social activity and elite in their corresponding followers. The members of the T2K had been more or less locked in place, with few additions or movements within their ranks, for almost eighteen months. But Mae knew she needed to try. By Thursday night, she'd gotten to 2,219, and knew she was among a group of similar strivers who were, like her, working feverishly to rise. She worked for an hour and saw herself climb only two spots, to 2,217. This would be difficult, she knew, but the challenge was delicious. And every time she'd risen to a new thousand, she received so many accolades, and felt she was repaying Annie in particular, that it drove her on. By ten o'clock, just when she was

But, even if the digital medium allows a reinforcement of the self calibrated on responses from the environment,[31] at the same time the confrontation with the Other must be taken into account. And new media offers a wide possibility of forms of self-representation, mediated by an interface between our physical body and the Other. Within the variety of possibilities of representation given by the distance between the physical self and the digital self, Turkle sees the moment of birth of a fundamental

tiring, and when she'd gotten as high as 2,188, she had the revelation that she was young, and she was strong, and if she worked through the night, one night without sleep, she could crack the T2K while everyone else was unconscious. She fortified herself with an energy drink and gummy worms, and when the caffeine and sugar kicked in, she felt invincible. The third screen's InnerCircle wasn't enough. She turned on her OuterCircle feed, and was handling that without difficulty. She pushed forward, signing up for a few hundred more Zing feeds, starting with a comment on each. She was soon at 2,012, and now she was […] was the number of queries handled that day thus far, 221, and the number of queries handled by that time yesterday, 219, and the number handled by her on average, 220, and by the pod's other members: 198. On her second screen, there were the number of messages sent by other staffers that day, 1,192, and the number of those messages that she'd read, 239, and the number to which she'd responded, 88. There was the number of recent invitations to Circle company events, 41, and the number she'd responded to, 28. There was the number of overall visitors to the Circle's sites that day, 3.2 billion, and the number of pageviews, 88.7 billion. There was the number of friends in Mae's OuterCircle, 762, and outstanding requests by those wanting to be her friend, 27. There were the number of zingers she was following, 10,343, and the number following her, 18,198. There was the number of unread zings, 887. There was the number of zingers suggested to her, 12,862. There was the number of songs in her digital library, 6,877, number of artists represented, 921, and based on her tastes, the number of artists recommended to her: 3,408. There […] could see how many people had viewed her profile that day, 210, and how much time on average they spent: 1.3 minutes. If she wanted, of course, she could go deeper, and see precisely what each person had viewed. Her health stats added a few dozen more numbers, each of them giving her a sense of great calm and control. She knew her heart rate and knew it was right. She knew her step count, almost 8,200 that day, and knew that she could get to 10,000 with ease. She knew she was properly hydrated and that her caloric intake that day was within accepted norms for someone of her body-mass index. It occurred to her, in a moment of sudden clarity, that what had always caused her anxiety, or stress, or worry, was not any one force, nothing independent and external—it wasn't danger to herself or the constant calamity of other people and their problems. It was internal: it was subjective: it was not knowing' (Eggers 2013, 193-196).

[31] Susca goes further, describing the relationship between the digital platform (in this case Facebook) and the human being in terms of automatism: 'Facebook is a multilayer universe where the connectivity is stimulated both technically and socially, and becomes an automatic process' (2010, 74 [my translation]).

question for the wired subject: 'What kind of personal life should I say I have?' (Turkle 2012, 180). If 'Networking makes it easier to play with identity (...) but harder to leave the past behind, because the Internet is forever' (159), and if at the base of the work in the digital world one has the too human desire to represent him/herself better (whatever this may imply of each subject/user may be the meaning of this word) than what one really is, it is up to the contemporary subject to face the difficult task of finding the balance between the physical self and the digital self. And the quest for this balance, as keenly identified by Turkle, is even more difficult because of the fact that the digital itself can easily be in the plural form, in the sense that it allows the subject to take multiple identities. As Turkle argues, 'When identity is multiple in this way, people feel 'whole' not because they are one but because the relationship among aspects of self are fluid and undefensive. We feel "ourselves" if we can move easily among our many aspects of the self' (2012, 194).

In summary, Turkle following the survey conducted in 2012, makes evident a complex world of relationships between the physical self and digital self, in which the projections of the physical self on one hand complicate the statute of the digital representation that the subject aims to offer, and on the other hand, allow the subject to feel alive. As Turkle

summarises happily, the contemporary subject lives in a fundamental shift 'from life to life mix' (2012, 157).[32]

In a study of digital behaviours of the younger generation, boyd (2015) starts instead from the assumption that media has always worked to create public identities. While mass media have kept separate audiences and performers, so that the audience became an abstraction defined by the purposes of mass communication, within social media the audience acquires a statute of visibility. However, while the contexts in the media are usually profiled, in social media contexts collapse and continuously change, so as to engage the audience in a constant redefinition of their public dimension that should be consistent with objectives (boyd 2015). De Kerckhove and Susca, in a text dedicated to the exploration of political phenomena within the context of social media, emphasise the importance of the emotional factor, triggered by contemporary technologies: 'The technology relies on social subjectivities around emotional vibrations, info-aesthetic pleasures, ludic drives' (Susca and De Kerckhove 2013, 6 [my translation]). If the background of Susca's and De Kerckhove's discourse is the impossibility of existing in the contemporary world without digital visibility,[33] contemporary technology is identified as a factor that subsumes the emotional aspect of

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[32] Lévy keenly describes the cyberculture as ambivalent *pharmakon* (2001, 32).

[33] 'I don't exist if not sharing the trivial elements giving body to my existence' (Susca and De Kerckhove 2013, 13 [my translation]).

interpersonal communication and takes it to a kind ecstatic state: 'The sensibility becomes a vector of a situated, partial, local knowledge, a product of the conversation where the electronic aura envelops the communicative relationship and expresses it as ecstasy' (2013, 25 [my translation]).[34] Susca and De Kerckhove thus identify a new category to be included in the political analysis, which takes the form of a new social contract based on emotional contagion rather than arising from utilitarian rational choices: '... a social contract grounded on the emotional contagion' (2013, 28 [my translation]), a new form of political communication in which the stimulation of emotions prevails over rational discourse.

At the end of this short survey on contemporary theories about social media, some more relevant topics emerge. First of all, there is great emphasis on the emotional dimension present in social media, which consists of sharing feelings, emotions and collective vibrations— sometimes in the form of such a strong stimulation to the subject that it may lead to a state of ecstasy. Secondly, there is the dimension of desire as a key factor on social media: a desire that manifests itself as a will towards the persistence of the self, as an alienated, yet reassuring representation of a better life—a place for hope, a possibility of designing another life in new transcendent forms. The secret and sharing

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[34] Everyone who has had the experience of following some hashtags related to recent global collective events (the earthquake in Fukushima, the Arab Spring) is well aware of the emotional tension conveyed from the screen.

are two problematic forms of relationship between real self and digital self, in which the subject has to make rational and strategic choices to maintain consistency between the self and the body, whether the digital identities that he/she can take are single or multiple. The matter of identity (which will then be eviscerated in the form of subjectivation) remains crucial in the whole discourse. These are some of the reasons why social media has had the explosion that we all know, whose numbers are discussed in the following chapter.

1.1.1 New Media Numbers

But what is the scenario that this overview about social media theories refers to? To define this, it is necessary to make a quick quantitative analysis about social networking platforms patronised by large amount of users.[35]

The site that has the most active users, with reference to the data available in March 2015, is Facebook (www.facebook.com), which totals more than a billion and four hundred users, to which half a billion users of Facebook Messenger should be added. In early 2009, Facebook accounted about two hundred million users, which has multiplied seven times in the last seven years. It's well known that Facebook is the most

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[35] All the following data are taken from the website *Statista. The Statistics Portal* (Statista. The Statistics Portal, 2015).

populated country in the world, surpassing China and India. It is also interesting to consider what the most popular pages on Facebook are: Coca-Cola is number one, with some ninety million users following it, YouTube follows with about eighty million. Lagging significantly behind in third place is Red Bull with 43 million (data referred to May 2015). Nike Football, Oreo, Converse All Star, PlayStation, Starbucks Coffee, Pepsi and iTunes follow in the top ten.

The second largest social network in the world is the instant messaging platform QQ (www.qq.com), used mainly in China, with about 830 million users. The Chinese audience also boasts the fourth largest social network ranked for the amount of its users: Qzone (qzone.qq.com), which comes to about 630 million users. This Chinese App is preceded by the primary system of instant messaging in the Western World, WhatsApp (web.whatsapp.com), which has 700 million active users. In seventh place, with about 350 million active users, is LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), a strictly professional social network. Skype (www.skype.com), a pioneer of the VoIP platform, follows in 8th place. One finds the photosharing platform Instagram (instagram.com) in 10th place with about 300 million users. Only in twelfth place is it possible to find Twitter (twitter.com) with its 288 million active users.[36]

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[36] Although Twitter's numbers are not very high when compared to those of other similarly less popular platforms, it is the social network with the highest public visibility on other media. One reason for this success is the massive presence of celebrities on Twitter. In 2015, within the top ten Twitter accounts with the largest

A summary table of the Global social networks ranked by number of

users in 2015 follows:

Leading social networks worldwide as of March 2015, ranked by number of active users (in millions)	
Facebook	1.415
QQ	829
WhatsApp	700
QZone	629
Facebook Messenger	500
WeChat	468
LinkedIn	347
Skype	300
Google+	300
Instagram	300
Baidu Tieba	300

number of followers worldwide, only one site is counted (YouTube). The other positions are occupied by US President Barack Obama (in third place with 60 million followers), a TV anchor woman (Ellen DeGeneres, in ninth place with 44.5 million followers) and seven singers. Katy Perry dominates above all with her seventy-two million followers (the following ones are: Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift Lady Gaga, Justin Timberlake, Rihanna, Britney Spears). Interestingly, all the profiles reported above are from the US. Regarding Twitter's metrics, boyd and Crawford affirm: 'Twitter provides an example in the context of a statistical analysis. First, Twitter does not represent 'all people', although many journalists and researchers refer to 'people' and 'Twitter users' as synonymous. Neither is the population using Twitter representative of the global population. Nor can we assume that accounts and users are equivalent. Some users have multiple accounts. Multiple people use some accounts. Some people never establish an account, and simply access Twitter via the web. Some accounts are 'bots' that produce automated content without involving a person. Furthermore, the notion of an 'active' account is problematic. While some users post content frequently through Twitter, others participate as 'listeners' (Crawford 2009, p. 532). Twitter Inc. has revealed that 40 percent of active users sign in just to listen (Twitter, 2011). The very meanings of 'user' and 'participation' and 'active' need to be critically examined' (boyd and Crawford 2001, 6).

	data
Twitter	288
Viber	236
Tumblr	230
Snapchat	200
LINE	181
Sina Weibo	167
VKontakte	100

This survey would not be complete if another activity, which parallels

and intersects social networking, were not included: online purchases

made by users. In this case the available data are referred to the US

market in March 2015.

Monthly unique visitors to U.S. retail websites 2015	
Most popular retail websites in the United States as of March 2015, ranked by visitors (in millions)	
	data
Amazon Sites	175
eBay	122
Wal-Mart	82
Apple.com Sites	77
Target Corporation	51
Best Buy Sites	31
The Home Depot	29
Kohl's	28
Etsy.com	25
Macy's	22

Interestingly, two sites that have an exclusively online presence occupy

the first two positions: Amazon (www.amazon.com) and eBay

(www.ebay.com), the first a worldwide leader in e-commerce B2C, the

second one in C2C. For both companies the issue of feedback is an

absolute priority. In third place is the largest retailer in the world, Wal-

Mart, while the world of Apple ranks only fourth, despite the huge worldwide exposure.

The explosion of this world would not have been possible without one of the fundamental inventions of this era: the account, which is discussed in the next chapter.

1.2 Accounting

1.2.1 Account and Digital Account

In order to reach a general definition of account, one must first undertake an etymological analysis of the various meanings that the word assumes in contemporary English.

The suggested starting point is the etymology of the term account, which comes from the Latin *computare.*[37] *Computare* is itself a composite of *cum* (together) + *putare,* whose original meaning is to clean, to prune the trees of dead leaves.[38] *Putare* passed from a material sense, related to cleaning of the plant, to an immaterial sense, which focuses on the meaning of give an order, especially between thoughts and words; and, in

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[37] It is not intended in this case to assume that the etymology is a comprehensive explanation of the meaning, especially if referring to etymological origins that date back thousands of years. However, as in this case, etymology is a useful tool to bring to light the deposits of sense that are sedimented in a term.

[38] For this etymological reconstruction see Messori (2007, 17-19).

a proper sense, to assign a value through the words. Consequently, from the verb *putare* another verb is derived: *disputare*, to dispute, which means to put words in order clearly, for a speech that is not confused; but above all—the purpose of this etymological reconstruction—the word *computare* is derived from *putare*, a word that takes on a double meaning. *Computare* generally means the possibility of formulating a judgment, but a judgment that may lean in two directions, which in the past were considered closer than at the present time. The first meaning of *computare* is to calculate, or to rationalise reality through numeric symbols.[39] But, secondly, the symbolic order that one aims to give the experience can also be produced through the use of another set of symbols: words. Hence *computare* can take on, in Latin, the meaning "to tell".[40] The activities of calculating and telling a story are very close in Latin and share the same root: giving a symbolic order to the world, both in the form of numerical calculation and in the form of a told story.

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[39] It seems appropriate also to u that the noun 'computer' designates both a person and a machine in English language, as brilliantly delineated by Hayles (2005).

[40] In Italian this common origin sounds clear, if one pays attention to the fact that the words *racconto*, "story," and *conto*, "count," contain the same root, which is lent to Italian from the adaptation of the Latin word *computare*. And the same relationship can be found in the Ancient Greek that offers different etymological roots but maintains the same ambivalence. *Legein* is the Greek word that means "to say," but at the same time keeps the original material root material of "to collect". The act of saying, and its figurative meaning—the act of storytelling—is the manifestation of the outcome of a collection, a selection of what happens in the experience. From the verb *legein,* then the philosophical term for excellence, "logos", is derived; translated generically with thought, but its etymology contains the idea of giving a symbolic order to reality. For an accurate reconstruction see Messori (2007, 19).

From the Latin language, which hinted at the double sense of computation expressed above (but without the epistemological harshness that the two overlapping meanings could generate in the contemporary world), *computare* moved to a neo-romance language, French. From the Middle Ages up to the contemporary French language, two terms with a strong similarity are still adopted: the verb *compter,* "to tell," and the word *conter*, "to count." The words in French lost the lexical unit that was typical of the Latin, but they shared semantic origin remained in the phonetics. France then exported the two words to England, in the form of the Middle English *acounte* and *accompte*, whose first known use dates back to the 14th century. They will soon drift into the contemporary term account.

And the contemporary word account retains all its semantic ambiguity, or rather: in the various meanings it can have in contemporary times, it demonstrates the potential meaning present in its etymological root. As a first definition (from the Merriam-Webster dictionary), account finds a meaning—very Latin, very archaic—in the term computation. Secondly, as part of the jargon of banking and finance, it indicates both a 'record of debit and credit entries to cover transactions involving a particular item or a particular person or concern', and 'a statement of transactions during a fiscal period and the resulting balance'.[41] Thirdly, the account is

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[41] This definition will not be subsequently taken into consideration.

delivered in order to explain a behaviour, so that one can understand the reasons, causes or motives of said behaviour.[42] Fourth, the account is a 'formal business arrangement for providing regular dealings or services (like banking, advertising or store credit) and involving the establishment and maintenance of an account'. This definition implies a shift in the word's meaning, but still has a strong bond with the Latin etymology: the account in this case is the factor of order in a system. Furthermore account appears several times in constructs that, as in the third definition, imply forms of attribution of value (for example in the expression "it's of no account to me": in this way account is close to synonyms like appreciation, esteem, regard and respect). In the fifth variation of the word's meaning, account significantly includes the idea of narrative, in the form of a reasoned description of facts, circumstances or events. In this case the word account finds synonyms in history, narration, record, report and story.

The rise of the word account in information technology is accredited to the Unix operating systems (from a private conversation with Denis Roio aka Jaromil, June 2015).[43] It was introduced to regulate a multi-user operating system. Since the early Unix operating systems, in 1969, the

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[42] Surely one finds here a strong influence of the Latin verb *putare*, from which computing is derived, which implies an attribution of value to the object of the verb. This third definition of account is critical to understanding the transition from account to accountability.

[43] A specific literature about this topic does not yet exist. What follows was borrowed from a private conversation with the hacker and media artist Jaromil (https://jaromil.dyne.org/), which took place in June 2015.

account is understood as a login process, which usually comprises a username and password that determine the login credentials and then the user's position in the hierarchical structure of the multi-user operating system. However, the login is not a full account. The login can be understood as an access procedure, which verifies one's credentials to something more complex, which is known as the account. The account in this case would be a set of functions, tools and content associated with a specific username in an operational context related to the network.

Understood in this sense, the digital account has its origins in the fourth standard definition presented above, which conceived of the account as a set of services, guaranteed by an agreement with the user; services that are primarily banking services but could also be associated with other operational areas (market, advertising, etc).[44] Besides the account has also some further features, which will be explored in more depth in the following pages: it does not only consist of accessing a number of services, but it also transforms the simple login into a complete profile, which includes extensive data about the user, and is generated by a system that depends on operations performed by user.

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[44] In this sense, the concepts of account and ID will never overlap. The account will always be considered a login giving access to a set of services, with a special emphasis on the relationship that one has with the services that the account offers; while the ID is the unique key in a system that allows the identification of an item out of the system (for example, the ID of a citizen with respect to the physical body of the individual).

Thus Facebook offers an account that lets the user post, share content

from other users, create communities of friends, like and comment on

other content, create pages and events, subscribe to groups and so forth.

The use of Twitter is another kind of digital account, allowing its users to

post pictures and tweet notes (with a rigorous 140 character limit) and

follow or be followed by other users. With its instant messaging service

of icons, text, images and video, and the possibility to create groups,

WhatsApp can also be understood in terms of the digital account. The

same can be said for the system that Amazon provides the user. While

Amazon is first a system for online purchases, it is also equipped with a

powerful profiling system that identifies the user's tastes in order to offer

him/her very accurate suggestions for further purchases. The perfect and

definitive account is the one described by Eggers in his latest novel,

already quoted in a previous footnote, *The Circle*:

> Ty had devised the initial system, the Unified Operating
> System, which combined everything online that had
> heretofore been separate and sloppy—users' social media
> profiles, their payment systems, their various passwords, their
> email accounts, user names, preferences, every last tool and
> manifestation of their interests. The old way—a new
> transaction, a new system, for every site, for every
> purchase—was like getting into a different car to run every
> different kind of errand. "You shouldn't have to have eighty-
> seven different cars," he'd said, later, after his system had
> overtaken the web and the world. (…) Instead, he put all of it,
> all of every user's needs and tools, into one pot and invented
> TruYou—one account, one identity, one password, one
> payment system, per person. There were no more passwords,
> no multiple identities. Your devices knew who you were, and
> your one identity—the TruYou, unbendable and
> unmaskable—was the person paying, signing up, responding,

viewing and reviewing, seeing and being seen. You had to
use your real name, and this was tied to your credit cards,
your bank, and thus paying for anything was simple. One
button for the rest of your life online. (2013, 21-22)

However this dissertation aims to demonstrate, above all in chapters two
and three, that the digital account preserves all the possible meanings of
the word account, derived from its Latin roots. Thus the account is not
only a simple, ingenuous and spontaneous modality of accessing services
provided by the Net, but is also the most relevant tool of a specific mode
of anthropotechnic operating in the contemporary era. This
anthropotechnic is given the name of accountability, and is explained in
the following chapter.

1.2.2 Accountability as Anthropotechnic

While the first use of account in the English language dates back to the
14th century, the first known use of accountability is dated 1770. The
general definition of accountability is related to the state of being
accountable, or to be responsible for certain actions, events or
circumstances, and to be able to give account for them.

However, in the 20th century, accountability has also become a keyword
for systems of organisation and governance, and an almost infinite body
of literature devoted to this 'fashionable' (Schedler 1999, 13) and

'chameleon-like' (Mulgan 2000, 555) term has been generated. In a text

found on the World Bank's website, accountability is defined as follows:

'broadly speaking, accountability exists when there is a relationship

where an individual or body, and the performance or tasks or function by

that individual or body, are subject to another's oversight, direction or

request that they provide information or justification for their actions'

(Accountability in Governance, 1). Thus, to have accountability there

must be first and foremost a relationship between an individual/body and

an observer. The observer exerts his/her report in three forms, according

to this categorisation: supervision, direction or request of information or

justification. What is subject to supervision/ direction/request for

information or justification, and pertains to the individual, is the

performance relative to his/her objectives or functions. Accountability is,

in this sense, a specific relation of power, as clearly stated by Schedler:

'Today, it is the fashionable term accountability that expresses the

continuing concerns for checks and oversight, for surveillance and

institutional constraints on the exercise of power' (1999, 13). It is

exercised within a relational environment and in which the dynamics of

knowledge and power are all put into play.[45]

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[45] For instance, 'Accountability is central to the way the CEOs (…) structure their understanding of their jobs (…). In its simplest sense, accountability entails a relationship in which people are required to explain and take responsibility for their actions' (Sinclair, 220-221); 'Accountability in management is: 'The process of making top corporate leaders responsible for their actions, goals and so on, utilizing available objective measures (Rosenberg 1993, p. 4)' (Mraović 2003, 168).

Continuing with the definition of accountability, one finds that it

> involves two distinct stages: *answerability* and *enforcement*. *Answerability* refers to the obligation of the government, its agencies and public officials to provide information about their decisions and actions and to justify them to the public and those institutions of accountability tasked with providing oversight. *Enforcement* suggests that the public or the institution responsible for accountability can sanction the offending party or remedy the contravening behaviour. As such, different institutions of accountability might be responsible for either or both of these stages (Accountability in Governance, 1).[46]

In both cases, accountability operates as a very complex machine. In a moment of answerability, the accountable operator must be able to provide appropriate information. This information must contain at a certain stage a form of storytelling or symbolisation (verbal or numeric) in order to make the work performed accountable. Secondly, this first form of storytelling could even not be sufficient, and must be helped by a supporting apparatus that makes it right according to a system of values. Furthermore, an additional element is defined at the second stage of accountability: enforcement, for which there is a system of sanctions for the individual/body who has not justified, due to negligence or misalignment with the value system, his/her actions. With the notions of answerability and enforcement the list of the elements of accountability is enriched by new factors: an individual/ body, an observer in relation to

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[46] It should be, not that this definition of accountability principally concerns governance. However, the context taken into account in this dissertation is broader.

him/her, a kind of story shared by both, a system of values that supports

the justification of the story, a penalty system that sanctions deviant and

unaccountable behaviour.

The same essay suggests a definition of accountability according to

typology. In a first moment systems of governance, mostly political, are

identified according to the categories of vertical and horizontal

accountability.[47] Subsequently a definition of a further model of

accountability, the social accountability, is provided:

> The prevailing view of social accountability is that it is an
> approach towards building accountability that relies on civic
> engagement, namely a situation whereby ordinary citizens
> and/or civil society organisations participate directly or
> indirectly in exacting accountability. Such accountability is
> sometimes referred to as society driven horizontal
> accountability (Accountability in Governance, 3).

This category of accountability is so defined as 'demand-driven and

made from the bottom up' (3). While many elements of this definition

are, in an analytical overview of the governance, fairly hazy (the concept

of the ordinary citizen or that of civil society, as opposed to systems of

governance), and find fertile ground in the nebulous, undefined political

cultural broth called direct democracy, what is interesting in this context

is that accountability can even grow from bottom-up processes. A key

factor in these processes is engagement—a voluntary factor therefore,

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[47] For which, respectively, citizenship controls the actions of the government, and some
entities within the system of government control each other.

neither necessarily political nor organisational, which arises because of this operativity.

To complete the first definition of accountability, engagement should be added as a key element. It follows that accountability is constituted by an individual/body, an observer in relation to him/her, a kind of story shared by both, a system of values that supports the justification of the story, a penalty system that sanctions deviant and unaccountable behaviour, and a motivation that possibly pushes a non-observer to act as observer and, consequently, to inaugurate a process of accountability.

A second text (Lindberg 2009)[48] introduces additional elements to the definition of accountability. The author defines accountability as follows:

> More or less all of the literature referred to in this paper agrees that the following should be included in the defining characteristics of any form of accountability:
>
> 1. An agent or institution who is to give an account (A for agent);
>
> 2. an area, responsibilities, or domain subject to accountability (D for domain);
>
> 3. an agent or institution to whom A is to give account (P for principal);
>
> 4. the right of P to require A to inform and explain/justify decisions with regard to D;
>
> and
>
> 5. the right of P to sanction A if A fails to inform and/or explain/justify decisions with regard to D.

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[48] It contains an impressive bibliography about accountability.

> (…) It should be noted at the outset that none of these
> conditions specify that these relationships have to be formally
> codified or that the agents and institutions involved are
> formal institutions or hold an official office. (8)

Compared to what was included in the first definition of accountability,
in this case accountability is defined more clearly in terms of the form of
account of his/her work that the agent is required to give. This request is
introduced as "giving an account", action which will have great
importance in the next steps of this dissertation. It furthermore precisely
defines that accountability is never a holistic process, but is instead a
unique process performed on specific domains, and then—when
described as a practice—should be always described in plural form.
Furthermore, it is added that the relations between the various factors that
operate within an accountability process do not need a formal coding, or,
in other words, it is not necessary a socially valid contract before the law
to make a process of accountability operate.

To include the concept of accountability in an epistemological matrix
that is more consistent with the discourse that will be developed later in
this dissertation, accountability is understood as an anthropotechnic,
according to the meaning of this term coined by German philosopher
Peter Sloterdijk. According to the definition given by Giovanni Leghissa,
an anthropotechnic is a set of exercises (Leghissa 2012, 23). Sloterdijk
defines the exercise as follows:

If man genuinely produces man, it is precisely not through work and its concrete results, not even the 'work on oneself' so widely praised in recent times, let alone through the alternatively invoked phenomena of 'interaction' or 'communication'; it is through life in forms of practice. Practice is defined here as any operation that provides or improves the actor's qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared as practice or not'. (2013, 4).

If life allows us all kinds of exercises (for instance, Sloterdijk himself classifies phenomenology as modest exercise (2012, 9)), and the purpose of each exercise is to change one's life, which is made more intense by the intensification of the performance, anthropotechnics also have a downside. Leghissa keenly observes that freedom can be defined in opposition to the habits induced by the anthropotechnics. Every anthropotechnic, in this sense, is in conflict with freedom (Leghissa 2012, 24).

But, whether anthropotechnics are good or not, surely accountability is a kind of anthropotechnic, or better: accountability is the most relevant anthropotechnic in the contemporary digital world. Firstly, exercise and accountability share the common feature of having a person doing a performance as common ground. Then, the action made in the accountable process is iterated. In addition, both exercise and accountability have the common purpose of the qualification of the subject: in the first case, through an improvement of performance and, in

the second case, according to a process accounting the performance which aims to lead to the improvement of the performance.

This chapter intends to argue that a digital account implies an anthropotechnic based on accountability, and therefore—given the pervasiveness of the digital account in the contemporary world—that contemporary society finds in accountability one of its fundamental processes, thus they should be defined as societies of accountability. The result of this merging of the digital account into an anthropotechnic is the lack of differentiation between having an account and giving an account.[49]

One must first go back to the definition of digital account given above. The account is a set of services uniquely associated with a username that is accessible in a hierarchical system through the login. However, a number of characteristics of the digital account are derived from the historical meaning of the term account. First of all, the digital account is a factor of order. This is carried out in two directions: on one hand, a factor of order in a hierarchical system allows the username associated with the account to apply some features and inhibit others; on the other hand, the account allows the user to select, among all the possibilities in the network, those that are more appropriate: this purchase rather than

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[49] In the following pages, the relationship having an account—giving an account is viewed through the difference possible—real, as theorised by Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (1995): giving an account is having an account plus the material existence of the account itself.

another one, one posted argument rather than others that are available, "following" a certain celebrity rather than someone else, etc. Furthermore, the order given by the user through the account is never purely theoretical. In social media, the user is always driven to do something, it is an agent, an active subject, before being an observer.[50]

The activity by the user is never sterile, but it is automatically designated to generate an account. That is the specific difference between "material" and digital accounts. In the digital world, social media, but also outside of them, the fact of having an account (operating also silently) is automatically a form of narration, in which the dimensions of counting and accounting collapse, according to a sense that can be traced back to the ancient Latin *computare*. Having an account (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) is automatically a factor that generates accounting. Having an account necessarily implies giving an account. The account that one creates can have verbal form—almost all social media operate at this level, asking to write something—or having an iconic form (like

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[50] Because of this, no definite theory of the observer has been taken into account in this dissertation. Maturana and Varela (1980) were instead taken into consideration during the research development. For the same reason, it was decided to avoid any ontological matrix derived from Deleuze. Deleuze observes in *The Fold*: 'Every point of view is a point of view on variation. The point of view is not what varies with the subject, at least in the first instance; it is, to the contrary, the condition in which an eventual subject apprehends a variation. (…) It is not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject' (2006, 21). And soon after: 'In each area point of view is a variation or a power of arranging cases, a condition for the manifestation of reality' (23). Deleuze's approach to the question of point of view implies an ontology of the existing in conflict with the central theme of this dissertation, i.e. the subject historically placed in a *here and now* according to a Foucaldian matrix.

Instagram, which nonetheless also includes a verbal component); or a numerical form in the forms of inferential statistics that the system generates in relation to the action of the user. Thus the operation of the user on social media is an automatic act of computation that generates statements. These statements are forms of narrative addressed both to the user his/herself and to the other, where the other is both the community participated in by the user and the digital system which the user is dealing with.

All these forms of accounting are a specific anthropotechnic (or a set of repeated exercises), which is here defined as accountability. The previous chapter intended to define accountability as a process, not necessarily agreed by a contract, which involves a person/apparatus that performs an action (first agent) who should give an account of his/her actions articulated in the form of narration and justification of the action based on a reference domain and expressed in symbols (numeric or verbal language) to a second person / apparatus, the recipient of the account, who performs the function of verifying the account, and consequently can impose penalties for lack in the account.

Thus digital accountability is a specific kind of digital anthropotechnic that implies the equality of having an account and giving an account. In order to demonstrate this, the features of accountability above illustrated are verified through the notion of digital account.

a) Digital accountability undoubtedly arises in the form of process. Every social media activity is transcribed in the form of operating algorithms, which can be simple and limited to a single operation (a post on Facebook) but can also take more complex forms (for instance a suggestion based on previous purchases made by the Amazon's algorithm, which pushes the user to an exploration of other books, read comments, etc.).

b) The issue of the contract in the digital accountability is twofold. On one hand, there is an agreement that is given by the user to the terms of use of the digital platform it is running on. Usually this type of contract is called the "Terms of Use," and involves a list of rights/duties that the user must follow and accept in order to operate on that platform. The terms of use are much debated at the time of writing this dissertation. For instance, one might compare the terms of use of Facebook (www.facebook.com/legal/terms) with those of the rival platform Ello, which is considered to be the anti-Facebook (ello.co/wtf/policies/terms-of-use). However, here it is believed that the terms of use are a marginal issue. In fact, digital accountability of course implies a contract with the platform used, but most of all with the community. What is meant here is to postulate that—in light of the processes of subjectivation that will be explained afterwards—the responsibility that the individual user exercises in the process of digital accountability is above all towards him/herself in relation to the community which he/she belongs to.

This ambivalence—which is not dialectic—is believed to deeply permeate the perception of themselves as users, and that the form assumed by the power in social networks is manifested as a hierarchical system platform (from here all the controversy over privacy about some platforms). In the three following chapters, digital accountability is demonstrated as a relational field that involves the self, community and digital platforms, as it is reductive to reduce it to a dualism—user/platform.

c) The presence of a subject is necessary in the process of digital accountability. In this analysis, possible forms derived from a cybernetic matrix are not taken into account—forms that would put a digital machine in place of the human agent, nor functional forms of accountability, in which the individual exercises the accountability function of assuming a role (for example, any institutional role), nor the ways in which institutions or apparatuses are subject to accountability (for example, vertical or horizontal accountability models, related to processes of governance). Digital accountability is the practice of being on social networks made by the human being in his/her everyday life.

d) If in traditional accountability the system imposes the production of an account onto the agent, so that the account is a necessity arising from the forms of power hidden in the process, in digital accountability giving an account of oneself is immanent in the process. In other words, when an

account is opened into a process of digital accountability, there is an implicit acceptance that an account of oneself shall be given, so that having an account and giving an account collapse one into the other. The question then is not about the "duty" to provide an account, but the choice of the individual to enter into a system of digital accountability.[51]

e) In this case too, digital accountability demonstrates a certain non-dialectical ambivalence. The account provided is in fact an account about oneself, which preserves the original feature of ordering the world according to one's way of *computare*. This order given to the world embraces both oneself and one's experience of the world. The notion of accountability as a process of subjectivation, which will be presented in the following chapters (at the root of the Sloterdijk's notion of anthropotechnic), will erase any kind of dualism behind it. As outlined above, a specific difference regarding narration in digital accountability is that the system itself is not limited to providing only the framework for the production of the narration, but also—through inferential systems based on a statistic matrix—it provides a second-level narration, built upon the interpretation of the intentionality of the subject made by the algorithm.

f) The domain of reference of digital accountability is determined by the mission of each digital platform that hosts a subject's account. For

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[51] The reasons for this acceptance are ethical rather than political or legislative, and they will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

instance, Facebook's mission reads as follows: 'Founded in 2004,

Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the

world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected

with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to

share and express what matters to them'

(www.facebook.com/facebook/info?tab=page_info).[52] Twitter laconically

posts: 'Our mission: To give everyone the power to create and share

ideas and information instantly, without barriers'

(about.twitter.com/company). Digital accountability has—as domain of

reference—the tasks of the mission exposed in each platform.[53]

g) As explained above, digital accountability is based on a sorting of the

experience of the user, translated into an account of oneself on/by the

digital platforms.[54] Digital accountability is always a representative form,

based on a symbolic order. This order, from the user's point of view, can

be limited to these forms of expression: verbal, written, oral (it's

superfluous to consider the explosion of the instant messaging based on

the delivery of oral messages), iconic (in the form of photography, video,

self-generated memes and so on). According to the specific digital

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[52] Facebook is often taken into account here as synecdoche for the whole world of social networks, given the incredible vastness of users worldwide.

[53] It is unnecessary to consider that the user does not adhere to the platform after reading the mission, but s/he usually subscribes due to a social convention deriving from word of mouth. However, a reading of the various mission statements coincides almost perfectly with the specific uses that are known by the users on that specific platform.

[54] The relationship with the *habeas corpus* of the user is one of the topics to be discussed widely in the continuation of the dissertation.

platform, one or more of the aforementioned symbolic tools is prevalent. But, while these forms of symbolisation are based on intentionality, they also offer a further level of the account: a level directly operated by the digital machine. First of all, the digital machine extrapolates a second semantic level from the discourse generated by the user, according to predefined algorithms. Secondly, this level is processed by systems of statistical inference, which transform the user into a numeric target.[55]

h) Digital accountability is again ambivalent about the recipient of the account given on digital platforms. In giving an account of him/herself, the user is not fully influenced by a possible model-reader. S/he aims to address the digital community of which s/he is a member within the digital platform. However, since digital machines also process all accounts, each social network has its own way of giving meaning to the account given by the user, according to specific algorithms. Even though the user is not aware of it, a phantom-reader, generated by the digital machine, is deployed to read his/her own account.

i) The community operates on the first level by reading the account provided by the user. The feedback by the community is the unit of measure of the validation of the account. The feedback can have many forms: silence, which implies in itself an attribution of value; the dispute,

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[55] This level is extensively treated within chapter four.

which can—in different forms—lead to the exclusion of the user from the community; and appreciation, which drives up the ranking of the user.

In addition to this first level, there is one more validation of the account, which takes the form of a sophisticated statistical inference. This validation of the user's account operated by the digital machine is strictly close to the neoliberal biopolitical paradigm: the validation of the data provided by the user is done when it is inserted in a process of economic rationalisation.[56]

j) While the digital machine does not tend to generate penalties for the account given by the user, according to principles that will be shown in the third chapter, the user is subject to definitely sanction when s/he violates the terms of use of the digital platform. However, the key moment of enforceability—at a first level—is provided by the community,[57] and within the processes of subjectivation regarding the relationship with the other.

In this chapter a classification of digital accountability has been provided in order to firstly verify the possibility of its existence and, secondly, its essential structure. Once these items are ascertained, the exploration of

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[56] This will be explained in chapter four.

[57] The writer of this dissertation is no longer on Facebook because, in June 2015, his account was suspended for an alleged bot behind the account, rather than a physical person. After the account's restoration through the production of legal documents that attested to the physicality of the writer, he decided anyway to erase it, given the totalitarian despotism under which the process was managed, starting with the first statement ethically untenable in any democratic system: "We suspect you're a machine."

its theoretical features will be the task of the chapters two, three and four. Upon completion of the scenario, a description of methodological tools that will conduct the investigation must be provided. These tools will be discussed in the next chapter, devoted to Foucault's toolbox.

1.3 The Foucauldian Toolbox

Michel Foucault[58] was undoubtedly one of the most influential thinkers of the second half of the 20th century, both by his publications (books, transcripts of interviews and seminars, essays) and by his active role in French and global politics. For instance, he was founder of the *Group d'information sur le prisons* (GIP) in 1971 (Eribon 2011, 351), and correspondent for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della sera* about the Iranian Revolution in 1978, and he was for sure fascinated by this political experience (448-498). Several times he took publicly position about French political affairs, and he was a militant during the Seventies. The trajectory of his political consciousness has been winding, so that the French writer has been considered to belong alongside with, and sometimes accused to adhere to, Marxism, Maoism, Anarchism, Social Liberalism, Neoliberalism. Nevertheless, after sympathising with Marxism in his early years, his intensive reading of Nietzsche at the

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[58] Didier Eribon provided the most exhaustive biography about the French philosopher (2011).

beginning of the Fifties supported him in acquiring a definite political

point of view, based on a very simple assumption: the contestation of the

'notion of adequate truth' (Veyne 2008, 218), whichever form it might

take in the development of political affairs. So it seems useful, in this

work, to understand the French philosophers through his works more

than his political life, knowing that each position he assumed was

instable by definition. Veyne brilliantly synthetised this approach,

undoubtedly very Foucauldian: 'Give word only to things, so to become

a mute ghost oneself' (217 [my translation]).

His cultural legacy is still fundamental for the understanding of the

contemporary age. This dissertation intends to apply epistemological

tools derived from the Foucauldian toolbox to investigate the digital

world.[59] The digital world—for obvious historical reasons—was not

known by Foucault; however, the conceptual tools provided by the

French author can be adapted to any context in which the human being

will be investigated as an open question. For convenience, at least three

of these conceptual tools have been adopted for the construction of the

scenario of this dissertation (namely: subject, dispositive, care of the self)

so that these definitions can be applied immediately in the following

chapters without the need of further explanation.

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[59] Clearly this is not a dissertation about Foucault, but it is believed that the toolbox
provided by the French author is the best method of analysis for approaching these
issues.

1.3.1 The Subject

The question of the subject has always been the primary concern of the

French author. As Foucault expressly states in one of his last interviews,

"The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", in 1984:

> I have always been interested in the problem of the
> relationship between subject and truth. I mean, how does the
> subject fit into a certain game of truth? The first problem I
> examined was why madness was problematized, starting at a
> certain time and following certain processes, as an illness
> falling under a certain model of medicine. How was the mad
> subject placed in this game of truth defined by a medical
> model or a knowledge? And it was while working on this
> analysis that I realized that, contrary to what was rather
> common practice at that time (around the early sixties), this
> phenomenon could not be properly accounted for simply by
> talking about ideology. In fact, there were practices—
> essentially the widespread use of incarceration which had
> been developed starting at the beginning of the 17th century,
> and had been the condition for the insertion of the mad
> subject in this type of truth game—that sent me back to the
> problem of institutions of power much more than to the
> problem of ideology. This is what led me to pose the problem
> of knowledge and power, which for me is not the
> fundamental problem but an instrument that makes it possible
> to analyze the problem of the relationship between subject
> and truth in what seems to me the most precise way.
> (Foucault 1997, 289-290)

In this long quote Foucault clearly exposes the concern of his whole

research—the subject—in the form of an intellectual journey. The

starting point for the delineation of a methodology of research about the

subject is a radical anti-essentialism. For it, Foucault refuses to consider

the question: *What is the subject?* According to the French author, it is not possible to give an unambiguous and invariant definition of the subject, even if great philosophical traditions have afforded it. Foucault rather outlines himself as a relativist, in opposition to the great intellectual constructions of the subject made in the history of philosophy, and first among them, the line that can be drawn through the work of Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Husserl. As he soon makes clear in the same conference: 'What I rejected was the idea of starting out with a theory of the subject—as is done, for example, in phenomenology or existentialism—and, on the basis of this theory, asking how a given form of knowledge [*connaissance*] was possible' (1997, 290).

If an *a priori* constitution of the subject is rejected as impossible, what is the process by which the establishment of the subject happens? Returning to the quote that opens this chapter, Foucault indicates that the subject arises from regimes of truth. The first example is about the definition of the foolish man, which Foucault provides in his first fundamental work (Foucault 1988a). The foolish is not constituted by an ideological apparatus, but is rather the outcome (here the Copernican revolution made by Foucault in defining human being) of concrete practices for which he is defined as such (for example, the practice of internment).

What are such practices, and how do they work? Foucault, in the Sixties, identifies knowledge as the ground for any possible definition of the

human—however, a knowledge that should not be understood in a purely theoretical sense, but as result of a network of relations innervating all the instances that constitute practices. In this sense, knowledge is absolutely concrete, and it is produced either in the scheme of visibility or in that of speakability.

Within the realm of knowledge, the statements (*énoncés*) acquire a key role. They are investigated in his following influential book, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1982). While language allows infinite possible combinations of enunciations, and it can unearth any possible sentence, in the world only a few selections of these possibilities are indeed brought to light (or rather, as opposed to the endless possibilities of language, only some things are said). The French philosopher then raises the question: why, within all the possibilities offered by language, do only a few things appear in the world? Foucault calls what is actually being said "statements", *énoncés*.[60] Archaeology is

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[60] Foucault defines the statement as thus: 'the statement is not the same kind of unit as the sentence, the proposition, or the speech act; it cannot be referred therefore to the same criteria; but neither is it the same kind of unit as a material object, with its limits and independence. In its way of being unique (neither entirely linguistic, nor exclusively material), it is indispensable if we want to say whether or not there is a sentence, proposition, or speech act; and whether the sentence is correct (or acceptable, or interpretable), whether the proposition is legitimate and well constructed, whether the speech act fulfils its requirements, and was in fact carried out. We must not seek in the statement a unit that is either long or short, strongly and weakly structured, but one that is caught up, like the others, in a logical, grammatical, locutory nexus. It is not so much one element among others, a division that can he located at a certain level of analysis, as a function that operates vertically in relation to these various units, and which enables one to say of a series of signs whether or not they are present in it. The statement is not therefore a structure (that is, a group of relations between variable elements, thus authorizing a possibly infinite number of concrete models); it is a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they 'make sense', according to what rule they

defined as the discipline that seeks to understand why only some statements are effectively produced, and some others not. He defines archive[61] as the network of relations of knowledge that allow the emergence of some statements rather than others. To understand the evolution of the concept of madness, one must then investigate the statements that relate to madness—a role delegated to archaeology—while the archive has the role of investigating the dynamics of knowledge that lead to the constitution of the subject as mad. As summarised by Foucault himself:

> What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another, as a mad or a healthy subject, as a delinquent or non delinquent subject, through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on. I had to reject a priori theories of the subject in order to analyze the relationships that may exist between the constitution of the subject or different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power, and so on. (1997, 290)

However, one element is still missing in this overview about the constitution of the subject in order to reach a complete description of the original relationship between subject and games of truth. This element is power. In his production of the Sixties, the analysis of power is absent, although it becomes a priority in a text edited in 1971, entitled *Nietzsche,*

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follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are the sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation (oral or written)' (Foucault 1982, 97).

[61] In a text devoted to Foucault, Deleuze defines him as an "archivist" (Deleuze 1988).

Genealogy, History (1984, 76-100). This short text offers a deep reading of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche 2014) and the second untimely meditation *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (Nietzsche 1997, 57-124). The reading of these Nietzschean texts compels Foucault to move from the notion of archaeology to the one of genealogy. The essence of the genealogical method is clearly explained in a famous passage about the inquiry of the origin, namely what justifies and legitimises the truth of things in the world:

> Why does Nietzsche challenge the pursuit of the origin (*Ursprung*), at least on those occasions when he is truly a genealogist? First, because it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to "that which was already there," the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity. However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something altogether different" behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms (1984, 78)

If, as Foucault states, 'History also teaches how to laugh at the solemnities of the origin' (79), then

> a genealogy of values, morality, asceticism and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their 'origins', will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive

to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once
unmasked, as the face of the other. Wherever it is made to go,
it will not be reticent in 'excavating the depths', in allowing
time for these elements to escape from a labyrinth where no
truth had ever detained them. (1984, 80)

"Excavating the depths" will remain a key feature of the genealogical

method. Instead of looking for a sort of mythical origin that gives

legitimacy to what exists, genealogy searches for completely random

emergencies, moments where history fractures, and something new will

be born. In the genealogical method, the investigation of the mechanisms

of knowledge is then combined with the analysis of the mechanisms of

power, by which a human being can exercise dominion and truth upon

another human being. Genealogy has the merit of having taught that what

is determined by truth, which Descartes understood in a solely theoretical

way, is at the same time constituted by the dynamics of power. Due to

this, an allocation of value is always accompanied by a set of obligations

to respect. In this sense, when one says about oneself: 'I am a fool,' one

at the same time sets up a series of obligations to which one is subjected

due to the fact that one is fool. An objectification of oneself follows, so

that one is "substantialised" according to a definitory system that does

not pertain to the subject itself, but to the truth of that particular

substantialisation.

Thus the subject is defined by relationships of knowledge and power. But Foucault demonstrates this definition as always unstable. In a famous passage, he describes the subject as follows:

> It is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself. You do not have the same type of relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes to vote or speaks at a meeting and when you are seeking to fulfill your desires in a sexual relationship. Undoubtedly there are relationships and interferences between these different forms of the subject; but we are not dealing with the same type of subject. In each case, one plays, one establishes a different type of relationship to oneself. And it is precisely the historical constitution of these various forms of the subject in relation to the games of truth which interests me. (1997, 290-291)

The subject is not only a substance, but s/he is not even a static subject. There are many dynamics of knowledge and power that cross him/her in the historical time of his/her life. These continuously variable relations cause the subject to continuously change over time. This continuous variation then creates a shift from the investigation of the (substantialised) subject to the investigation of the processes of subjectivation. The processes of subjectivation are the encounters, based on a historical *here and now*, between the subject and certain regimes of truth. These encounters make that the subject what it is. The standard processes of subjectivation that one meets in one's life are one's relationships with family, educational institutions, a given citizenship, a medical system and judicial system—but also a digital world and a

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natural environment. All these encounters become the trigger of specific historical becomings, which can be called processes of subjectivation.

The subject cannot be understood if not from the point of view of processes of subjectivation. The human being living in the liminal condition of deprivation of every process of subjectivation is the human being with no qualifications, who cannot say anything about him/herself and about which no one can say anything.

But, in this way, the subject is always also object, when s/he preaches something of himself: "I am ..." Automatically s/he objectifies him/herself in front of the eyes of the others. But this objectification is made according to regimes of truth that do not belong to the subject, but pre-exist him/her and innervate him/her. Namely: the "I" understands itself only when duplicated; and in this duplication acquires a self-consciousness that would not otherwise appear, remaining forever fixed in the identical. Revel pointedly sets an appropriate terminology to describe the status of the subject determined by the processes of subjectivation: 'One is never singular, but, on the contrary, because one becomes s/he can reach the singularity' (Revel 2008, 140 [my translation]). She continues: 'It is as if life is a power of subjectivation—the development of this long differential becoming through individual differences, namely the construction of the 'common', always re-enacted as a weaving of differences' (Revel 2008, 145 [my translation]).

An element remains untapped in this introduction: the regimes of truth. Foucault says several times that the subject is determined by the regimes of truth and that the processes of subjectivation are the result of the encounter between a subject *here and now* and the regimes of truth. They will be treated in the following chapters; however, one preliminary definition should be provided. The truth Foucault discusses has neither logical, epistemological nor ontological meaning, according to the canons of classical philosophy. According to the French author, if subjectivity is seen as that which varies in the relationship with its own truth, 'the truth is conceived as a system of bonds' (Foucault 2014b, 15 [my translation]). The truth, as Foucault conceives it, is not at all theoretical. Rather, truth is what ensures that the subject is what s/he is. In other words, truth is the element that arises from the relationships between knowledge and power that generate an obligation to the subject. This obligation should not necessarily be understood as physical constraint: it may take this form, but mostly it is something that can incline the subject towards a certain direction. For instance, the educational system is not true because it is bonded to a theoretical horizon that determines the truth, but rather because it models knowledge and behaviours of its students. Equally, the medical system is a regime of truth because it describes the human being as sick or healthy and, in doing so, triggers a process of subjectivation concerning it (typically

based on the bipolarity sick/healthy, while for education it could be argued educated/uneducated).

After defining the processes of subjectivation from the side of the subject, Foucault proposes a concept in 1977 to synthesise the relations of knowledge and power. This concept is the dispositive.

1.3.2 The Dispositive[62]

One is writing a paper on a laptop equipped with a word processor. S/he is lying on a couch lined with an unidentified fabric. A lamp is pointed at the white wall in front of the writer on a fairly dark day in November. One wears a shirt and pants, and glasses to protect him/her from the light waves of the screen. Next to him/her, on a shelf next to the sofa, there is a Blackberry that hasn't rung since the previous day. In front of him/her, to the left of the screen, his/her eyes meet the spines of some coloured publications, neatly lining a shelf made from cheap plywood. In his/her back pocket there is a wallet containing money, credit cards, a couple of passport photos, cards for discounts at the supermarket and receipts— some of them very old. One is lining up some pixels. Every object named in this list is a dispositive.

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[62] The English translation of the French word *dispositif* has been uncertain for a long time. The proposal advanced by Bussolini (2010) has been adopted in this dissertation.

Dispositive is a polysemic and ambiguous word, but it is also a precise and fruitful notion. It is a precise notion, because the dispositive can have many definitions, but some of them (which will be discussed in this chapter) are absolutely grounded, calculated in their formulations. It is fruitful because the dispositive is one of the most powerful concepts of contemporary era that allows one to give an order, albeit tentative and uncertain, to the chaos in which our lives unfold. The purpose of this chapter is to bring out this fruitful sense of the word dispositive from the background noise from which the informational era is delivering it.

Thus, it makes sense to begin this analysis of the dispositive with a cliché: the relevant page in Italian from Wikipedia (/it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispositivo). The page is sparse and indexes a set of definitions that show that the dispositive can be: a device, a tool and something concerning legal acts. It may indicate components of a computer, an operating system or a medical device. The page is linked to pages from the Iberian region, built according to a taste for bizarre taxonomy: a list of seven items can be found on the Spanish page and twenty-two in Portuguese. If the Internet offers us a slight, uneven definition of the dispositive, it is then appropriate to return to different authoritative sources. The austere Treccani, the standard Italian encyclopaedia, focuses on the dispositive as an adjective. It reiterates the legal sense of the noun and adds a tasty military deviation, for which the dispositive would function here as the manner in which a unit is disposed

on the ground to meet the attacks of the enemy and the unit itself (www.treccani.it/vocabolario/ device). Otherwise the well-known Italian dictionary, the Sabatini Coletti, outlines the meaning of the legal term and proposes a second definition that underlines the computational aspect of the term. It is relevant that the definitions of this term suggested by the Italian Wikipedia page and the Sabatini Coletti are close to the English word "device" (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Device), which is explained as both a tool and an electronic apparatus. This page does not connect to any Italian or French pages. Assonance with the Italian word occurs with the French word *dispositif*: 'The dispositif, in a philosophical sense, is a concept theorised by many thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first century to describe a mode of strategic governance' (fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispositif_%28philosophie%29). The French page quotes Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben and is linked to an English page, which lists a French term (*dispositif)*, a German (*Dispositiv*) and a Danish (*Anordning*). Curiously, although the Foucauldian definitions of the term are quoted, the noun appears as apparatus. Device, *dispositif*, apparatus, philosophy, medicine, computer science, law: it seems that the dispositive does not allow itself to be easily imprisoned.

All iPhones are dispositives, but not all dispositives are iPhones. Or, put in other words: devices are a subset of dispositives, and it is not possible to reduce dispositives to devices. It is therefore time to abandon Wikipedia and systematically explaining the concept of the dispositive,

taking into account the meaning of dispositive that has persisted on the philosophical scene since the mid-Seventies, which was elaborated by Michel Foucault. Consequently, the concept will be updated by the work of two significant authors, Gilles Deleuze (2007a) and Giorgio Agamben (2009), who both devoted short essays to the topic bearing the same title: *What is an apparatus?*

To understand how and why Foucault aimed to fully delineate the concept of dispositive, it is worth remembering the brief philosophical journey that led him to this outcome. A constant in Foucault's thought is the process of subjectivation (as explained in the previous chapter), or the way in which the Western human being has come to define itself as a subject, and according to what features. What is the historical element that has enabled the contemporary human being, and their ancestors before them, to define him or herself as a subject? This is the question that unites almost all of Foucault's production—a question not idly theoretical but highly practice-oriented. While, in the Sixties, Foucault was still focused on the analysis of the dynamics of knowledge, in the Seventies another foundational term appeared on his conceptual scene: Power. It is this articulation of knowledge and power that allows Foucault, at least from *Discipline and Punish* (1995) onwards, to make a structured analysis of the processes of subjectivation. This articulation of knowledge and power has been termed dispositive since the early Seventies onwards.

Foucault uses the term dispositive several times in the Seventies, and in *Discipline and Punish*, published in 1975, the concept is so widely developed that it became one of the fundaments of the structural analysis of the disciplinary systems exposed in this text. However, a complete and articulated definition of the term dispositive is not found in Foucault's texts until an interview published in 1977 entitled *The Confession of the Flesh* (original French: *Le jeu de Michel* Foucault; in Foucault 1980, 194-228). Upon the interviewer's question 'You speak of "apparatus of sexuality." What is the meaning or the methodological function for you of this term, apparatus (*dispositif*)?', Foucault exposes his own definitions of the dispositive, which I have quoted below almost in its entirety.

> What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions —in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term "apparatus" a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The

apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially mercantilist economy: there was a strategic imperative acting here as the matrix for an apparatus which gradually undertook the control or subjection of madness, mental illness and neurosis. (Foucault 1980, 194-195)

The definitions given above of the dispositive are crystal clear yet abstract, so they require a brief contextualisation to unlock the power of the concept. First of all, dispositives should never be considered as single entities, but always as a plurality—in Foucault there is no essentialist instinct in any of his formulations. Dispositives are networks and hierarchies of discursive elements. A division between concrete and abstract, physical and symbolic is useless and misleading. The dispositive is the net linking what has been in history verbalised and what is given in the world of the visible. To introduce an example: a school is made at the same time by the walls of the classrooms, by the forms compiled by the students, by the knowledge that is taught. A car is a dispositive as tangible object, but also the dispositive "car" includes the engineering that produced it, as well as its instruction manual of use or the photograph of the same car on the Amalfi coast that persuaded the purchaser to buy it. The dispositive is then the network that connects all these elements.

But these networks have one specific feature: they are formations and, as such, have some kind of internal consistency. This consistency can easily

become absolutely vast. In this sense, the health care system—made up of hospitals, medical practices, nursing gowns, public funding, bills and neurology textbooks—is a dispositive. The Federal Reserve is also a dispositive, from the pipes inside the walls of its Washington headquarters to the cost of fruit in a market stall in Quito, considering that the cost of the fruit is determined by the Fed's economic policies.

Given the consistency and flexibility of dispositives, Foucault introduces the criterion of the generation of the dispositive. The dispositive is formed as a response to an urgency. Urgency can be understood as an impetus, a pressure that determines that the previous dispositives, or system of dispositives, which crystallised and perpetuated a certain situation, are no longer adequate. This push—vital, biological, social, anthropological (the urgency may have different historical reasons)—requires a new response. The emergence of a new dispositive is this response. Foucault, both in courses at the Collège de France and in fundamental texts like *Discipline and Punish*, unabatedly applies his conceptual effort to investigate some urgencies, and explains the dynamics that have created the large dispositives of the modern era: hospitals, schools, police. But it would be naïve to think that there is a master of puppets governing the dispositives. The dispositives are numerous, and there is no absolute sovereign or central government managing them. Here the radical difference with some Marxist theories, like the ones advanced by Louis Althusser (1969), emerges clearly, as for

Foucault 'The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth' (Foucaul 1984, 64), without entitling the State of the role of a machine of repression. [63] They are different responses to different urgencies, and although it is possible that there is, at any given moment, a certain homogeneity among them (homogeneity that, on a theoretical level, Foucault called épisteme), the correct approach is to look at the individual dispositive, to dissect it from the inside, to see the dynamics of knowledge and power within it, and then build relationships with other dispositives.

Dispositives and processes of subjectivation are two sides of the same coin. Because this is ultimately the heart of Foucault's thought. During these decades he incessantly questions power, asking which hypotheses of freedom can be formulated for the modern human being. There is not a subject—Cartesian, Christian, in other words, essential—but the processes of subjectivation instead makes the human being an individual, giving a shape to his/her living flesh from the moment of birth. This work of modelling is accomplished by the dispositives, the dynamic forces that within historical time have the function of directing the human

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[63] Ryder keenly summarises the position of Foucault underlining the distinction between the notion of repression, from the Marxist vocabulary, and the Foucauldian notion of power: 'He [Foucault] considers the juridical not as the repressive apparatus controlled by the bourgeoisie as a method of class domination, or at least not only that, but rather as a *technique of power*, the effect of a transformation on the way in which the body itself is invested by power relations' (Ryder 2013, 150).

being according to the relations knowledge/power that structure him/her. Thus, which hypotheses of freedom can be formulated for the human being, emerging from the system of dispositives? It's worth pointing out when looking for an answer that the hypotheses of freedom cannot be practiced out of dispositives, as if it were possible a release from the dispositives that consist of breaking the wall of any institution; but it is also never "internal", at least in a trivial psychoanalytic sense. It is intended as a way to deal with that set of tools with which one lives, the story of one's practices with which one takes care of oneself. Since the environment in which the human being is collocated is made by dispositives, it results that the analysis of dispositives is at the same time the analysis of the processes of subjectivation. And if the understanding of dispositives is an approach to a preliminary understanding of the human being, the hypotheses of freedom with respect to them cannot be other than the *mot trenchant* Foucault coined a few years later: *se déprendre de soi même*, to uproot oneself.

Deleuze is the one who understood and clarified this strong ethical and political side of the dispositive, rather than conceiving of it only as an epistemological tool. In a conference held in Paris in 1988 dedicated to Michel Foucault, Deleuze held his last public address, and dedicated it to the concept of dispositive (Deleuze 2007). After an analysis of the device in the highly practical, dynamic style we can expect from Deleuze, the

96

French philosopher proposed a link between the dispositive and the development of history:

> We belong to these apparatuses and we act in them. The newness of an apparatus in relation to those preceding it is what we call its currency, our currency. The new is the current. The current is not what we are but rather what we become, what we are in the process of becoming, in other words the Other, our becoming Other. In every apparatus, we have to distinguish between what we are (what we already no longer are) and what we are becoming: the part of history, the part of currentness. (Deleuze 2007a, 345)

And a little further:

> In every apparatus we must untangle the lines of the recent past from the lines of the near future: the archive from the current, the part of history and the part of becoming, the part of analysis and the part of diagnosis. If Foucault is a great philosopher. it is because he used history for something else: like Nietzsche said, to act against time and thus on time in favor, I hope, of a time to come. What Foucault saw as the current or the new was what Nietzsche called the untimely, the "non-current", the becoming that splits away from history, the diagnosis that relays analysis on different paths. Not predicting, but being attentive to the unknown knocking at the door. (2007a, 346)

Deleuze always takes conceptual systems built by other authors and, as with Nietzsche or Spinoza, folds them, violates them, forces them to unleash the power of thought that they contain. Becoming and bifurcation are certainly also current themes in Foucault. However, in Deleuze's synthesis they find a new background and, above all, they grasp the dispositive from another point of view, that of novelty. The subject of

novelty's close association with dispositives—which one can certainly also find in Foucault, but Deleuze illuminates further—finds an explanation in the distinction presented above between analysis and diagnosis. One can make an analysis of dispositives, which relates to history. But one can also look at current dispositives and dissect them to bring out the lines of force that are working right now—this is the diagnosis of the governing forces of contemporary dispositives. This diagnosis aims to understand the actual forces acting in contemporary dispositives, in order to have an insight about the direction that history will take in the near future.

While Deleuze considers the society of control, such as the effect of the diagnosis of contemporary dispositives, Giorgio Agamben offers a different diagnosis of contemporary society formulated from the point of view of dispositives (in Agamben 2009, 1-24). He instead traces the genesis of the dispositive in Foucault's thought from the influence exerted by the French author Jean Hyppolite, Foucault's teacher, whose fundamental contribution is the review of the Hegelian-Marxist works. If Agamben identifies the Hegelian concept of positivity as the main influence on the development of Foucault's conception of the dispositive, what matters here is the proposal to conceive of the dispositive differently: 'I wish to propose to you nothing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into two large groups or classes: on the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in

98

which living beings are incessantly captured' (Agamben 2009, 13).

Surely this is a liminal, unworkable and impossible idea if aimed at

establishing the foundation of any epistemology, because it would be

based on assuming a state of nature, essential and unhistorical, of living

beings, an infinitesimal "time zero" at the moment of the birth, a purely

conceptual abstraction. However, what follows is a successful and

articulated development of the notion of dispositive:

> I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some
> way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept,
> model, control, or secure
>
> the gestures, behaviors, opinions or discourses of living
> beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, mad houses, the
> panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines,
> juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection
>
> with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen,
> writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes,
> navigation, computers, cellular telephones, and—why not—
> language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of
> apparatuses—one in which thousands and thousands of years
> ago a primate inadvertently let himself be captured, probably
> without realizing the consequences that he was about to face.
>
> To recapitulate, we have then two great classes: living beings
> (or substances) and apparatuses. And, between these two, as a
> third class, subjects. I call a subject that which results from
> the relation and, so to
>
> speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and
> apparatuses. (Agamben 2009, 14)

In this ternary relationship—dispositives, living beings and the result of

these items: the subject—what emerges as a development of Foucault's

discourse is that all that exists, except for the raw and neutral flesh, is a

dispositive.[64] This allows Agamben to make an additional step. The history of human beings, from the appearance of *Homo sapiens*, is made up of an intensification of dispositives, up to the present situation of their out of control proliferation and accumulation: 'What we are looking for is neither simply to destroy them nor, as some naïvely suggest, to use them in the correct way' (Agamben 2009, 15). If the human being has made his/her desire for happiness solid, tangible and separate through dispositives, the hypotheses of freedom can be grounded on the abstraction of this desire for happiness from the externalisation into dispositives, and making it available as a common good. This action is called the profanation of dispositives.

Likewise, the analysis continues in Agamben. Foucault had shown how the disciplinary dispositives generated processes of subjectivation, namely that 'Apparatus, then, is first of all a machine that produces subjectifications, and only as such is it also a machine of governance' (Agamben 2009, 20), and that in every process of subjectivation a reverse moment of de-subjectivation is necessary (to gain a new piece of identity offered by a dispositive, a piece of the previous identity is lost earlier). Agamben consequently argues:

> What defines the apparatuses that we have to deal with in the
> current phase of capitalism is that they no longer act as much

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[64] Leghissa keenly observes that the neoteny of the human being implies that one can never choose the dispositives, which are given by necessity before birth, in a here and now (Leghissa 2012, 24).

through the production of a subject, as through the processes of what can be called desubjectification. A desubjectifying moment is certainly implicit in every process of subjectification. (…) what we are now witnessing is that processes of subjectification and processes of desubjectification seem to become reciprocally indifferent, and so they do not give rise to the decomposition of a new subject, except in larval or, as it were, spectral form. (2009, 21)

Some examples provided by Agamben (the purchase of a mobile phone that forever reduces the person to a phone number; television that reduces the viewer to an infinitesimal number for the composition of the share) are weak. At the same time, the idea that the transition for which the proponents of the proper use of technology should necessarily be, 'for their part, the product of the media apparatus in which they are captured' (21) deserves further analysis. However, this provisional conclusion does not alter the final result that has been reached in this digression about the dispositive: namely that in the contemporary dispositive there is a considerable threat that everyone is subjected to processes of de-subjectivation without any real possibility of re-subjectivation. It would be useful to think about what the devices are that mark the end of the era of modernity at the moment, to understand what, to return to the Deleuzian lexicon, is "current" at this time and thus indicates the way for a new humanity. As Deleuze states at the end of his text dedicated to Foucault: 'As Foucault would say, the superman is much less than the disappearance of living men, and much more than a change of concept; it

is the advent of a new form that is neither God nor man and which, it is hoped, will not prove worse than its two previous forms' (Deleuze 1988, 132).

1.3.3 The Care of Oneself

Foucault is very often considered to be an author who has developed his ideas through breaks and ruptures, while on the contrary his work is characterised by a strong sense of continuity, with the purpose of investigating the subject. Frederic Gros, a former student of Foucault who edited and published the transcripts of some of Foucault's courses at the Collège de France, defines Foucault's research on the subject as follows:

> On the subject: 1. The subject should be questioned not as eternal essence, but as someone who is constructed through some historical techniques. 2. The subject should not be questioned as an *a priori* structure, but as someone who changes into a process of subjectivation that is also a game of freedom. 3. The subject should not be questioned only as cognitive structure, but also as an ethical substance'. (Gros 2008, 301 [my translation])

The new keywords that are learned from reading this passage are historical techniques and games of freedom, which are also the two biggest questions that Foucault raises in the last years of his production.

Foucault himself states:

I would say that if I am now interested in how the subject
constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the
self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented
by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in
his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him
by his culture, his society, and his social group. (1997, 291)

What are these practices of the self that the individual finds in his/her

own culture? Foucault, during the 1981-1982 fundamental course

devoted to the hermeneutics of the subject (2005), identifies that the

Greek culture consists mainly of two poles with respect to the subject.

The first pole is the *gnothi seauton*, the invitation for which the human

being is required to have knowledge of himself in order to better

understand him/herself and thus to be able to better govern him/herself.

This pole has been absolutely dominant in western culture according to

Foucault, and was then replaced first by the Christian confession and

later by the Cartesian moment, which considers the knowing subject as

first substance of the universe.[65] But Foucault also identifies a second

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[65] 'First, the Cartesian moment philosophically requalified the *gnothi seauton* (know
yourself). Actually, and here things are very simple, the Cartesian approach, which can
be read quite explicitly in the Meditations, placed self-evidence (*l'évidence*) at the
origin, the point of departure of the philosophical approach—self-evidence as it appears,
that is to say as it is given, as it is actually given to consciousness without any possible
doubt [...]. The Cartesian approach [therefore] refers to knowledge of the self, as a form
of consciousness at least. What's more, by putting the self-evidence of the subject's own
existence at the very source of access to being, this knowledge of oneself (no longer in
the form of the test of self-evidence, but in the form of the impossibility of doubting my
existence as subject) made the 'know yourself' into a fundamental means of access to
truth. Of course, there is a vast distance between the Socratic gnothi seauton and the
Cartesian approach. However, you can see why, from the seventeenth century, starting
from this step, the principle of gnothi seauton, as founding moment of the philosophical
method was acceptable for a number of philosophical approaches or practices. But if the
Cartesian approach thus requalified the gnothi seauton, for reasons that are fairly easy to
isolate, at the same time—and I want to stress this—it played a major part in

pole, which has been neglected by Western culture: the *epimeleia heautou*, or care of the self. How Foucault specifies: 'Epimeleia heautou is care of oneself, attending to oneself, being concerned about oneself, etcetera' (2).

What is this care of the self? In an illuminating passage, Foucault argues that to the three techniques identified by Habermas (production techniques, use of symbols or communication, domination) a fourth technique should be added, formed from the set of technologies of the self (Foucault 2001, 990). These technologies were abundant in the Greek world, and then disappeared from the Christian horizon. They are technologies whose purpose is to establish a truth about the subject that is not purely cognitive. These technologies, sometimes referred to as practices, naturally exist prior to the subject. But the subject that subjugates him/herself to them becomes part of a process that allows him/her to uncover new truths about him/herself. The technologies of the self are practices that involve learning outside of the cognitive sphere. The technologies themselves are forms of learning that do not imply only that one learns, but also that one internalises what s/he has learned. According to Foucault, within the Greek world they can be classified as: *mathesis*, dedicated to a more cognitive learning; *meletè*, a form of

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discrediting the principle of care of the self and in excluding it from the field of modern philosophical thought' (Foucault 2005, 14).

meditation; *askesis*, which is practiced in the form of the exercise (Foucault 2014a, 35). As summarised by Foucault, the goal of the technologies of the self is the intensity of relations with the self, the forms in which one is called to assume him/herself as an object of knowledge and investigation, in order to transform, correct, cleanse, build or save (Foucault 1988b).

Once the care of the self has been identified as one of the capacities of the human being in ancient Greek culture, what is the motivation that necessitates a re-enactment of this forgotten concept? Foucault, in a very famous passage, identifies the reason for the recovery of the care of the self into modernity: 'We can say that we enter the modern age (I mean, the history of truth enters its modern period) when it is assumed that what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject's access to the truth, is knowledge (*connaissance*) and knowledge alone' (Foucault 2005, 17). What has been lost, with the neglecting of the care of the self, is an ethical possibility for the modern subject. The subject capable of truth postulated by modernity is a subject that has confined his/her ethical substance into oblivion, namely: freedom as the basic element of ethics. As summed up by Gros: 'The practices of the self are programs of stylisation of the existence that make sense only within the horizon of freedom: a freedom, however, that is not considered as a fundamental nature but as a game of different practices' (Gros 2008, 294 [my translation]). So the practices of the self are standardised series of

occurrences of the experience that the subject is asked to repeat. However, the subject devoted to the care of the self is not fixed in one or more practices, which end up completely stylising his/her existence. On the contrary, s/he practices his/her freedom within the differential game of practices, namely: s/he practices his/her freedom in a becoming in which s/he plays among the practices of the self, in a continuous change that is not a purpose itself but a chance for variation and escape from habits. Care of the self finds its essence in this game between differences based on abandonment. As Foucault sums up: 'The practice of the self must allow one to get rid of all the bad habits of all the false opinions that can received by the crowd or by bad teachers, but also parents or entourage. Unlearning (*de-discere*) is one of the important points of the culture of the self' (Foucault 2001, 1176 [my translation]) Foucault in these formulations is far beyond the Greek formulation of the concept, adding in his reflection some of the authors whom he had loved in the Sixties (Nietzsche, Blanchot, Bataille). The ethical substance of the subject in Foucault is an exercise of freedom based on the risky abandonment of habits that stifle any possibility of real existence. Care of the self is the practice of this exercise, based on a movement (in this case, non-dialectical) of de-subjectivation and re-subjectivation, in the transition from the old strenuous practices to the new re-subjectivising practices. As Fontana summarises well, self-care is the 'detachment of oneself in the double movement of a preliminary de-subjectivation and

an 'ascetic' re-subjectivation, in a line of reading that is the necessary

extension onto the subject of a thought that has constituted itself, from

the start, in the form of the detaching of themselves' (Fontana 2008, 43

[my translation]). With a definitive expression (*mot trenchant*, as

Deleuze has then defined it), Foucault designates this mode of life as *se

deprendre de soi-meme* (Foucault 2001, 1362), and elsewhere *s'arracher

de soi meme*, uproot oneself.

However, the exercise of self-detaching is definitely dangerous. Foucault

repeatedly comes to compare the Greek concept of care of the self to the

posterior concept of limit-experience:

> The experience in Nietzsche, Blanchot, Bataille is designed
> to eradicate the subject from himself, to make that no longer
> the subject can be himself or to bring him to his annihilation
> or dissolution. It is an undertaking of subjectivity, the idea of
> a limit-experience that eradicates the subject from himself ...
> (Foucault 2001, 862)

The limit-experience has the affective tone that Foucault defines several

times elsewhere as *moral de l'inconfort*, ethics of the disquiet: that of a

subject who pays his/her exercise of freedom with a sense of precarious

existence.

This subject—determined by the processes of subjectivation induced by

the dispositives, who can take care of him/herself at the cost of its

concern—is the user of the digital accountability, whom the next chapter

takes into analysis.

2 The Scene of Address

This chapter intends to answer the question: why is the modern human so adept at speaking about him/herself on social networks? Giving an account of oneself on social media is not taken as the essence of modernity, but as a simple empirical fact that characterises current practices. When a platform like Facebook collects 1,400,000,000 active users, it is not necessary to add further analysis in this respect: the data appears self-evident. Every person who acts on Facebook does nothing other than continuously produce forms of accounting.

Here it is considered that activities performed by users on social networks are absolute forms of accounting. Nevertheless, Han claims the opposite several times in his recent works. For example, in *The Transparency Society* he argues that narration always involves a selection, while on social networks one sees the account of the positive, of what it is, without the filter provided by the narration (Han 2014, 56 [my translation]). In another text he explains that the contemporary representation of the self gives way to other forms: presence and co-presentation (Han 2014, 31 [my translation]). These approaches both seem completely erroneous. In the light of what has been explained in the

previous chapter, the form of accounting on social media is rooted in an accounting that turns out to be an organising principle of the world. Han's thesis would be acceptable if one merely finds repetition of the chaos of experience on social media, without forms of filtering and selection. On the contrary, the basis of this dissertation is that accountability is a process of subjectivation that implies a form of rationalisation and symbolic representation of experience.[66]

The previous chapter has already demonstrated that, applying Foucauldian epistemology, a subject cannot exist outside of narratives that produce truth; and that these narratives are brought to light by the encounter between the subject and dispositives. Thus, this text refuses to understand the digital world as a possible space of absolute freedom—a space-limit of absolute freedom, the space typical of the Samuel Beckett's characters who are definitely alone at the end of the world without the possibility of real dialogue. These subjects produce a pure empty talk without recipients: without the possibility of communication, without the presence of the other. Beckett's characters pay for their foolish freedom at the price of radical solitude, the absence of the other. So Foucault keenly emphasises that the contemporary period is

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[66] Arturo Mazzarella pertinently emphasises the issue of virtuality in relation to the experience: 'Virtuality does not erase the ordinary reality, nor it replace it, but only analyzes it in terms of bundles of perceptual relationships that cross it (...); up to show each object, not as something given, but as the product of one of the many modes of possible perceptions. Up to show, in a nutshell, that reality—the way reality is recognised and interpreted—is always the result of a process of construction or rather, a view cropped from the chosen point of view' (Mazzarella 2008, 51 [my translation]). The account is the outcome of this virtualisation.

characterised by the renunciation of two elements: silence and suicide, both of them denying the possibility of the existence of accounting (Foucault 2001, 1345).

However, this is not the way that the modern human being lives. While Beckett's characters do not account their stories to anyone, in accountability—whether digital or not—there is always someone to whom the account is addressed. Moreover, the average contemporary man or woman is not addicted to silence and suicide.[67] This chapter aims to place the subject in a scene in which the address produces an account of him/herself, analysing its operative modality and then genealogically locating the emergence of the accounting the history.

2.1 Was it you?

In the contemporary era everyone is a small Pierre Riviére (Foucault 1992), accustomed to accounting one's existence. However, the fundamental question that arises here is: how can one say something about him/herself, and how to say it? For accountability cannot exist

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[67] It seems appropriate to also mention here a subtle distinction identified by Slavoj Žižek. A genuine ethics can only emerge when there is a transition from "I" to the subject. "I" is like the characters one finds in Beckett, silent and inclined to disappearance. Subjects will become only when the "I" becomes the agent of an impersonal truth and, as seen above, this happens when the "I" is asked to give an account of himself (Žižek 2009, 147-152).

without accounting practices, thus the absence of accounting would also be the absence of accountability.

The starting point for this investigation is the reconstruction of the scene of address, with which the subject who tells his/her account and the recipient of the account are joined. The starting point of this reconstruction is the analysis made by Judith Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). This work puts forth the fact that the subject can say something about his/herself as the fundamental ethical problem—both with respect to the subject itself and his or her relation to the other.

The first question that Butler raises regards the rules governing the establishment of the scene of address:

> We must ask, however, whether the ''I'' who must appropriate moral norms in a living way is not itself conditioned by norms, norms that establish the viability of the subject. It is one thing to say that a subject must be able to appropriate norms, but another to say that there must be norms that prepare a place within the ontological field for a subject. In the first instance, norms are there, at an exterior distance, and the task is to find a way of appropriating them, taking them on, establishing a living relation to them. The epistemological frame is presupposed in this encounter, one in which a subject encounters moral norms and must find his way with them. (2005, 9)

The starting point for the reconstruction of the scene of address—in which the subject is constituted according to the process of the subjectivation of accountability—is that the foundation of the scene of address is an entity that acquires the ontological status of subject when he

meets some norms. There is neither a consequent time nor a consequential logic in this passage: it is an ontological question, for which the subject cannot be constituted in the absence of norms. Once this is acquired, the question as to what norms govern the scene of address remains open.[68] With a theoretically keen operation, Butler says: 'We start to give an account only because we are interpellated as beings who are rendered accountable by a system of justice and punishment' (Butler 2005, 10). The scene of address is thus constituted, according to Butler, when norms grounding it concern a system of justice and punishment. In this system, human beings are challenged to give account for themselves, and following this interpellation they constitute themselves as subjects. Butler derives this reconstruction of the scene of address from sections of Nietzsche's masterpiece dedicated to the genealogy of morals (Nietzsche 2014). In fact, shortly afterwards the same American author quotes the German philosopher:

> So I start to give an account, if Nietzsche is right, because
> someone has asked me to, and that someone has power
> delegated from an established system of justice. I have been
> addressed, even perhaps had an act attributed to me, and a
> certain threat of punishment backs up this interrogation. And
> so, in fearful response, I offer myself as an ''I'' and try to
> reconstruct my deeds, showing that the deed attributed to me
> was or was not, in fact, among them. (Butler 2005, 11)

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[68] Agamben would say that in this case, instead of the subject, one should speak of the liminal condition of living out of regime of dispositives (see the previous chapter).

One acquires additional elements here for the definition of the scene of address. First, the subject is subjectified through the production of an account when s/he is explicitly requested by someone to produce it. That someone is not the undifferentiated other, but s/he is part of a dispositive in which s/he can exert the power to interrogate. This dispositive administers the power of justice.[69] The dispositive of justice works so that the questioner has the chance to question an action that I have taken, and to indicate the punishment that would result from the eventual violation with respect to this action. Faced with this interpellation, one is asked to introduce oneself as oneself, and to begin to tell one's point of view about events.[70]

Shortly afterwards Butler sums up the emergence of the subject in the scene of address:

> There may well be a desire to know and understand that is not fueled by the desire to punish, and a desire to explain and narrate that is not prompted by a terror of punishment. Nietzsche did well to understand that I begin my story of myself only in the face of a ''you'' who asks me to give an account. Only in the face of such a query or attribution from an other—''Was it you?''—do any of us start to narrate ourselves, or find that, for urgent reasons, we must become self-narrating beings. (2005, 11)

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[69] Justice is not here to be understood in the modern legal sense, but as a general principle of sorting of the human community, according to the Platonic origin of the term.

[70] In the original version of the scene of address the subject is invited to express his/her point of view about his/her position in the world. This request—the obligation to express a point of view—brings out both the subject and his account in the form of an explicit and shared point of view.

At this crucial point, Butler points out that it is not obvious that the impetus towards the account is born only out of needs related to the fear of punishment. The terror of punishment seems to be put here as a secondary factor if compared to what is considered as basic mechanism of the emergence of accounting: an "other"—who, regardless of the reason of justice, asks the I to give an account of him/herself. The question: *Was it you?* at this point overshadows the fact that one is inside a scene of address that was set up within a system of justice. An other who poses questions represents the new constituent elements of the account—there is an I questioned, and an account that the I gives in the face of an other questioning. However, this triad does not exhaustively constitute the basis of the scene of the address. We find its foundation in the moment in which the self receives an attribution of identity by the other that questions him/her. In that precise moment—the identification of an I by an other—the completeness of the scene of address is generated, for which the human being becomes a subject through the production of an account of him/herself. The ground of constitution as subjects would therefore be a process of accountability.[71]

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[71] It deserves to be highlighted, despite the conceptual clarity of the reconstruction made by Butler, that three elements are neglected. The first is the need of the emergency of the account, the reason why I respond to an other questioning. The second concerns the way in which the account is shaped. Third, having made this distinction, it seems that the account itself becomes the raw material of some narrative form, thus putting a gap between a rather curious account of oneself out of the realm of the unspeakable, so that the account itself and the facts accounted would collapse, and a narrative form as verbal representation of the account itself. To all these elements an alternative explanation will be provided, based on a reconstruction of a different scene of address in the following chapters.

In a following step, Butler highlights some elements regarding the giving of an account of oneself: 'Giving an account thus takes a narrative form, which not only depends upon the ability to relay a set of sequential events with plausible transitions but also draws upon narrative voice and authority, being directed toward an audience with the aim of persuasion' (Butler 2005, 12). Here Butler seems to place quite a radical split between the form of storytelling and giving an account of oneself. In this dissertation, for reasons that have been explained above, this distinction is never taken into account, assuming that giving an account of oneself is always narrative. However, it is interesting to dwell on what, according to Butler, turns the account into narrative form. The first point is the connection between consequential events with plausible relationships of cause and effect: a narrative forms some effective and dramatic avenues, but that barely has to do with the narrations of existence that common subjects give daily. The self-attributed authority by the subject giving an account looks something like the authority of the orator, as if each accounting process that is produced is directed to a political scene or a courtroom. In fact it will subsequently be argued that the purpose for which one gives a narrative form to the account is persuasion. If persuasion is definitely a foundational element of the Western narrative (see for example its role in ancient rhetoric (Cicero 1954)), it is here postulated that the only acceptable form of narration of accountability is aimed at persuading the other about the correctness of one's actions. The

115

way in which accountability is instead articulated here is different, since the emergence of giving an account of oneself is analysed according to another possible genealogy, the confession, which will be discussed later.

Butler then outlines, following Nietzsche, the transformation of the account into a narration providing new elements: 'the doer becomes the causal agent of the deed only through a retroactive attribution that seeks to comply with a moral ontology stipulated by a legal system, one that establishes accountability and punishable offenses by locating a relevant self as a causal source of suffering' (Butler 2005, 14). One clearly notes the echo, derived from Nietzsche, of the interpretation as a foundation of the will to power. The basis of the narrative form would then reside in the legal system (in other words: the order given by the justice to the world), which is read as moral ontology that necessarily consists in norms. Deeds, unconnected in existence, would be related to the I according to a principle of retroactive attribution. This retroactive attribution should then operate to persuade the other. Nonetheless, in this analysis the concept of accounting disappears, being just an awkward intermediate between the factual and the narrative form. Accounting would exist here only as a nominal form, without a specific content, which emerges only as an outcome of the narration, without dimensions.

Despite the complexity and relevance of Butler's reconstruction, this text contends that, on the one hand, the split of the account from the narrative

leads to *aporias*; and, on the other hand, that the explanation of the response by the subject to the interpellation of the other is incomplete. First of all, there are forms of accounting that ignore the sanction, namely: the account is not necessarily generated to avoid a penalty. In the second place, it is not justified according to whether the subject is resistant or not to the request to give an account of his/herself. In more Foucauldian than Butlerian terms: why does the subject offer him/herself to that process of subjectivation that is called accountability? The answer given by Butler—because it is the moment when the subject is identified by another, and thus identifies him/herself as a subject—seems to fall short. The two next chapters will seek to answer these unresolved issues.

2.2 Praxis and Poiesis

The scene of address can be reduced to three elements: a subject, a questioning other and an account of oneself supplied by the subject. It remains unclear what the reasons are that compel the subject to give an account of himself to another questioner.

One possible answer to this question is found within a theoretical horizon far away from that defined by Butler. To build it, the arguments exposed by the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno in the text *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2004) are useful. The argument Virno puts forth assumes that the political unity that enshrines human beings in the modern world is not

to be found in some form of state. This is because the prevalence of the

Hobbesian Leviathan has been established in the modern era, and even

with the prevalence of the political concept of the people, the multitude

has been confined to the private sphere, in opposition to the public. Here,

in the private sphere, the unity of the multitude is rooted in language.[72] In

summary, the public sphere relegates the multitude to the private sphere,

determining it as the multitude; and the multitude finds its unity in the

dimension of a common language.

Virno then goes on to examine the human experience in light of this

assumption, namely that language determines the unity of the multitude.

In the philosophical tradition there is a tripartite division of human

experience into three categories: work, intellect and action, which are

formulated by Aristotle for the first time in *Nicomachean Ethics*. These

categories were subsequently handed down via philosophical common

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[72] There is not intention here to dwell on this premise. However, this lengthy quotation from Virno sums up the matter: 'The multitude, which is the polar opposite of the people, takes on the slightly ghostly and mortifying features of the so-called private. Incidentally, even the public-private dyad itself, before becoming something indisputable, had been forged through tears and blood during a thousand theoretical and practical disputes; it is maintained, therefore, by a complex set of consequences. What could be more normal for us than to speak of public experience and of private experience? But this bifurcation was not always taken for granted. (…) "Private" signifies not only something personal, not only something which concerns the inner life of this person or that; private signifies, above all, deprived of: deprived of a voice, deprived of a public presence. In liberal thought, the multitude survives as a private dimension. The many are aphasic and far removed from the sphere of common affairs' (2004, 23-24). And a little further: 'Even the many need a form of unity, of being a One. But here is the point: this unity is no longer the State; rather, it is language, intellect, and the communal faculties of the human race. The One is no longer a promise, but a premise. Unity is no longer something (the State, the sovereign) towards which things converge, as in the case of the people; rather, it is taken for granted, as a background or a necessary precondition' (2004, 25).

sense for centuries, until Hannah Arendt in contemporary era

rearticulates these three categories in her masterpiece, *The Human

Condition* (Arendt 2000). Summarising, Virno states:

> as numerous as the intersections were, Labor, Intellect, and
> Politics remained essentially distinct. For structural reasons.
>
> Labor is the organic exchange with nature, the production of
> new objects, a repetitive and foreseeable process. The pure
> intellect has a solitary and inconspicuous character: the
> meditation of the thinker escapes the notice of others;
> theoretical reflection mutes the world of appearances.
> Differently from Labor, political Action comes between
> social relations, not between natural materials; it has to do
> with the possible and the unforeseen; it does not obstruct,
> with ulterior motives, the context in which it operates; rather,
> it modifies this very context. Differently from the Intellect,
> political Action is public, consigned to exteriority, to
> contingency, to the buzzing of the "many;" it involves, to use
> the words of Hannah, "the presence of others" (Human
> Condition, Chap. V, "Action"). The concept of political
> Action can be deduced by opposition with respect to the other
> two spheres. (2004, 50)

Arendt renews these categories to emphasise that the separation between

labour and political action, between praxis and poiesis, that was distinct

in ancient Greece is no longer clear. The end of this separation, the

German philosopher claims, has taken place when poiesis has subsumed

within it and imitated some features of praxis, or—to depart from Greek

vocabulary: political action began to imitate dimension of labour.

However, the thesis put forth by Virno is diametrically opposite.

According to the Italian philosopher, labour has conformed to political

action:

119

I maintain that things have gone in the opposite direction
from what Arendt seems to believe: it is not that politics has
conformed to labor; it is rather that labor has acquired the
traditional features of political action. My reasoning is
opposite and symmetrical with respect to that of Arendt. I
maintain that it is in the world of contemporary labor that we
find the "being in the presence of others," the relationship
with the presence of others, the beginning of new processes,
and the constitutive familiarity with contingency, the
unforeseen and the possible. I maintain that post-Fordist
labor, the productive labor of surplus, subordinate labor,
brings into play the talents and the qualifications which,
according to a secular tradition, had more to do with political
action. (2005, 51)

Leaving aside the theoretical aspects of this political and economic

analysis, [73] what matters is the emphasis on the relational and

communicative dimension of the working subject. Every subject in the

post-Fordist context that characterises the present era is invited to

exhibit—before the eyes of the others—not only the product s/he

produces with his/her work, but also him/herself in the time of

production. The worker then becomes a political actor on the stage of the

productive environment; and the clear symptom of this change is the rise

of the power of human resources departments within companies. As

Virno keenly observes, reformulating Arendt, there are many similarities

between political action and art: neither have a productive aim, both

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[73] In the Italian language there is a long series of studies related to post-Fordism, a
category that brings together mostly Leftist approaches for a critique to a presumed
neoliberal drift. In its more neutral definition, post-Fordism is a principle of economic
rationality that goes beyond the traditional Fordist mass production, characterised by the
standardisation of the product and the dimension of production, to usher in complex
production systems based on a flexible workforce, qualified and specialised, that
guarantees the just-in-time production required by the company.

require an audience and both imply a kind of virtuosity in their execution.

According to Virno, every political action is virtuosic. He comes to this

conclusion after reviewing this step in Arendt:

> The performing arts [...] have indeed a strong affinity with
> politics. Performing artists-dancers, play-actors, musicians,
> and the like —need an audience to show their virtuosity, just
> as acting men need the presence of others before whom they
> can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their
> "work", and both depend upon others for the performance
> itself. (Arendt, quoted in Virno 2004, 53-54)

However, political action that permeates the working dimension—thus

ushering in a figure of post-Fordist worker, a political player

characterised by processes of subjectivation that were absent before—has

a constitutive element. In the post-Fordist system, based on the

qualification and specialisation of the worker, the multitude turns into

individualised singularities, the result of a progressive differentiation. As

seen previously with Butler in this case there is also a scene of address

that determines the subjectivation of the human being. This scene of

address, such as the one carried out previously, includes the account of

itself as a constitutive element. As Virno argues, 'In fact, while language

belongs to everybody and to nobody, the passage from the pure and

simple ability to say something to a particular and contingent utterance

determines the space of an individual's notion of "my own"' (2004, 77).

Virno delineates this singular statement in a particular way, which

incorporates the concept of idle talk by Martin Heidegger.[74] Common

everyday speech has been introduced here as a defining moment in the

process of the subjectivation of the human being. However, when

considered in light of the concept of idle talk, it assumes a negative

connotation. As Virno says:

> It seems to me that idle talk makes up the primary subject of
> the post-Fordist virtuosity discussed in the second day of our
> seminar. Virtuosos, as you will recall, are those who produce
> something which is not distinguishable, nor even separable,
> from the act of production itself. Virtuosos are simple
> locuters par excellence. But, now I would add to this
> definition the non-referenced speakers; that is, the speakers
> who, while speaking, reflect neither one nor another state of
> affairs, but determine new states of affairs by means of their
> very own words: those who, according to Heidegger, engage
> in idle talk. This idle talk is performative: words determine
> facts, events, states of affairs (Austin, *How to Do Things with
> Words*). Or, if you wish, it is in idle talk that it is possible to
> recognize the fundamental nature of performance: not "I bet."
> or "I swear," or "I take this woman as my wife," but, above
> all, "I speak." In the assertion "I speak," I do something by
> saying these words; moreover, I declare what it is that I do

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[74] Idle talk is detected by Heidegger as one of the fundamental structures of the being in the world. It is defined in a famous page from *Being and Time*: 'Communication does not 'impart' the primary relation of being to the being spoken about, but being-with-one-another takes place in talking with one another and in heeding what is spoken about. What is important to it is that one speaks. The being-said, the dictum, the pronouncement provide a guarantee for the genuineness and appropriateness of the discourse and the understanding belonging to it. And since this discoursing has lost the primary relation of being to the being talked about, or else never achieved it, it does not communicate in the mode of a primordial appropriation of this being, but communicates by gossiping and passing the word along. What is spoken about as such spreads in wider circles and takes on an authoritative character. Things are so because one says so. Idle talk is constituted in this gossiping and passing the word along, a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on increases to complete groundlessness. (…) The groundlessness of idle talk is no obstacle to its being public, but encourages it. Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without any previous appropriation of the matter. Idle talk already guards against the danger of getting stranded in such an appropriation. Idle talk, which everyone can snatch up, not only divests us of the task of genuine understanding, but develops an indifferent intelligibility for which nothing is closed off any longer.' (Heidegger 1996, 168–169)

while I do it. Contrary to what Heidegger presumes, not only is idle talk not a poor experience and one to be deprecated, but it directly concerns labor, and social production (2004, 90)

Thus Virno claims that talk is a fundamental dimension of post-Fordist production of language. A few pages later, he writes: 'Thirty years ago, in many factories there were signs posted that commanded: "Silence, men at work!" Whoever was at work kept quiet. One began "chatting" only upon leaving the factory or the office. The principle breakthrough in post-Fordism is that it has placed language into the workplace' (2004, 90-91). Computers and digital networks have, for sure, a role in it.

Undoubtedly Virno is describing modern forms of accountability, which indeed can also be found in digital accountability. If Butler left the question of why the subject replies to the other questioning unanswered, one finds in Virno a fairly comprehensive response. The I responds because the relevant characteristic of the post-Fordist man is the collapse of political action into labour. This collapse introduces a dimension of artistry in all individual existences, and it is revealed in the form of the virtuosity of language. This implies that the contemporary human being spontaneously speaks. His/her talk is not articulated, however, in the sense of the speech, but in the direction of the chattering which, as previously demonstrated, is the language that is articulated inasmuch language, without necessity of a referent.

The contemporary form of idle talk has at least four consequences, some of which are particularly relevant within the context of accountability. Firstly, idle talk does not have the need of a referent. Having no referent, idle talk does not need to be validated according to criteria of fact checking, but merely through social consensus. In the digital scene, accountability, the regime of truth faced by the idle talker, is the mere presence of the idle talk itself within the community, which in turn is generated by the digital dispositive. With consequences that will be analysed in the fourth chapter, the status of producer of regimes of truth concerning the contemporary processes of subjectivation is delegated to the digital dispositive.

Secondly, the will of idle talk—for which language, as aptly noted by Virno, remains in the realm of the pre-individual—dismantles a fundamental principle of modern politics, the *habeas corpus*. Again, this reflection is not founded on the physical body and digital identity in dialectical terms, nor does it intend to appeal to the principles of the original (the subject's body) and copy (its digital version). The I speaking on social networks is identified as a ghost, or an impersonal voice that talks the talk. The current legislation is very lazy in pursuing aggressive speech on the network (the current legislation would allow it without problems, without the need for adaptation), because the I speaking on social networks loses the form of expression of the individual, and it acquires the pre-individuality of common speech. In this sense it loses its

124

habeas corpus, not meant here as a physical body, but as a relation between a legal entity (digital or biological that may be) and the justification of its actions. For this reason, the principle of justification/sanction in the digital accountability takes different routes than those of conventional standards of accountability.

The third moment concerns the contemporary practices of the self. In a world dominated by the linguistic dimension, operated by linguistic dispositives, and where the linguistic dimension of digital dispositives determine regimes of truth, the current practices of the self are inevitably associated with the dimension of language, specifically written language. Professional performances are determined by the current capacity of processing language, to the point that some current post-Fordist writers (for instance, Maurizio Lazzarato 1997) argue that what is being waged in the world today is not the time given by the worker to the company, but the potential of exploiting the worker's human capital, including language.[75] It is worthwhile to notice that idle talk is one among many technologies of the self based on language; however, it seems appropriate to clarify that the idle talk defined above is a precise technology of the self, that very often is considered one of the soft skills of the worker in the form of pompous "interpersonal skills".

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[75] According to this analysis, any possibility of distinction between work time and leisure time disappears completely, as the dimension of language permeates so much free time and what is practiced in the free time (reading books, watching movies) that the contemporary subject is always a person at work at any time of his/her life.

The fourth outcome concerns the relationship between the thinking subject and the speaking subject. If the experience of the outside is based on the dissociation between "I think" and "I speak", with a possible disappearance of the speaking subject, the modern world, based on idle talk, seems to reverse the possibility of a thought of the outside. If everything is word, an outside no longer exists, so that it can be embraced by the thought out of the possibility of linguistic expression. The contemporary subject is a manufacturer of constant idle talk; this talk is not, however, an attempt to linguistically process thought that desperately tries to explore the outside, and then to create; but it stands as idle talk, or as virtuosic and sterile repetition of what exists.

At the end of this chapter, the account in the form of the idle talk will have been interrogated and this survey will identify language as a fundamental element of the contemporary subject. It will also partially respond to the question posed at the end of previous chapter: why does the I reply to the other's questioning? However, one point remains completely untapped, which regards the intentionality of the questioned human being. Without an understanding of this intentionality, one might not understand how the subject can answer the question. This understanding implies a shift of the initial question. Butler (following Nietzsche) founded her analysis of the scene of address—and consequently on accounting—on the question: *Was it you?* Nonetheless, the analysis operated in this dissertation has revealed some fallacies in

Butler's reconstruction. Virno has demonstrated that the referent of idle

talk is unnecessary, thus the link between accountability and sanction has

been removed from the discourse. In order to fix these aporetic issues,

the basic question of the scene of address will be revised in the following

pages. The process of giving an account with shift from the question *Was*

it you? to a different starting point: *Who am I?* The next pages aim to

demonstrate that accountability, in all its contemporary forms, is rooted

in this question, and that this question derives from the Christian

confession.

2.3 The Confessions of the Flesh

The Confessions of the Flesh would have been the fourth volume of the

series inaugurated by Foucault in 1976 with *The History of Sexuality*

(Foucault 1990a). This text never saw the light of day due to the author's

premature death. In *The Confessions of the Flesh*, Foucault would have

continued with the examination of the process of subjectivation that he

had identified as the most relevant, namely: sexuality in the early

Christian period.[76] This section takes into account a course, held in 1979-

1980, that Foucault had called *On the Government of the Living*

(Foucault 2014a). As often happened in courses given by the French

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[76] Please note that the analysis of sexuality would have closed with the investigation of
the concept in psychoanalysis.

philosopher at the Collège de France, the course ended up taking a

different path that focused on the genealogy of confession in the

Christian context. The pages that follow aim to illustrate the author's

arguments about the confession.

Firstly, Foucault developed a methodological premise in which he

intended to clearly identify the relationships between truth, power and

knowledge. To do so, he introduced the concept of alethurgy:

> *Alēthourgēs* is the truthful. Consequently, forging the fictional
> word *alēthourgia*, alethurgy, from *alēthourgēs*, we could call
> "alethurgy" the manifestation of truth as the set of possible
> verbal or non-verbal procedures by which one brings to light
> what is laid down as true as opposed to false, hidden,
> inexpressible, unforeseeable, or forgotten, and say that there
> is no exercise of power without something like an alethurgy.
> (Foucault 2014a, 7)

Alethurgy has a fundamental dimension of process, or rather of a set of

processes. The purpose of these processes is to bring to light what is true,

as opposed to what is false. Again, as mentioned previously, it is clear

that the question of truth is the process of its construction, without any

ontological foundation. And the truth is identified as a key moment in the

construction of the subject, or as a necessary moment in which the

subject is identified as such.[77]

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[77] That is, the moment in which one can answer the question: *Who are you?*. Over the
following course held at the Collège de France, entitled *Subjectivité et Verite*, in 1980-
1981 (Foucault 2014b), as yet unpublished in English, Foucault further elaborates upon
the regime of truth, a notion that had not yet been fully developed at the time of the
previous course. In the first lesson on January 7, 1981 this notion is expressed in a long

After establishing the notion of alethurgy, Foucault poses a clear portmanteau about the tools of analysis that he had used throughout the previous decade, namely the duality power-knowledge. From his text on Nietzsche's genealogy, and later with the massive application of the same notion in the fundamental *Discipline and Punish* (1995), knowledge and power were the basic tools in the Foucauldian toolbox. But in this text, the superiority of the analysis of the regimes of truth on different systems is clearly spelled out. As Foucault definitively states:

> the second shift in relation to this notion of knowledge-power involves getting rid of this in order to try to develop the notion of government by the truth; getting rid of the notion of knowledge-power as we got rid of the notion of dominant ideology. (...) this notion of government, which seemed to me to be much more operational than the notion of power, "government" being understood, of course, not in the narrow and current sense of the supreme instance of executive and administrative decisions in State systems, but in the broad

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passage that is reported almost entirely in the clarity of the terms in which it is formulated: 'The problem 'subjectivity and truth' is, in the philosophical tradition, in wondering how and under what conditions I can know the truth, or even: how the knowledge, as experience made by a subject who knows, is possible? Or again: for which reason the one who makes this experience can certainly recognize that it is true knowledge? Let's say that the philosophical problem 'subjectivity and truth' can be characterised as follows: resolve the tension between these two propositions. (...) In this formulation of the philosophical question 'subjectivity and truth', you could put up a formula that I would call, in a very hasty way and for convenience, positivist, that would be the question in reverse: about the subject, is it possible to have a true knowledge, and under which conditions can you have a true knowledge of this subject? (...) What experience can the subject have of him/herself when s/he is put in the condition or the ability to recognize, about him/herself, anything considerable as true?' (2014b, 12-13 [my translation]). And a little further: 'The truth (...) is not defined by a certain content of knowledge that you might consider as universally valid, and it is not even defined by a formal and universal criterion. The truth is conceived primarily as a system of bonds, independently from the fact that, by this or that point of view, one can consider it true or not. (...) The important thing in this issue of truth, is that a number of things pass actually for true, and that the subject should or should not produce it by him/herself, or accept it, or subjugate him/herself to it' (Foucault 2014b, 15 [my translation]). It is useful to recall the radicality of the regime of truth taken into account by Foucault in the previous period: the definition of crazy, sick, deviant.

sense, and old sense moreover, of mechanisms and
procedures intended to conduct men, to direct their conduct,
to conduct their conduct. (Foucault 2014a, 12)

If in the four years previous to this course, governmentality was situated
as a crucial territory to be investigated.[78] The regimes of truth are now
being proposed as the main tool for the analysis of this same area. Thus,
at this time the French author is addressing the question of the subject as
follows:

a) The fundamental issue that drives all research carried out by Foucault
is the subject.

b) The subject is defined by and within a process, as the outcome of the
ever-changing processes of subjectivation.

c) Governmentality is the set of processes of subjectivation aimed at
leading subjects.

d) Governmentality includes the dimensions of knowledge and power,
but above all it is based on regimes of truth that allow the management of
subjects' conduct.

e) These regimes of truth are not ontological dimensions, but sets of
obligations that manage the lives of subjects.

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[78] Foucault proposes a possible categorisation of the economy of the truth, which would
manifest itself in five aspects: scientific discourse, economics, distribution and
consumption, the domain of political machines, and the form of the debate. (Foucault
2001, 112-113)

f) The regimes of truth, to be effective, imply that the subject can account for him/herself, namely: give him/herself some qualifications.

g) These qualifications are not spontaneous creations of the subject, but they exist prior to him/her within the regimes of truth present in governmental processes.

h) This connection between governmentality, regimes of truth and processes of subjectivations establish the rules of the making of the subject, so that s/he can answer the question: *Who are you?*

If this is the work plan of the French philosopher, the course of 1979-1980 is concerned with identifying and analysing the emergence of a process of subjectivation tied to a specific regime of truth: the Christian confession. As Foucault announces,

> I would like to talk about another regime of truth: this is a regime defined by the obligation for individuals to have a continuous relationship to themselves of knowledge, their obligation to discover, deep within themselves, secrets that elude them, their obligation, finally, to manifest these secret and individual truths by acts that have specific, liberating effects that go well beyond the effects of knowledge. In other words, there is a whole regime of truth in Christianity that is not so much organized around the truth act as act of faith, but around the truth act as act of confession. (Foucault 2014a, 83-84)

The operation Foucault performs here is absolutely radical. The concept of regime of truth is part of the Foucauldian matrix, but in this course the regime of truth is verified and then made true when situated in specific

historical dimensions. Foucault identifies a basic system of truth in the construction of the Western contemporary human being, namely the Christian confession. One finds a powerful application of the concept of the regime of truth in the Christian confession. As explained above, the confession is an act of self-knowledge, which is not at all an act of faith. It follows that in the Christian religion the French author identifies a specific pole not included in the context of the belief in an afterlife (belief in the afterlife and in redemption), but he identifies something external to theological virtues. What Foucault identifies in Christianity is the birth of a process of subjectivation: the fact that the Western subject is obliged to tell the truth about him/herself: a truth that is not reached in moments of mystical devotion, but a truth of the subject about him/herself that is accessible only in the form of a self interrogation about his/her secrets.

A crucial conversational passage illustrates how the truth of the subject emerges in Christian religion:

> when he says "it is true, therefore I submit," he does not utter this "therefore" because it is part of the logic. It is not part of the logic, for it is not the truth of the proposition that, in fact, actually constrains him, it is not because it is logical, it is not because he is a logician, or rather it is insofar as he is doing* logic, for it is not his status or qualification as logician that means that he submits (he might well not be a professional logician and he would submit the same), but because he is doing logic, that is to say, because he constitutes himself, or has been invited to constitute himself as operator in a certain number of practices or as a partner in a certain type of game. (Foucault 2014a, 97-98)

132

The nouns "logical" and the adjective "logic", in this paragraph, shall be adopted in the philosophical sense, or in relation to the branch of philosophy that aims to distinguish the true from the false. Here Foucault repeatedly emphasises that the truth of the subject in the Christian confession does not have anything to do with this type of logic. The truth of the subject is not part of any plan of formal logic that determines the true and the false, as the subject who submits to confession has nothing to do with it.

Nevertheless the Christian confesses, and in confessing s/he utters a truth about him/herself himself, a truth that determines his/her classification as a sinner. This happens because the Christian subject "does logic", or works within a context of truth and falsehood, without "being logical". This gap can arise when, by the confession, the Christian subject undergoes a regime of truth that exists before him/her in the form of obligation (the obligation determined by the confession). As Foucault briefly yet effectively argues: the confession 'is the acceptance of a certain regime of truth' (Foucault 2014a, 98). Analysing the texts from the first centuries of Christianity dedicated to the sacrament of confession, Foucault identifies a key moment for the contemporary era:

> The injunction, "tell me who you are," which is fundamental in Western civilization, is what we see being formed in these and other texts of the same time, when the soul is told: Go to the

truth, but, on the way, don't forget to tell me who you are, because if, on the way, you do not tell me who you are, you will never arrive at the truth. (Foucault 2014a, 146)

Here Foucault determines "the fundamental injunction of Western civilization", an injunction that did not appear in the Greek world.[79] This injunction forces the subject to answer the question: *Who are you?* The reconstruction made by Foucault follows some clearly defined steps. Christianity divides the act of confession by the act of faith. The act of confession is an absolutely specific process of subjectivation. Its key moment is the subjugation offered by the subject to specific regimes of truth. These regimes of truth are meant to refer the subject to the obligation for which the subject must tell the truth about him/herself. The obligation to declare the truth about him/herself—a truth that the subject must explain after having sought it in his/her hidden dimensions—is the knowledge of the subject about him/herself. This knowledge is functional to salvation, so that confession opens the door to salvation, but opens the door only as long as the subject is telling the truth about him/herself. The Christian subject is, unless s/he is able to qualify him/herself, to answer

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[79] The first lessons of the course of 1979-1980 are dedicated to the analysis of Oedipus Rex, in which the regimes of truth work differently from those operating in Christianity. A hermeneutics of the subject that is based on a hidden truth, detectable only with the confession, is stranger to the Greek-Roman world, and it appears historically with Christianity.

the question: *Who are you?*, undergoing regimes of truth determined by the obligation of the act of confession.[80]

The dimension of the case for which the subject constructs the truth of him/herself within the becoming is clearly stated in the following passage:

> is this coupling of "truth-telling about oneself" whose function is to erase the evil and "transit of self" from the unknown to the known, giving oneself to oneself and in one's own eyes a status of object to be known at the same time as one verbalizes the sins in order to erase them, getting oneself to exist as object of knowledge at the moment that, through verbalization, one provides oneself with the means to bring it about that the sin no longer exists or at any rate is erased, is forgivable. (Foucault 2014a, 225)

Forgiveness is the goal of confession, and the fundamental culmination of the process of confession. Forgiveness allows the subject to put salvation on its cognitive plan. This binding occurs when the "truth-telling about oneself" and "transit of self" from the unknown to the

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[80] It is also interesting to put forth a passage that concerns the relationship between knowledge and salvation. Foucault clearly identifies that: 'Christianity thought the relapse (*rechute*). It battled with the problem of how the subject, having arrived at the truth, could lose it, how, in this relationship, which is after all conceived of as a fundamentally irreversible relationship of knowledge, something can take place that is like falling back from knowledge to non-knowledge, from light to darkness, and from perfection to imperfection and sin' (Foucault 2014a, 186). In Christianity there is therefore a split between knowledge and salvation: the conquest of knowledge about themselves in the act of confession is no guarantee of eternal salvation, but it is a temporary condition that the subject—for the call of the flesh?—may lose after the confession. Self-knowledge is considered something transient and, above all, reversible. The recognition of this aspect thus opens the way for an anthropology that identifies a force, which remains in the subject as condition of permanent exit from the knowledge, which turns out to be a condition always perfectible.

known are matched.[81] If the Christian subject tells the truth about him/herself, this happened because s/he was able to pass himself from the unknown to the known. This transit however, as Foucault acutely notices, implies a split inside the subject, a split in which the subject is asked to identify him/herself as an object.[82] It is a kind of hermeneutic circle: one can preach to oneself only when one constitutes oneself as the subject, and one exists as an object only if subjected to qualifications (in the case of confession, against the acts that classify the subject as sinner).

However, if the Christian subject in the moment of confession operates a process of knowledge that leads him to "tell-the-truth-about-him/herself", what kind of regime of truth is at work? Afterwards, Foucault again deepens the notion of regime of truth as a set of obligations, specifying a further dimension of the truth:

> In Christian examination, on the other hand, you can see that the question does not bear on the objective content of the idea, but on the material reality of the idea in the uncertainty of what I am, the uncertainty of what is taking place deep within myself, and while searching—for what? Whether my idea is true? Not at all. Whether I am right to hold this or that opinion? Not at all. What is in question is not the truth of my idea; it is the truth of myself who has an idea. It is not the question of the truth of what I think, but the question of the truth of I who thinks. (Foucault 2014a, 303)

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[81] As Foucault points out: while *discretio* in Stoicism is applied to things, the Christian is asked to consider his/her ideas.

[82] In this sense, the Christian confession stands as strong moment of de-subjectivation in the form of self-denial.

The analysis made by Foucault here is fundamental for the understanding of the status of contemporary human beings. The regime of truth of the Christian subject's confession is not about what the subject thinks, or the idea that the subject may have with respect to this fact or that. The opinion of the subject is irrelevant in the Christian truth. The "tell-the-truth" was seen previously as "becoming-true". But what transits to the truth is not the content of knowledge possessed by the Christian subject. What is in transit to truth is the Christian him/herself. Foucault summarises that it's not true what the Christian subject thinks; what is true is the Christian him/herself in the moment of confession. This conclusion is a balanced harmony between confession as a process of subjectivation and truth as subjugation of the Christian subject to some kind of governmentality.

The conclusion is trenchant: if the Christian subject is saved when s/he subjectifies him/herself in the subjectivation process of the confession, this moment is genealogically the emergence of the modern subject that makes him/herself true in the regimes of truth imposed by governmentality. However, this emergency would be trivial if the confession would not have revealed an additional element, namely, that the subject tells the truth about him/herself in the confession. Taking the fundamental consequence of what has just been exposed: the contemporary Western human being, genealogically Christian, is true when s/he qualifies, preaches, objectifies him/herself, states the truth

137

about him/herself, gives an account of him/herself within any kind of governmental dispositive that reiterates the Christian confession by asking the question: *Who are you?*[83] As Foucault masterfully summarises: 'this obligation to tell the truth about oneself has never ceased in Christian culture, and probably in Western societies. We are obliged to speak of ourselves in order to tell the truth of ourselves' (Foucault 2014a, 311).

During the same period Foucault was working on the notion of pastoral power, which was identified as a form of power proper to Christianity. And a question that was left open in the analysis of the scene of address exposed by Butler was the absence of resilience by the subject. In other words: why does the subject obey? Foucault provides the answer in this passage:

> The Christian does not have the truth of the world above his head, with the exception of his own truth, the truth concerning himself. The Christian has the truth deep within himself and he is yoked to this deep secret, indefinitely bent over it and indefinitely constrained to show to the other the treasure that his work, thought, attention, conscience, and discourse ceaselessly draw out from it. And by this he shows that putting his own truth into discourse is not just an

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[83] Interestingly, in the scene of address put forth by Foucault about the Christian confession the questioner does not hold weight. As Foucault says: 'One can trust confession as an operator of discrimination, not so much because the person to whom I speak is trustworthy, but simply due to the fact of speaking to another person. The form itself of confession is a principle of discrimination, even more than the wisdom of the person to whom I speak' (Foucault 2014, 304-305). It follows—and it is an important point for the rest of this dissertation—that the process of the subjectivation of confession should not imply any qualification about the role of the questioner; what is relevant is the act of accounting itself.

essential obligation; it is one of the basic forms of our
obedience (Foucault 2014a, 312-313).

The contemporary subject is obedient because its foundation is the

Christian subject. One of the Christian subject's first forms of obedience

emerges in the confession. And the Christian is subjected to the regime of

truth of the confession as it is in the confession that the subject can

account him/herself. If one confesses in order to be true, the same is true

for the regimes of truth derived from the confession. In submission to the

new governmentalities the subject finds his/her own truth. Since the

confession requires that one be honest about him/herself, the next section

will explore accountability as contemporary form of Christian

confession.

2.4 Digital Accountability as Confession

This section aims to demonstrate that digital accountability

genealogically finds its foundation in the Christian confession. It is not

intended here to demonstrate that accountability and confession are the

same: the more than 1500 years that have passed between the encoding

of the Christian confession to the establishment of the contemporary

accountability is a quite long period. What is meant here is that the

typical formation of accountability shares numerous characteristics with

Christian confession. To establish this argument, what follows will outline accountability and Christian confession in parallel.

First of all, accountability arises in the form of process, both in standard form and in digital accountability. Surely, Christian confession involves a procedural form, which is divided into the stages of: recognition as a sinner through knowledge of the self and of sins; the act of confession itself; the upheaval towards the source of salvation; and repentance.

Secondly, it has been observed that a certain form of contract exists in accountability. This contract operates on two levels in digital accountability: one is the contract with respect to the platform and the other is the "social" contract between the user and the community to which he belongs. There is no doubt that even in Christian confession there is a kind of contract with respect to the community,[84] which is called the flock according to the pastoral and theological power of the church. The contract assumes no written form, but consists of the ritual obligations that the Christian must undergo in order to remain within the flock. It is useful to remember that in Christianity, and especially in Catholicism and Orthodoxy, a fundamental constraint to stay in the flock is the submission to the sacraments. Only by virtue of the assumption of the holy sacraments, can the Christian profess his/her membership to the

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[84] Not surprisingly, the Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which is translated in the Christian context as community, in this case, the community of believers. The noun was borrowed from the popular assembly of the Ancient Athens.

church. Among the sacraments, not coincidentally, one finds the confession. Due to this, it is believed that the Christian church has been replaced by the community of users, and that the confession as a sacrament is instead replaced the social contract of belonging to a certain community.[85]

Subsequently it had been taken into account the presence of a person acting (meaning active), which had been identified in digital accountability as the traditional user of social networks. Again, one can draw a parallel with the Christian confession, which focuses on the act of confession in which the sinner intends to redeem his/her sins.

Fourth, the need for the user to give accounts in the accountability process was introduced. It was seen that in the traditional process of accountability, giving an account of himself/herself is an immanent necessity of accountability itself, without which accountability would not exist. It has also been observed that in digital accountability having and giving an account were two sides of the same coin, and that the fact of having an account consequently implied the giving an account. In the act of Christian confession one finds the same mandatory bond. The characterisation of the subject as a Christian can take place only with the act of confession, and the act of confession can be only grounded in the

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[85] This contract may be distinguished in various manners. If some years ago, a great emphasis was placed on the issue of network etiquette, for example, it is interesting that now the rule, set to be within a community, effectively has become multifaceted, until it has taken on the contours of a subject of study (personal branding, for example).

Christianity of the subject. It has been seen above, however, that the act

of confession consists of an act of "telling-the-truth" by the subject about

him/herself, and that this "telling-the-truth" cannot ignore the form of the

account (as opposed to the act of faith, which may not require a

dimension of accounting). This results in the indissoluble bond, argued

above, between the dimension of the account itself in the form of "tell-

the-truth" and the Christian confession.[86]

This leads to the fifth item related to accountability, the account itself. It

was shown that—as an etymological origin of the term—an account of

oneself in both the forms of accounting and storytelling pertained to the

same horizon of meaning, and that one should not put a portmanteau

between verbal narration and a different symbolic narration that proceeds

otherwise (for example, a symbolic narration based on numbers). It was

then validated that the result of statistical inference made by the digital

machine in accountability could be also considered as a form of narrative

itself, one that emerges from the intentionality of the subject. As clearly

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[86] Due to this reason I depart from Butler when she says: 'Giving an account is thus also a kind of showing of oneself, a showing for the purpose of testing whether the account seems right, whether it is understandable by the other, who 'receives' the account through one set of norms or another' (Butler 2005, 131). It is considered here, as repeatedly expressed, that the fundamental feature of accountability is the subject situated in the process, rather than the account operated by the subject. Butler indeed says in another moment: 'The account is an act—situated within a larger practice of acts—that one performs for, to, even on an other, an allocutory deed, an acting for, and in the face of, the other and sometimes by virtue of the language provided by the other. This account does not have as its goal the establishment of a definitive narrative but constitutes a linguistic and social occasion for self-transformation' (Butler 2005, 130).

argued by Foucault, one cannot make a confession without telling the truth, which can only take the form of the account itself. Just as in Christian confession, as mentioned above, one finds the pivotal moment of Western culture, in which the subject finds him/herself at the very moment in which he tells-the-truth to him/herself. And also the subject is true when his/her account has an external referent that makes the account real, but only because he is precisely that person who can tell-the-truth. It is not the accounting of the truth that offers the Christian subject salvation, but it is the truth of the accounting—*the truth of the accounting subject*—that saves the subject.

And then—the sixth moment—the reference domain where the account itself is situated is identified in the mission statement of any digital platform. This mission is the remediation of Christianity's salvation plan. The invitation to the Christian subject was: obey the act of confession and you will be saved. The invitation digital platforms offer the contemporary human being is: be consistent with the mission of the platform and you'll find yourself. A picture on Instagram, a tweet, a Facebook post: these are all instruments by which the contemporary subject encounters the will of the platform. If the subject meets the will of the platform, the possibility of subjectivation—and objectivation in front of his/her eyes and the eyes of other—is offered through the account in digital accountability. If the process of self-accounting offered by the platform is guaranteed, the subject will then be in a position to

143

continuously produce accounts about him/herself. Thus, this continuous accounting constantly keeps the subject within a paradigm of confession, or a form in which the subject is continually invited to tell the truth about him/herself: a "tell-the-truth" that does not pertain to the contents of the account, but to the subject who manifests him/herself as a subject able to give an account of him/herself. This is the fundamental point that can be gleaned from a genealogy of Christian confession: the subject of social networks is a perpetual producer of accounts. As this subject is perpetually accountable and confessable, he or she is thus permanently "saved".

In seventh place, is has been shown that accountability can only be based on the dimension of symbolisation, and that digital accountability can offer both an intentional symbolisation and an unintentional numerical symbolism, made by the strategic inferences operated by the platform. In this case, the legacy of confession in accountability is fully rediscovered, whether digital or not. Confession is always a symbolisation of the account in front of another. In confession, the Christian tells someone his/her sins. Confession is not an examination of conscience, to which it could be compared.[87] While the examination of conscience presupposes a dialogue of the subject with himself, a dialogue seeking to determine

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[87] This is something that the Greeks already had in mind, and in various forms. For instance the *praemeditatio malorum* operated by the Stoics, consisted of imagining all future evils, to accustom themselves to manage the emotions that would ensue once the evils they had come true; or the famous soliloquies Marcus Aurelius told to himself (1997).

what was good or bad during the day, or regarding a specific incident, the confession strictly requires that the subject exposes his/her *arcana conscientiae* in front of another person. The Christian confession is not a meditation. The ground of the Christian confession is the verbalisation, the dimension of telling rather than thinking. Only in the form of public speech the confession can take place. The account of oneself given in confession itself does not have the private form of self-examination, but it is public, and the fact that it's public means that it needs a recipient.[88]

The eighth moment concerns the presence of a recipient of the account in the scene of address. If the questioner plays a critical role in accountability, and usually s/he is directly interested in the account, and if in digital accountability the interlocutor is more nuanced and sometimes opaque, as expressed above in the confession, the recipient to whom the account is addressed is irrelevant: s/he can be wise and full of knowledge, as well as foolish and ignorant. What counts is the precise location that the questioner occupies in the process of confession: the mere fact that s/he offered a listening ear to the response of the subject makes true what the subject has said. Likewise in digital accountability the function of listening is fundamental: it is not relevant what the subject says, but the function of listening itself driven by what is being said. This listening makes true not so much what is said, but the telling subject

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[88] The act of confessing sins can be made public, in front of an audience, within some Protestant churches.

Insofar as s/he tells telling.[89] In digital accountability one finds his/her salvation on the basis that one has a recipient for their address. And it is no coincidence that social networks make it possible to quantify this function of listening, by counting the likes, retweets, shares, and all other available tools. In the spread of my account— quantitative in the case of digital accountability—one finds salvation, since s/he is guaranteed to be in a process of subjectivation fruitful for him/her.

Thus, accountability implies an answer, which in digital accountability takes the form of feedback operated by the community. In Christian confession, there is clearly an answer in the dialogical dimension that assumes the act of confession itself, which does not consist in a soliloquy to the ear of the other, but includes a response from the confessor that facilitates the Christian subject in the knowledge of him/herself. The community operates similarly: the reply offers a fundamental moment of feedback, both affirming the truth of the act of accounting (the like), or asking for additional information as needed (the reply to the post), wherein the subject is invited to respond in turn. Other forms of response are given through the address of specific content on Facebook and Twitter (the interpellation to the recipient via the "@"), or the creation of trend topics (introduced by the hashtag "#"), where the semantic function is totally subordinate to the question of the revival of the discussion. This

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[89] As Turkle notes: 'We enjoy continual connection but rarely have each other's attention' (Turkle 2012, 280).

revival is entirely consistent with the mechanisms of veridiction expressed above, for which the invitation to subjectivation is continuously stimulated.

Finally, in accountability the moment of sanction is essential. However, it appears appropriate to focus on digital accountability's sanction mechanism, in which the greatest penalty is the lockout. On a basic level, the blocking and deleting of an account can be due to two factors. The first is the convenience of content shared online. However, I don't aim to dwell on this point here, as it will be seen in chapter four how moral issues are linked to the discourse of economic rationality. What matters here is rather the principle of deletion. It is forbidden to have more than one account tied to a physical body. But above all, being a psychical person must be proven in case of dispute (for example, if one is accused of being a bot). To understand this mechanism of exclusion, Butler is revealing:

> In a real sense, we do not survive without being addressed, which means that the scene of address can and should provide a sustaining condition for ethical deliberation, judgment, and conduct. In the same way, I would argue, the institutions of punishment and imprisonment have a responsibility to sustain the very lives that enter their domains, precisely because they have the power, in the name of ''ethics,'' to damage and destroy lives with impunity. If, as Spinoza maintained, one can desire to live life in the right way only if there is, already or at the same time, a desire to live, it would seem equally true that the scenario of punishment that seeks to transform the desire for life into a desire for death erodes the condition of ethics itself. (2005, 49)

147

The sanction is ambivalent on Facebook. On one hand, it refers to control, but on the other hand its roots lie in disciplinary systems, in which the exclusion involved immediately results in de-subjectivation. Facebook applies an archaic attitude of power, for which deviance determines exclusion without possibility of re-subjectivation within the dispositive. It is the same scene of address to be denied. Faced with a continuing claim on the ethical platform, the platform itself denies any possible ethics to the user in the moment that the user him/herself can be removed. In this sense, one could even assimilate Facebook within the administrative system of death, rather than disciplinary systems of life.

This issue will be taken up in the last chapter. Now that the genealogy of contemporary digital accountability has been established through an analysis of the Christian confession, the next chapter will analyse four possible forms of hermeneutics of the self: screaming, free, disembodied, coherent subjects.

3 The First Hermeneutics of the Subject

In *The Government of the Living* (2014a), Michel Foucault defines *exagoreusis* as a specific procedure in the Christian world by which the subject has to give perpetual testimony of him/herself. Based on an account of oneself, exagoreusis is the self perpetually staging itself (301). Exagoreusis seems to anticipate contemporary practices on social networks, however neither exagoreusis nor accounting of oneself on social networks comprise the only practices through which the human being stages him/herself. As Foucault noted, literature is another great system of constraint by which the Westerners obliges daily life to assume a narrative discourse (reflection exposed in *The Life of Infamous Men* (2001, 252).[90] 'People have written about themselves in the same way for a thousand years, but not in the same modality', Foucault states (2001, 1227 [my translation]) in his consideration of the act of writing as one of the main techniques by which human being offers him/herself to the other and, in doing this, makes him/herself a subject.[91] One form of

[90] Even the reflection of Kundera, dedicated to the theory of the novel, belongs to this area, for which the novel—a typical Western invention- is merely a form of storytelling of the neat experience (Kundera 2003).

[91] As Foucault points out, in a very important step for the definition of the relationship between writing and visibility: 'Writing is to show ourselves, make us visible, make our face visible to the other. (...) The letter manages a kind of face-to-face'(Foucault 2001, 1245 [my translation]). By the act of writing, the human being shows him/herself,

writing that Foucault takes into account in this text is the *hyponmemata*, a technique of collecting thoughts that flourished in Ancient Greece. As Foucault describes them:

> In the technical sense, the *hypomnemata* could be account books, public registers, individual notebooks serving as memoranda. Their use as books of life, guides for conduct, seems to have become a current thing among a whole cultivated public. Into them one entered quotations, fragments of works, examples, and actions to which one had been witness or of which one had read the account, reflections or reasonings which one had heard or which had come to mind. They constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation. They also formed a raw material for the writing of more systematic treatises in which were given arguments and means by which to struggle against some defect (such as anger, envy, gossip, flattery) or to overcome some difficult circumstance (a mourning, an exile, downfall, disgrace). (Dreyfus 1983, 246)

However hyponmenata, which Foucault outlines in rich detail, seem ambivalent regarding the discourse developed here. On one hand, they certainly work as a process of subjectivation, as a general act of writing. Foucault himself declares: 'The writer is the synthesis of *hypomnemata*, insofar as subjectivation passes through the exercise of the personal writing'(2001, 1241 [my translation]).[92] If in hypomnenata the regime of

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changes from a state of invisibility to visibility within a dimension dialogue with the reader.

[92] The definition of *hypomnenata* given above and a possible comparison to reposting and sharing content produced by others on social media seems interesting. Surely, even in sharing, the element of content aggregation retrospectively reflects upon the writer, namely: the work of selecting content to share indicates a particular regime of visibility for the one who posts it. And, accordingly, this selection allows the reader to establish a particular type of analysis of subjectivity that s/he faces. It is certainly interesting then

visibility prevails, and the subject returns continuously to him/herself, the French author suggests that perhaps one can find a more authentic and complex corresponding story of the self (Foucault 2001, 1245).

Thus the relationship between writing and giving an account of oneself as an act of self-construction is a fundamental aspect of subjectivity, both historically and in the contemporary world. As Lanier astutely points out (2011), Unix systems, which are the basis of all modern computing, established a user typewriter among its various available options at the operating system's inception. Thus, it stands to reason that writing (now flanked by iconism) has exploded in modern times to reach an era in which writing has never been so diffused (Ferraris 2011).

Social networks certainly comprise the most diffused form of symbolising the world through writing today, at least if we consider the number of people involved in the process of constructing the narratives distributed though these platforms. Rovatti keenly observes: 'Facebook is basically an account of oneself through others' (Rovatti 2010, 155 [my translation]), mediated by algorithms. 'Through' can be understood in

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to take into account what is shared as strategic dimension of subjectivity; however, a basic element of the confession is missing in this process: the dimension of self-discovery, which is the basis of accountability. In fact, as Foucault says in the same pages about *hypomnemata*: 'The function of *hypomnemata* is not to unveil the not-said, but to gather the already-said, what can be understood and read, in a design that is just the constitution of the self' (Foucault 2001, 1224 [my translation]). *Hypomnemata* are a constitution of the self that is already active under a regime of visibility, while the confession works out the visible manifestation of what is under the regime of invisibility, at least according to a more radical process of self-construction.

two ways here. First of all, the notion of a recipient for an account of the self is essential in a system like Facebook. The account of itself only exists on social media in the reception of the other. Secondly, it is equally important to consider that not all the content offered in the account originates from the self who does the accounting: the function of sharing is one of the possibilities that dominates the constitution of the account itself. Accentuating the inclusion of the other in the account of oneself on social networks shortly thereafter, Rovatti emphasised: 'Facebook is a widely visible construction of subjectivity operated by the others' (155 [my translation]). However, unlike Rovatti, here it is considered that the social dimension of the construction of the self is not only the work made by others, but also that the subject is active in the construction of his/her own subjectivity through self-representation. In the following chapter, four possible figures will be introduced in order to analyse possible forms of the account of oneself on social networks, as well as to outline the subject in a way that is not reducible—as Rovatti claims—to an effect produced by others: the unscreaming subject, the free subject, the disembodied subject, the coherent subject.

3.1 The Unscreaming Subject

One of the most relevant phenomena on contemporary social networks is the facial representation enacted by their users, a phenomenon that has

primarily been referred to as the selfie in the years spent writing this dissertation.[93] If the question of the face has a wide dimension in Western culture, for which the examination of this issue can be approached from a psychological, anthropological, artistic or even theological point of view, this chapter aims to analyse the representation of the face in the contemporary era according to a deconstruction based on the concept of faciality, investigated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Deleuze and Guattari emphasise the importance of faciality but in the form of deconstruction: 'Yes, the face has a great future, but only if it is destroyed, dismantled. On the road to the asignifying and asubjective' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 171). The face acquires value only when it is dismantled through its destruction and its removal to bring out its asignifying and asubjective appearance; a deconstruction, therefore, leading to a horizon of meaning for which the face loses the status of representation of the subject, and every possible signification. Why do Deleuze and Guattari want to undertake this deconstruction of the face?

In order to understand this operation, one should firstly consider the dualism that the authors identify in the face, which they describe as a white wall/black hole:

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[93] The phenomenon is so vast and well known that neither description nor definition is required here. It covers almost all users of social networks, and it is one of the main forms of self-representation of the contemporary.

Signifiance is never without a white wall upon which it inscribes its signs and redundancies. Subjectification is never without a black hole in which it lodges its consciousness, passion, and redundancies. (…) Oddly enough, it is a face: the white wall/black hole system. A broad face with white cheeks, a chalk face with eyes cut in for a black hole. Clown head, white clown, moon-white mime, angel of death, Holy Shroud. The face is not an envelope exterior to the person who speaks, thinks, or feels. The form of the signifier in language, even its units, would remain indeterminate if the potential listener did not use the face of the speaker to guide his or her choices ("Hey, he seems angry ..."; "He couldn't say it..."; "You see my face when I'm talking to you ..."; "look at me carefully..."). (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 167)

The polarity of the white wall/black hole thus reflects another polarity, which at first glance did not seem to have been posed as antithetical: meaning/subjectivity. The white wall is the place where the process of signification inscribes its signs, while the black hole is the place where subjectivity manifests itself. The face is the system that allows the joining of these two poles: white wall (meaning) *versus* black hole (subjectivity). In this dimension of representation, the face—as sharply indicated by the authors—is not an outer envelope that contains the interiority of the subject, but it is above all the form in which it presents itself to the other, a significant dimension that allows the other to make sense of what is offered in communicative exchange. And in a later passage on the articulation of the concept of faciality the authors go further:

Faces are not basically individual; they define zones of frequency or probability, delimit a field that neutralizes in

154

advance any expressions or connections unamenable to the
appropriate significations. Similarly, the form of subjectivity,
whether consciousness or passion, would remain absolutely
empty if faces did not form loci of resonance that select the
sensed or mental reality and make it conform in advance to a
dominant reality. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 168)

The dimension of the face as a system is here articulated further. When

the two authors state that faces are in fact not individual, they claim that a

part determines the signification process for which the face remains

comprehensible to the other. In other words: the face arises from a

system of rules of signification that permits the intelligibility to the other.

In this system of signification, everything is cut out that could not find a

suitable mode of signification.[94] The black hole of subjectivity is

supposed to operate like the process of signification. Whether

consciousness or passion, the interiority of subjectivity must fully adapt

to the dominant reality that constitutes faciality. In a negative case, the

emptiness of the face would determine the impossibility of expression.

In a following step, then, an accurate description of how the machine of

faciality works is offered:

It is absurd to believe that language as such can convey a
message. A language is always embedded in the faces that
announce its statements and ballast them in relation to the
signifiers in progress and subjects concerned. (…) When the
faciality machine translates formed contents of whatever kind
into a single substance of expression, it already subjugates

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[94] It seems superfluous to consider that Deleuze was deeply aware of all the issues
regarding faciality. One can just consider all the analytical study on the portraits of
Bacon presented within the Deleuzian masterpiece *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 1989).

them to the exclusive form of signifying and subjective expression. It carries out the prior gridding that makes it possible for the signifying elements to become discernible, and for the subjective choices to be implemented. The faciality machine is not an annex to the signifier and the subject; rather, it is subjacent (connexe) to them and is their condition of possibility. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 179–180)

First of all, Deleuze and Guattari claim that it's impossible to think that language as such can exist without being expressed by a face. The message exists only when it is inserted within faces. It is expressed by faces; and therefore, it exists at the time when it is enclosed within the system of the white wall/black hole, the network that connects meaning and subject. Secondly, content cannot exist except in the form of the substance of an expression, and the substance of this expression can only exist if produced by faciality, which here takes on the dimension of the machine. In short, faciality is the machine that produces individuals. The processes of the faciality machine comprise the communication grid that establishes the horizon of possibility for the content's existence—content that can exist only if subjected to the domination of the faciality machine. This domination operates according to the usual two axes: the significant elements that make the message intelligible and the subject's choices that allow this message to exist. Without a faciality machine, no meaning or subjectivity could be given.[95]

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[95] Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the faciality machine is definitely framed in terms of Foucault's dispositive. In fact, one cannot consider the constitutions of the self

Considering that the pages were written in 1980, the two French authors were certainly considering the production of the private portrait, but their primary focus was the production of public portraits by the mass mediatic machine. In this context, Deleuze and Guattari notice the collapse of the mask in faciality:

> Even the mask assumes a new function here, the exact opposite of its old one. For there is no unitary function of the mask, except a negative one (in no case does the mask serve to dissimulate, to hide, even while showing or revealing). Either the mask assures the head's belonging to the body, its becoming-animal, as was the case in primitive societies. Or, as is the case now, the mask assures the erection, the construction of the face, the facialization of the head and the body: the mask is now the face itself, the abstraction or operation of the face. The inhumanity of the face. Never does the face assume a prior signifier or subject. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 180–181)

In this long passage there are many conceptual connections. Although the authors note that the mask was born in primitive societies as an extension of the body in relation to its line of flight to the animal, Deleuze and Guattari claim, with radical insight, that the mask is no longer an extension of the body in the contemporary world, but rather itself the facialisation of the head and body. And as such it takes on the dimension, ambiguous and inhuman, of the abstraction of the face: a face that exists

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in the form of subjectivity in the absence of the dispositive. On the other hand, it is interesting how Deleuze then develops a discourse about the meaning more complex than Foucault, who seems to overlook the semantics of dispositives. Following the legacy of aesthetic communication, one could affirm that the semantic of the dispositive are the signs of the practices generated by feedback loops that derive from inserting an existing subjectivity into it, refusing any hypothesis of creation *ex nihilo*.

only as a mask, as an abstraction of itself. The mask then takes on a new

power status, in which the order at the origin of the primitive mask has

completely reversed itself. As argued by Deleuze and Guattari:

> The order is totally different:
>
> > despotic and authoritarian concrete assemblage of power
>
> > triggering of the abstract machine of faciality, white wall/black hole
>
> > installation of the new semiotic of signifiance and subjectification on that holey surface.
>
> That is why we have been addressing just two problems exclusively: the relation of the face to the abstract machine that produces it, and the relation of the face to the assemblages of power that require that social production. The face is a politics. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 180–181)

An authoritarian and despotic regime of power is defined here. And this

regime of power triggers the production of the faciality machine,

imposing its mechanisms of representations on systems like

meaning/subjectivity, white wall/black hole, namely: generating

signifying codes that allow only a certain type of expression of

subjectivity. Once the faciality machine becomes active, the

contemporary subject must join these regimes. Consequently, at the

conclusion of this discourse—being that the faciality regime is

determined by a power that requires social production—the face cannot

have any other dimension except politics. In other words, contemporary

subjects produce their political dimension in the face, according to

assemblages of power that pre-exist them and abstract them from their corporeality. Faciality, which acts as an interface between systems of signification and subjectivity, is therefore pre-determined, and the contemporary subject can only be consistent with signifying codes that power imposes on him/her.

If this type of analysis had been conducted by Michel Foucault, one probably would have had regimes of truth instead of power assemblies because, as previously stated, the regimes of truth set obligations to which the subject must adhere in order to fit into processes of subjectivation that make him/her socially acceptable. One can also say without a shadow of doubt that the faciality machine fully operates on social networks. Although the portrait's transformation into the public portrait sparked Deleuze and Guattari's analysis, there is nonetheless no doubt that the contemporary faciality machine generates public portraits in the form of contemporary selfies—or any other representation of faciality, for that matter. A face in front of a monument, a happy face, a face with a heart-shaped mouth, an ecstatic face: these are all results of the contemporary faciality machine, in which the process of subjectification are completely precoded through a system of signification (the white wall). If the modern portrait was born in the Italian Renaissance with the aim of expressing the interiority of an individual through exterior signs, then the present portrait has lost its link with contemporary art, and, in doing so, also the connection with the

159

possibility of inaugurating new faciality machines. It does nothing but

perpetuate a system of signification that generates preconceived

subjectivities, in which the black hole is not a proper form, but rather is

subjugated to assume a predetermined shape. In this sense, social

networks powerfully operate as a political machine, since the assembly of

power is the constitutive element that determines the faciality machine,

which generates the white wall. The subject does not produce original

content on Facebook or Instagram when posting his/her selfie on these

platforms. On the contrary, Facebook and Instagram determine the

content that the subject posts—in a moment in which the black hole is

empty and silent. The face should thus be destroyed—because the face is

the contemporary expression of assemblies of power, or as Foucault

would say: of regimes of truth that are completely abstracted from the

black hole of the subject.

How then to get out of this situation of radical subjugation and

abstraction, which inhibits any process of subjectivity? Deleuze and

Guattari pose the question to themselves, garnering a surprising response:

> How do you get out of the black hole? How do you break
> through the wall? How do you dismantle the face? Whatever
> genius there may be in the French novel, that is not its affair.
> It is too concerned with measuring the wall, or even with
> building it, with plumbing the depths of black holes and
> composing faces. The French novel is profoundly pessimistic
> and idealistic, "critical of life rather than creative of life." It
> stuffs its characters down the hole and bounces them off the
> wall. It can only conceive of organized voyages, and of
> salvation only through art, a still Catholic salvation, in other

words, salvation through eternity. It spends its time plotting
points instead of drawing lines, active lines of flight or of
positive deterritorialization. The Anglo-American novel is
totally different. "To get away. To get away, out!... To cross a
horizon ..." From Hardy to Lawrence, from Melville to
Miller, the same cry rings out: Go across, get out, break
through, make a beeline, don't get stuck on a point. (Deleuze
and Guattari 1987, 186–187)

Their response can be found then in the escape from these schemes of

faciality. The next section, therefore, addresses the issue of freedom of

the subject.

3.2 The Free Subject

If the previous section analysed faciality as mode to deconstruct the

iconic representation of the subject, this section addresses the question of

the subject's freedom—or rather, it intends to criticise the figure of the

free subject on social networks.

Foucault says that there are three distinct elements that constitute the

basis of his analysis: knowledge, based on the mechanism of veridiction;

power, which manages governmental systems; and the practices of the

self, with which the subject subjectifies him/herself (Foucault 2012, 1-

19). This chapter aims to analyse a particular practice of self, to which

Foucault devotes the last two courses held at the Collège de France: the

parrhesia, or free-spokenness.[96] Why does Foucault identify parrhesia as a fundamental element of analysis in his last texts? Parrhesia connotes a single moment in which knowledge, powers, games of truth and processes overlap: an instant that Foucault termed parrhesiastic. The concept played an important role in the philosopher's final texts because in parrhesia Foucault had identified a possibility for freedom. The purpose of this chapter is to first define parrhesia and then to analyse the possibility of its existence on social networks to, finally, locate the relationship between parrhesia and digital accountability.

To introduce parrhesia, one must remember what Foucault's claims regarding ascetic practices:

> This is a work of the self on the self, an elaboration of the self by the self, a progressive transformation of the self by the self for which one takes responsibility in a long labor of ascesis (*askesis*). *Eros* and *askesis* are, I think, the two major forms in Western spirituality for conceptualizing the modalities by which the subject must be transformed in order finally to become capable of truth. (Foucault 2005, 16)

Foucault declares that there is a mode of the subject called tell-the-truth; and that this mode can comprise a mode of being for the subject through a practical exercise (*askesis*). Tell-the-truth can be a powerful process of subjectivation, which surely concerns the fundamental questions of accountability: *Who am I?* (for a true account of him/herself) and *Was it*

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[96] The first use of the word *parrhesia* is within *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005), However, this notion is not widely analysed in this course, although it is the heart of the two following courses.

you?. The latter question, as illustrated in the chapter about the scene of address, invites the subject to take care of and responsibility for the relationship between himself/herself and his/her surroundings. Tell-the-truth and accountability, real or digital, are therefore closely linked to one another.

According to Foucault, the one who practices parrhesia is neither the prophet, nor the wise, nor the technical (Foucault 2012, 27). Taking into account John Austin's theory of performative utterances (Austin 1975), Foucault raises an important distinction between the parrhesiastic act and the performative utterance. As Foucault says:

> there is a major and crucial difference. In a performative utterance, the given elements of the situation are such that when the utterance is made, the effect that follows is known and ordered in advance, it is codified, and this is precisely what constitutes the performative character of the utterance. In parrhesia, on the other hand, whatever the usual, familiar, and quasi-institutionalized character of the situation in which it is effectuated, what makes it parrhesia is that the introduction, the irruption of the true discourse determines an open situation, or rather opens the situation and makes possible effects which are, precisely, not known. Parrhesia does not produce a codified effect; it opens up an unspecified risk. And this unspecified risk is obviously a function of the elements of the situation. (Foucault 2011, 62)

Parrhesia therefore implies the assumption of a risk. This risk is given by the fact that the dispositive within which the utterance takes place does not provide for the possibility expressing that particular utterance. The performative utterance is written from the set of the possible speakable

163

outsets within the dispositive. The parrhesiastic statement is rather a

rupture with the possibilities offered by the dispositive. While

consequences can be established *a priori* in the performative utterance,

parrhesia opens an entirely new situation—which Foucault claims is

risky. The risk that derives from parrhesia is twofold: on the one hand it's

harmful to the dispositive itself, as parrhesia is an emergency that the

dispositive had not contemplated. Secondly, the risk is for the parrhesiast,

who pronounces a statement not included in the script of the dispositive,

thus exposing him/herself to unknown consequences.[97] Despite

parrhesia's manifold risks*,* it nonetheless maintains a double bond with

the truth. As Foucault clearly illustrates, parrhesia

> is always a sort of formulation of the truth at two levels. A
> first level is that of the statement of the truth itself (at this
> point, as in the performative, one says the thing, and that's
> that). The second level of the parrhesiastic act, the
> parrhesiastic enunciation is the affirmation that in fact one
> genuinely thinks, judges, and considers the truth one is saying
> to be genuinely true. I tell the truth, and I truly think that it is
> true, and I truly think that I am telling the truth when I say it.
> This doubling or intensification of the statement of the truth
> by the statement of the truth of the fact that I think this truth

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[97] 'What defines the parrhesiastic statement, what precisely makes the statement of its truth in the form of *parrhesia* something absolutely unique among other forms of utterance and other formulations of the truth, is that parrhesia opens up a risk. Although it states the truth, there is no parrhesia in the progressive steps of a demonstration taking place in neutral conditions, because the person who states the truth in this way does not take any risk. The statement of the truth does not open up any risk if you envisage it only as an element in a demonstrative procedure. (…)In a sense, therefore, it is the opposite of the performative, in which the enunciation of something brings about and gives rise to a completely determined event as a function of the general code and institutional field in which the utterance is made. Here, on the contrary, it is a truth-telling, an irruptive truth-telling that creates a fracture and opens up the risk: a possibility, a field of dangers, or at any rate, an undefined eventuality' (Foucault 2011, 63).

and that, thinking it, I say it, is what is essential to the
parrhesiastic act. (Foucault 2011, 64)

A second essential feature of parrhesia concerns that which is said, which
is also present in the performative utterance. One need merely say
something and it holds true by the fact of being uttered. The essential
element of parrhesia, which is accompanied by risk, is the connection
between what one says and what one thinks. Foucault's analysis neither
aims to reflect upon the power of the lying word, nor the attitude of the
truth-telling or lying subject. Foucault treats the parrhesiastic statement
here, in which the parrhesiast makes a commitment to him/herself. This
commitment results in the parrhesiast's exposure to risk, which he or she
assumes by virtue of the covenant taken with him/herself. In summary:
the parrhesiast believes what s/he thinks is true; s/he tells the truth s/he
thinks; it follows that s/he is exposed to a risk; This risk is the seal of the
connection between the truth and the subject who tells this truth. As
summarised by Foucault:

> The parrhesiast, the person who uses parrhesia, is the truthful
> man (*l'homme véridique*), that is to say, the person who has
> the courage to risk telling the truth, and who risks this truth-
> telling in a pact with himself, inasmuch as he is, precisely, the
> enunciator of the truth. He is the truth-teller (*le véridique*).
> (Foucault 2011, 66)[98]

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[98] Foucault finds a genealogy for this notion of parrhesia in Nietzschean discourse: 'it
seems to me that Nietzschean veridicity (*véridicité*) is a way of putting to work this
notion whose distant origin is found in the notion of parrhesia (truth-telling) as a risk for
the person who states it, a risk accepted by the person who states it' (Foucault 2011,
66). Veridicity is recovered by the Nietzschean subject in the interpretation deriving

Again, Foucault returns to the difference between parrhesia and the pragmatics of discourse, which should not be confused. Unlike the pragmatics of discourse, the relationship between subject and statement is reversed within parrhesia:

> 'With parrhesia we see the appearance of a whole family of completely different facts of discourse which are almost the reverse, the mirror projection of what we call the pragmatics of discourse. In fact, parrhesia involves a whole series of facts of discourse in which it is not the real situation of the person speaking which affects or modifies the value of the statement'. (Foucault 2011, 68)

In the pragmatics of communication, the status of the enunciating subject influences the sentence. The same sentence pronounced by different people in different contexts would take on a different value of truth. Attributed to the subject by the dispositive in place, the role of the enunciating subject in the network absolutely predominates in the pragmatics of communication. The opposite happens in parrhesia. The truth of the statement establishes the truth of the enunciator. In the parrhesiastic act, the role occupied in the dispositive by the enunciating subject has no function. The emergence of the truth of a given statement generates the veracity of the enunciating subject, who—as mentioned above—is exposed to a risk because it alters the homeostasis of the

from the will to power, the capacity of the *Üebermensch* to deliver his/her truth to the others, assuming the risks bonded to this truth.

apparatus. As summarised by Foucault: 'taking things in their most general and neutral form, quite simply mean that the person who said something has actually said it, and by a more or less explicit act binds himself to the fact that he said it' (Foucault 2011, 68).

So what is the goal of parrhesia? The goal of parrhesia is eminently ethical, in several ways. Firstly, the purpose of parrhesia is a modification of ethos that takes place in order for a statement of truth to emerge that has the immediate effect of destabilising the dispositive in which it is inscribed (Foucault 2012, 57-62). In the parrhesiastic act, the dispositive that inscribes parrhesia suffers an imbalance that may lead to its rupture. Plato speaking in front of Dionysus or Diogenes in front of Alexander are two well-known parrhesiastic episodes offered by antiquity. In both cases, the dispositive that ruled the pragmatics of communication—in this case the relationship between sovereign and subject—is shaken to its core, as the parrhesiastic act implies that neither of the two roles can condition the truth of the enunciation. Secondly, parrhesia is a process of subjectivation that, as Foucault points out: 'is therefore a certain way of speaking. More precisely, it is a way of telling the truth' (Foucault 2011, 66). *Parrhesia* is proposed as a right to talk to others to guide them and also as an obligation to talk about him/herself to save him/herself (Foucault 2011, 339-347). In this case, salvation has nothing to do with Christianity and the paradigm of confession: in parrhesiastic salvation, the subject finds itself in relation to his/her truth.

167

The subject finds him/herself saved insofar as s/he is truthful. And this truth is not neutral, but it also carries a political effect. Parrhesia is in fact an act of government. How can this happen? Parrhesia is risky for the dispositive in which it occurs, because it undermines the network of knowledge-power sanctioned by the same dispositive. Parrhesia is an emergency of the truth, a new fact that brings to light the possibility of the existence of a different and new dispositive. The tell-the-truth of Plato and Diogenes brings the possibility of a different dispositive to light that no longer makes the relationship sovereign-subject function, at least not for the moment. Parrhesia is a radical form of self-care, in which the relationship with others is deeply affected by the breakdown of the dispositive.

Foucault says: 'it is a way of telling the truth that lays one open to a risk by the very fact that one tells the truth' (Foucault 2011, 66). Therefore at the end of parrhesia there is freedom, the substance of ethos. Parrhesia is the particular process of subjectivity that radically involves the freedom of the subject. How is the subject made free by the parrhesiastic act? One obtains freedom through the power to overthrow the dispositive. Rovatti summarises the Foucauldian notion of freedom

> Freedom means: the practice to go out of ourselves, the alteration of our condition of subjects stuck in the identitary dispositives; the enlargement of the horizons of habit, but also a certain kind of surplus of the self; the assumption of a risk of exposure, without safety net. (Rovatti 2008, 222 [my translation])

168

Parrhesia can be found in all of these elements. The parrhesia is in fact a real exit from the self, as the truth of the statement makes the truth of the subject, and not vice versa. Secondly, as seen above, parrhesia is an instrument that undermines the identity generated by dispositives, in the sense of networks of relationships that establish what the subject is. By breaking the dispositive, parrhesia triggers *ipso facto* a process of de-subjectivation, for which the subject must no longer be defined by the identitary dispositives that the same process undermines. Third, there can be no parrhesia without risk of exposure, with a safety net. As noted by Foucault in a quotation above, parrhesia opens an entirely new situation that implies the absence of a safety net—in the form of a dispositive previously established—that can guarantee the parrhesiast the absence of risk. Parrhesia operates as exposure to an entirely new situation: 'Parrhesia would function proleptically within an aesthetics of existence to modify existing relations of power and to imaginatively construct moral selves on social configurations' (Simpson 2012, 100).

Is parrhesia possible on social networks? The answer is no. There are some attempts to propose a "free" way to behave on social networks, so as to be free agents. For example, Lanier proposes a list of possible curious escape strategies from the domination of the dispositives in order to have room for freedom on social media: do not post anonymously; use a personal voice as much as possible instead of collective systems such

169

as wikis; create an original website from the coding, instead of using templates created by others; post and blog something only after careful reflection, and not be led by the immediacy of thought (Lanier 2011). However, this list of good intentions does not address the extent of the power of networks. Lanier definitely proposes a series of performative actions, but they function only within predetermined dispositives. With these kinds of how-to-be-free, one merely replaces a system of strong truth (that of the most commonly used platforms: WordPress, Wikipedia, Facebook, etc.) with other, perhaps less common, regimes of truth.[99] The notion of parrhesia as explained above surely does not function in the manner defined by Lanier. Parrhesia implies the questioning of the dispositive itself. The parrhesiastic statement imposes a truth that goes against the dimension of existing knowledge and power. One does not achieve the status of free subject through the opportunity to be more "creative". Creativity has nothing to do with freedom. Since freedom, insofar as it is the basis of any possible ethics, is a practice that involves a political risk by the questioning of the dispositive, every practice that does not question the dispositive—and then at the same time causes a radical reversal of the subject—cannot be established as free.

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[99] It is remarkable that these lists suggest a conception of freedom that is very close to the freedom of press, which, however, has little to do with the ontological dimension of freedom that one is dealing with here. Freedom suggested by Lanier is simply a remediation in the digital world of the democratic principles of freedom of press operating in mass communication.

In this sense, accountability cannot possibly be parrhesiastic. Parrhesia questions the same scene of address, in which the roles of the questioner and the respondent are predefined. And not a single one of the characteristics outlined in the definition of accountability is consistent with the parrhesiastic practice. Parrhesia can be given only out of accountability, which essentially rejects the parrhesiastic practice. In fact, following the aforementioned categorisation of accountability in chapter one, it can be noted:

a) Both share a dimension of process.

b) The contract present in accountability is sometimes binding; but, even if there is also a "contract" in parrhesia, the truth-telling as such acts outside of any contract.

c) Both share an active subject.

d) A key difference is that in accountability the subject is bound to give an account of his/her work, while in parrhesia the subject spontaneously chooses to tell his/her own truth.

e) The account in the parrhesiastic act must not adhere to any specific format, having the shape of the truth-telling, while in the accountability the account should be isomorph with the discursive formation of reference.

f) The domain of reference within which accountability is made is distorted by parrhesia.

g) Both instruments share verbal expression.

h) They both share a recipient.

i) But in the accountability the recipient has the role of verifying the account, according to an *adequatio* of the truth of the account with external elements of comparison. In parrhesia instead a new truth is brought to the stage, a truth that cannot—in his capacity of urgency—be compared to anything.

j) Sanction is included in accountability, while parrhesia functions inversely: parrhesia intends to topple the regimes of truth and knowledge-power relations that require sanction, in a manner that they are not included within the penalised dispositive.

Thus in digital accountability the subject faces a system of dispositives to work for them, not to subvert them. The risk is even lower in the digital community because the subject can enjoy a safety net through the absence of the body.[100] While the parrhesiastic exercise of Plato or Diogenes, according to tradition, completely lacked a safety net and put the body of the subject at risk, the body of the subject is far away in

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[100] Since the publication of *History of Madness*, a connection is established between Foucault's production and Deleuze's and Guattari's. For instance, the notion of parrhesia could be read within the context of schizo-politics. About reciprocal influences between the French writers in the field of politics, see Penfield (2014).

digital accountability, hidden by the mediation of the screen and the keyboard. Not even an iconic accountability could be comparable to parrhesia, as only the representation of the body is manifested, instead of the body itself.

But the radical difference between parrhesia and digital accountability is found in the concept of emergency that appears in parrhesia. As stated above, parrhesia is the emergence of a truth, the truth of the subject, which aims to undermine the regime of truth of the dispositive where the parrhesia is placed. But the media act as powerful producers of homologation of the otherness. All dispositives share this activity of homologation, which first intends to keep them safe and, for this reason, is resistant to environmental perturbations. But the media operate in a symbolic sphere that also relates to semantics and are thus powerful factors of homologation, in which a key element is the reduction of the otherness to sameness (Kirchmayr 2010, 96). The emergence of a parrhesiastic moment, a disruption that calls into question the existence of the medium itself, is not reducible to homologation. For this, the media operate to the exclusion of the uncanny subject by deleting his/her account. One who does not abide by the terms of service is excluded from the community. Paradoxically enough, the result is that the only parrhesiastic accountability possible on social networks is the elimination of the condition for which accountability is possible: the existence of the account.

In conclusion, it may be outlined that the accountable subject cannot be free. Surely social networks can ensure man's emergence from the obscurity of the crowd (Kirchmayr, 2010, 94). Indices of charisma (O'Neil 2010, 49) operating within free networks scales (Barabasi 2014) can measure the subject's will to power and his/her rank within the network, and can also make someone accountable, but definitely not a free subject. When the possibility of becoming-other offered by the digital world was sensed, the possibility of being free has assumed the mode of disembodiment, which the next section discusses in detail.

3.3 The Disembodied Subject

The third figure that the first hermeneutics of the subject aims to criticise is the disembodied subject. Katherine Hayles' understanding of the reconstruction of the history of cybernetics, as outlined in *How we Became Posthuman* (Hayles 1999), will prove fundamental to the notion of disembodiment expressed in the pages that follow.

The starting point is Norbert Wiener's book *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine* (1948). In this text Wiener provides the first popular definition of cybernetics: 'Cybernetics is the scientific study of control and communication in the animal and the machine'. Wiener advances the future organisation of society based on a new matter: information. Cybernetics is applied to the analysis of

systems involved in a closed loop signal with the environment. In this loop, an action by the system causes some change in its environment. The environment reacts, and that change is fed to the system via information. This enables the system to change its behaviour: an operation commonly called feedback. When the system reacts to the feedback with a new action, a feedback loop is created. In this kind of system, entropy is a threat that must be fought. According to this definition of cybernetics, which also applies to animals, humans are primarily information-processing entities who are essentially similar to intelligent machines.

Shannon was the first to propose a complete overview of information theory in the seminal text *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Shannon and Weaver 1975). This key reference in cybernetic theory defined information as a pattern, because, firstly, it was difficult to measure meaning and its effects. Secondly, abstracting information from a material base meant that information could become unaffected by changes of the context. Finally, information can be formalised as a mathematical function, 'Shannon was able to develop theorems, powerful in their generality, that hold true regardless of the medium in which the information is instantiated' (Hayles 1999, 19). According to Hayles, this definition operated by Shannon 'of a possible decontextualized construction of information, has important ideological implications, including an Anglo-American ethnocentrism that regards digital

information as more important than more context-bound analog information' (19).

Homeostasis comprises a central concept of the period that we refer to as the first wave of cybernetics, which took place between 1945 and 1960. Traditionally, homeostasis had been understood as the ability of living organisms to maintain steady states when they buffeted by fickle environments. Cybernetics extends this concept to machines. Like animals, machines can maintain homeostasis using feedback loops that had long been exploited to increase to the stability of mechanical systems. The conjunction between homeostasis and information occurs when the feedback loop is seen as a flow of information. Cybernetics was born when nineteenth-century control theory merged with the nascent theory of information. In cybernetic theory control and information are closely associated to ensure homeostasis. In other words, the system must be preserved. Homeostasis is the state in which the system is preserved and its operating mechanisms are based on feedback loops that can be translated into information. It follows that information becomes the main tool to ensure control of the system.

In the second wave of cybernetics, from 1960 to 1980, the focus shifts from homeostasis to reflexivity: 'Reflexivity entered cybernetics primarily through discussions about the observer' (Hayles 1999, 9). While 'first-wave cybernetics followed traditional scientific protocols in

its placement of observers outside of the system they observe' (9), the objectivist view propelled by the reflexivity of second wave cybernetics sees information flowing from the system to the observers, but feedback can also loop through the observers, drawing them in to become part of the system being observed. The second wave reached its mature phase with the publication of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the Realization of the Living* (1980): 'Building on Maturana's work on reflexivity in sensory processing and Varela's examination of the dynamics of autonomous biological systems, the two authors expanded the reflexive turn into a fully articulated epistemology that sees the world as a set of informationally closed systems' (Hayles 1999, 10). Organisms respond to their environment in ways determined by their internal self-organisation. Their one and only goal is to continually produce and reproduce the organisation that defines them as systems. Thus the centre of interest for autopoiesis shifts from the cybernetics of the observed system to the cybernetics of the observer.[101]

The third wave of cybernetics has been taking place since the 1980s. Reflexivity is replaced by virtuality. In virtuality one has the cultural

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[101] In the famous opening pages of *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the Realization of the Living,* Maturana and Varela stated: '3.It is an attribute of the observer to be able to interact independently with the observed entity and with its relations; for him both are units of interaction (entities). (…) 4. For the observer an entity is an entity when he can describe it. (…) Accordingly, the observer can describe an entity only if there is at least one other entity from which he can distinguish it and with which he can observe it to interact or relate' (Maturana and Varela 1980, 8).

perception that information patterns interpenetrate material objects, and 'the definition plays off the duality at the heart of the condition of virtuality—materiality on the one hand, and information on the other' Hayles 1999, 14). The perception of virtuality facilitates the development of virtual technologies that reinforce perception: 'Hence the definition's strategic quality, strategic because it seeks to connect virtual technologies with the sense that flows of information interpenetrate all material objects, from DNA code to the global reach of the World Wide Web (14).

We ultimately find in cybernetics that information is distributed in the material world.[102] One hears behind cybernetics a strong ontology that implies both the material (the hardware), and information (the software), as if the vision of the cybernetic remedies an old dualism already present in Plato, Aristotle and Descartes, to mention only a few.[103] The

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[102] Till the disturbing theories advanced by Raymond Kurzweil (1999) or Hans Moravec (1998), that information can be detached from any material substrate (including human brain) to be stored on a selected different medium. It would be easy to confine their vision to a dystopian science fiction; but, as Barbrook has keenly pointed out, the dream of science fiction is not innocent: 'Contemporary reality is the beta version of a science fiction dream: the imaginary future' (Barbrook 2007, 9).

[103] One could of course also analyse the duality of matter-information from another point of view, viewing it as an invasion of bodies in the networked world. See, for example, Caronia: 'We could say that to the processes of replication of the body and of the invasion of the body, virtual technologies are beginning to support a third process, the dissemination of the body in the networks and virtual spaces, immaterial, of digital machines. And the disseminated body is intended to alter and threaten a basic relation, which had held more or less unchanged for tens of thousands of years, the relationship between body and identity' (Caronia 1996, 101 [my translation]). This is not the place to explore all the implications that this discourse provides. Surely there is much *naivete* in accepting an ontology dual-material information. On the other hand, however, there is no doubt that the digital artefact operates in a dizzying manner in the human world. As Caronia also notes: 'Various reflections on the media landscape are thus found in the

disembodied subject is therefore at the end of this path. In a general

cultural sense, the disembodied subject is the one who can live the pure

virtuality of information, without the need for anchoring to a material

substrate. In the gap between the virtuality of information and the

heaviness of the subject, the disembodied subject thinks s/he inhabits

infinite spaces of freedom, which are created by the virtual ontology of

the information in which the disembodied subject lives.

As acutely identified by Ascott, the disembodied entity exemplifies a

perpetual will to power. Based on a confusion between a possible

liberation from matter and a liberation from all dispositives, the

disembodied subject explores virtuality to test his/hers will to power: 'To

continue in Foucault's Nietzschean vein, networking can be seen as an

issue of the "will to truth", since its form, spreading over the whole

planet, invisible in a sense, promises to evade those systems set-up for

the control and delimitation of discourse' (Ascott and Shanken 2007,

191).[104] The disembodied subject would therefore be defined according

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same years, within the popular narrative (or at least in its certain zones eccentric), to seize a point of crisis, an articulation of the imaginary, in the figure of the interior of the body (and especially of the nervous system) that is exchanged and mingles with the outside, with the reality perceived by our senses. It is all too obvious that Dick and Ballard want to build a metaphor, perhaps a bit insistent, almost "literalized" (...) of the relationship of exchange that the human being establishes with the world, of all the mental representations that s/he makes and modifications that imposes on it by its action on the environment. And they tell us that this exchange relationship is jamming, that there is perhaps a process of flooding, that they are not responsible for this hypertrophy of the imagination, great writers, but a reality whose criteria for defining and building are changing, perhaps too fast' (Caronia 2012, 13-14 [my translation]).

[104] Some other premises of the digital world would find the same foundation: 'Networking (...) leads to the amplification of thought, enrichment of the imagination,

to almost divine prerogatives: spread across the planet, invisible and avoiding systems for controlling and limiting speech.

However, each one of these prerogatives is false. First, the spread of the subject across the entire planet is an illusion. It is certainly true that a page on the network is visible from all over the world, yet in strict computer terms it is a bit string that resides on a server in a specific place in the world. This alleged spread across the planet only takes place when the page is actually required all over the world at once. Since spreading across the planet is only a possible logical feature, its real existence is not so obvious. Second, disembodied does not mean invisible. Of course, there may be a form of untraceability that is not subject to panopticism, but panopticism is in the name of visibility as Bentham had already conceived it. Even if not physically visible, other forms of panopticism easily tap movement on the network. Even in the limit-condition of the exclusion of any type of materiality (for instance, the materiality of the body), however, the flow of information travels on the electronic matter that constitutes the substrate of the medial bits. It is thus impossible to imagine any form of escape from control. It is true that there are digital spaces that lie outside of control (for example, the darknets accessible via Tor). However, in the first place, all spaces are here intended to be territorialised by the control exerted by dispositives. Secondly,

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both broader and deeper memory, and the extension of human senses' (Ascott and Shanken 2007, 222).

anonymity is the price one has to pay to access these areas—and anonymity is not the urgency of the disembodied subject, whose desire is not the negation of identity, but the possibility to freely explore it. Lastly, one cannot understand how anyone could act outside of the boundary of discourse. Since it is impossible to act outside of dispositives, and each dispositive connects with a particular discursive formation, it follows that the abolition of the boundaries of discourse functions as a removal of language itself. Secondly, since everything is part of the digital matrix and language, one does not understand how to function without language, if not via elimination of the interface itself.

As summarised by Ascott, the disembodied entity emerges from a human desire, too human, to exit oneself: 'Computer networking, in short, responds to our deep psychological desire for transcendence—to reach the immaterial, the spiritual—the wish to be out of body, out of mind, to exceed the limitations of time and space, a kind of biotechnological technology' (Ascott and Shanken 2007, 223).

But this escape from limitations can be intimately correlated with the dimension of the body. The avatarism led by the virtuality of digital technology is merely the remediation of an old practice, for which the body is the utopian place par excellence. As Foucault argues:

> In any case, one thing is certain: that the human body is the principal actor in all utopias. After all, isn't one of the oldest utopias about which men have told themselves stories the

181

dream of an immense and inordinate body that could devour
space and master the world? This is the old utopia of giants
that one finds as the heart of so many legends in Europe, in
Africa, in Oceania, in Asia—this old legend that for so long
fed the Western imagination, from Prometheus to Gulliver.
The body is also a great utopian actor when it comes to
masks, makeup and tattoos. To wear a mask, to put on
makeup, to tattoo oneself, is not exactly (as one might
imagine) to acquire an other body, only a bit more beautiful,
better decorated, more easily recognizable. To tattoo oneself,
to put on a makeup or a mask, is probably something else: It
is to place the body in communication with secret powers and
invisible forces. The mask, the tattooed sign, the face-paint
lay upon the body an entire language, an entire language that
is ciphered, secret, sacred, which calls upon this body the
violence of the God, the silent power of the Sacred, or the
liveliness of Desire. The mask, the tattoo, the make-up: They
place the body into an other space. They usher it into a place
that does not take place in the world directly. They make of
this body a fragment of imaginary space, which will
communicate with the universe of divinities, or with the
universe of the other, where one will be taken by the gods, or
taken by the person one has just seduced. (Foucault 2006,
231-232)

Even in avatarism one can find the matter of the mask, the sign and

make-up. But, as shown by Foucault, this utopia of the avatar is already a

utopia of the body, which extends back to the origin of the *Homo*

sapiens. The promise of escape the avatar offers simultaneously

remediates the promise of escape that the signification made on the body

offered in the past. In both cases, there is the magic that allows getting in

touch with invisible forces: irrational dimensions of the body and of the

avatar, seeking a magical and unattainable utopia.

3.4 The Coherent Subject

A final hypothesis aims to deconstruct the coherent subject: a subject who offers a coherent account of him/herself. The coherent account can be understood as the subject's willingness to give an account (or representation) of him/herself perfectly consistent in all its manifestations. The coherent account is one of the mantras of improbable contemporary disciplines such as personal branding, for which visibility and consistent representation of itself can be synonymous. To validate the coherent account's possibility of existing, it's necessary to postulate a completely substantialised subject, hypostatised and objectified. This subject is—as said many times in this argument—impossible to theorise because the processes of subjectivation always happens in a dimension of chaotic becoming. Furthermore, the coherent account seems to be a bond that is at once arbitrary and bound to the substantialised subject, thus going against any possibility of change and, therefore, of freedom.

A more detailed analysis will be proposed in the pages that follow to demonstrate the impossibility of coherent accounting, for it is first necessary to return to the scene of address described by Butler. The first argument Butler put forward concerns the fictional nature of any narrative:

> Fictional narration in general requires no referent to work as narrative, and we might say that the irrecoverability and foreclosure of the referent is the very condition of possibility for an account of myself, if that account is to take narrative

form. The irrecoverability of an original referent does not destroy narrative; it produces it ''in a fictional direction,'' as Lacan would say. So to be more precise, I would have to say that I can tell the story of my origin and I can even tell it again and again, in several ways. But the story of my origin I tell is not one for which I am accountable, and it cannot establish my accountability. At least, let's hope not, since, over wine usually, I tell it in various ways, and the accounts are not always consistent with one another. (Butler 2005, 37)

This kind of accounting does not need any kind of referent. Indeed, it is the foreclosure of the referent, the condition of possibility of the accounting. Then one should consider that the scene of address is a physical one. This physical scene is present both in the Butler's case (the hypothesis that accountability has given birth to the question: *Was it you?* before which the subject is asked to be accountable) and in the assumption of Christian confession made by this dissertation, for which the subject has to answer the question *Who am I?* And then, as claimed by Butler:

There is a bodily referent here, a condition of me that I can point to, but that I cannot narrate precisely, even though there are no doubt stories about where my body went and what it did and did not do. The stories do not capture the body to which they refer. Even the history of this body is not fully narratable. To be a body is, in some sense, to be deprived of having a full recollection of one's life. There is a history to my body of which I can have no recollection. (Butler 2005, 38)

This short passage deserves a thorough analysis. In the moment in which the subject enters the scene of address, there is undoubtedly the presence

184

of a bodily referent. This body is something that can be shown (here and now, this is obvious), but according to Butler it cannot be precisely accounted. So the scene of address requires a speaking subject, and the speaking subject requires a body, his/her own. However, the relationship between the account given by the subject and the subject's body is an ambiguous relationship, partial and necessary at the same time. Following Jacques Lacan, Butler reaffirms the gap between the identity and the body when she says that the account cannot capture the body, due to the foreclosure of the body. It results that one cannot give a definite account about the body itself, thus dropping the subject from the body.

Although Butler's discourse effectively claims that the body, subject and account are a problematic connection, in nonetheless lacks clarity in its explanation of this link; the very concept of foreclosure of the referent as a condition of possibility for the existence of the account is furthermore quite perplexing. Therefore, to resolve these problems—due to the uncertain connection between body, subject and account—the following pages will explore this connection through the lens offered by the phenomenological tradition, namely from Husserl's text *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Husserl 1970).

Husserl begins by distinguishing between two possible meanings of the word body, which he differentiates in the text through two different

German words: *Körper* (meaning a body in the geometric or physical sense) and *Leib* (referring to the body of a person or animal). Leib should be understood as "living body" (Leib is related to Leben), while Körper is considered as "physical body" (from a note of the translator, in Husserl 1970, 50). Husserl makes a fundamental distinction through the use of these two terms. On the one hand the Körper is the pure biological physiological-fact,[105] and as such it can be subjected to the analysis of biophysical sciences, and thus be subjected to a scientific accounting based on physiological, medical, chemical and physical parameters. This accounting, however, does not exhaust the body. Indeed, it allows it to isolate a dimension of the body, the scientific one, so to speak, that has its mode of narration rooted within scientific discourse. Furthermore the distinction between Körper and Leib also has another result: to isolate scientific discourse itself. Through making this distinction, Husserl not only isolates Körper but also the scientific discourse that involves the Körper.[106]

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[105] 'The biophysical sciences, those which at first concentrate, in a one-sided fashion, purely on what pertains to the physical body, still find it necessary to begin by grasping the concrete entities descriptively, analyzing and classifying them intuitively; but the physicalistic view of nature makes it obvious that a further-developed physics would in the end "explain" all these concrete entities in a physicalistically rational way. Thus the flourishing of the biophysical descriptive sciences, especially in view of their occasional use of knowledge taken from physics, is considered a success of the scientific method, always interpreted in the sense of physics'(Husserl 1970, 63).

[106] It's worth remembering that the ultimate goal of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* is to reduce the pervasiveness of science, and in the end to prove the ethical superiority of pre-categorical (the world of life) as opposed to categorical (the world of science), whose reversal in favour of science, according to the author, had led to the downfall of Europe.

Before the domain of reason and its necessary consequence, scientific

discourse, Husserl claims the need to return to sensibility, a sensibility

that nevertheless has to find a new relationship with the body.[107] As

Husserl says:

> Thus sensibility, the ego's active functioning of the living
> body or the bodily organs, belongs in a fundamental, essential
> way to all experience of bodies. It proceeds in consciousness
> not as a mere series of body—appearances, as if these in
> themselves, through themselves alone and their coalescences,
> were appearance of bodies; rather, they are such in
> consciousness only in combination with the kinaesthetically
> functioning living body [Leiblichkeit], the ego functioning
> here in a peculiar sort of activity and habituality. (Husserl
> 1970, 106–107)

Sensitivity is thus a series of appearances of other bodies that manifest in

consciousness, as if it were possible to distinguish a blank canvas

(consciousness) on which the appearances of other bodies are inscribed

(phenomena) according to obscure mechanisms. Rather, the presence of

bodies in consciousness comes from the close relationship between the

sensitivity that intentionally opens the body to the world and the body

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[107] To a critical analysis was also conducted the empiricism and its greatest author, David Hume, which still is one of the noble representatives of phenomenology. Hume had correctly placed the premise (the superiority of sensitivity), but he had taken the wrong consequences (that every story was fictitious). As Husserl says: 'Hume had shown that we naively read causality into this world and think that we grasp necessary succession in intuition. The same is true of everything that makes the body of the everyday surrounding world into an identical thing with identical properties, relations, etc. (and Hume had in fact worked this out in detail in the Treatise, which was unknown to Kant). Data and complexes of data come and go, but the thing, presumed to be simply experienced sensibly, is not something sensible which persists through this alteration. The sensationalist thus declares it to be a fiction' (Husserl 1970, 93). The same empirical approach seems to also be found in Butler.

itself as a living body that operates in the world. In this way Husserl

opens the possibility of phenomenology:

> Thus, purely in terms of perception, physical body and living
> body [Körper und Leib] are essentially different; living body,
> that is, [understood] as the only one which is actually given
> [to me as such] in perception: my own living body. How the
> consciousness originates through which my living body
> nevertheless acquires the ontic validity of one physical body
> among others, and how, on the other hand, certain physical
> bodies in my perceptual field come to count as living bodies,
> living bodies of "alien" ego-subjects. (Husserl 1970, 107)

In the phenomenological foundation the ego is first and foremost a body

open to the world that, as a living body, enters into a cognitive relation

with other beings in the world. Based on the intentionality of these

cognitive relationships, which simultaneously comprises maximum

realism and maximum idealism, the possibility emerges for a mode of

describing the world that is not scientific (the dimension that reduces the

body to Körper), but rather phenomenological. This phenomenological

description grounds its constitution in the pre-categorical world of the

body, before the intervention of the rationalising domain of logic.

According to Husserl, it is indeed the existence of the pre-categorical (or

the bodies being in the world) that gives the possibility of existence of

scientific description, which is an abstraction of the second level from

pre-categorical.[108]

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[108] Naturally the prevalence of the body is not exclusive within phenomenology. Even
Foucault underlines the importance of the role of the body in constituting subjects, and

As Husserl says, one can make a true, sensitive and evidence-based discourse that isn't based on scientific abstraction:

> Even though the human living body is counted among the physical bodies, it is still "living"—"my physical body", which I "move," in and through which I "hold sway", which I "animate". If one fails to consider these matters—which soon become quite extensive— thoroughly, and actually without prejudice, one has not grasped at all what is of a soul's own essence as such (the word "soul" being understood here not at all metaphysically but rather in the sense of the original givenness of the psychic in the life-world); and thus one has also failed to grasp the genuine ultimate substrate for a science of "souls". (Husserl 1970, 212)

One can draw conclusions about the gaps in Butler's analysis from this Husserlian discourse. First of all, Husserl offers a dual account of the body. The first account concerns the Körper, and it is subjected to the domain of scientific discourse. Through it, an objective and scientific account of the body, based purely on bio-physiological elements, can be provided. However, the second kind of account seems to be the interesting one: the account of the body and the account through the body. The body, in the Husserlian sense of the Leib, is a remnant of the infinite horizon of sense. It enjoys this condition because the kinaesthetic activity of the body in the world of life is a continuous generator of new experiences. These experiences take place in terms of pre-categorical sensitivity before being transferred in the form of a rationalising

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his reflection about the care of the self involves deeply the dimension of the body, for instance in the words *meleton* and *gymnesthai* that appears several time in the Foucauldian production (Foucault 2005, 381).

scientific discourse (that is nonetheless unnecessary). These experiences can give birth to a scientific description: the account in the phenomenological sense. However, as mentioned above, the body is an infinite horizon of sense, and it is in two directions. First, since the body as Leib is part of the pre-categorical world, it essentially offers a fundamental remnant of that which can always be analysed through a phenomenological description. In other words, the body and the world of sensations offer, by virtue of their pre-categorical status, the continual possibility of being deepened by phenomenological description. Secondly, the body is alive in the world as a kinaesthetic body always open to new experiences. This aspect subjects the body to a regime of becoming for which the phenomenological description will always be partial. However, this is not the incompleteness that Butler mentions, quoted above, which results in the fictionality of the accounting. It is a bias that is based on the fact that the evidence offered by the body will always be contingent, limited and perfectible. When the subject accounts his/herself, s/he operates not according to a kind of fictionality, but according to evidence derived from a horizon of infinite sense. The body always retains an opaque and increasable dimension, which nevertheless can be made evident and accounted as true.

The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy has made a great impact since Husserl's death in 1938. The text influenced many authors,

most prominently Maurice Merleau-Ponty who introduced a new concept

of perception with his analysis of the subject's primordial contact with

the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, perception is mediation operated

by the body, always active, which involves the body in the world before

it is symbolically represented: 'My field of perception is constantly filled

with a play of colours, noises and fleeting tactile sensations which I

cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet

which I nevertheless immediately "place" in the world, without ever

confusing them with my daydreams' (Merleau-Ponty 2013). It follows

that perception is always a form of action, and with it intentionality,

which should not be confined to consciousness (as theorised by Husserl)

as it also affects the body.: 'Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing

through the intermediary of the body' (138-9). Furthermore,

consciousness does not concern language, because the body has its own

world and includes it without the need of the objectifying function

operated by language. Merleau-Ponty opens up the possibility of a pre-

symbolising understanding of the world. This way of understanding the

world is explained by the analysis of the figure of Cézanne:

> Merleau-Ponty considers Cézanne the paradigmatic example
> of a phenomenologist working with paint rather than words.
> Cézanne's struggle to express what exists while remaining
> faithful to the phenomena was no different from that of the
> phenomenological philosopher. Both tried to overcome the
> traditional dichotomy between, on the one hand, the
> intellectualist's prioritizing of the mind as, for instance, in
> classical line drawings with linear perspective, and, on the
> other, the empiricist's privileging of the senses, as with the

impressionists' obsessive attention to the eye's reception of light and color. What Merleau-Ponty recognizes in Cézanne is a similar fascination with the realm where the self and the world fuse in an embodied encounter. When he quotes Cézanne as saying: "the landscape thinks itself in me, and I am its consciousness," it is easy to see how this resonates with his own emphasis on the unity of the subject and the object. (Gaut and McIver Lopes 2011, 169)

Merleau-Ponty opens even the possibility of an account of oneself that is independent from verbalisation, and may take other forms. The iconic offers an extension of the possibilities of phenomenological description, which are rooted in the body out of the necessity of verbal language. One can see here the possibility of a purely iconic accountability. This mode of accountability has already been seen at work in the digital world, through all forms of self-expressions that proceed outside of verbal language. As with verbal description, iconic accountability also retains the horizon of infinite sense offered by the body, according to the plans explained above, as a condition of possibility of the existence of a visual accountability. The inexhaustibility of perception guarantees the constitutive opacity of visual storytelling. If there cannot be subjectivation without discourse, the assumption for the existence of discourse is the presence of an opaque body, which can become an account through dispositives.

Once the issue of the body's opacity as a horizon of infinite sense that one draws upon in the accounting of his/herself has been established, it

must be emphasised that the scene of address requires the here and now of a "you", which begs the question of to whom the account is addressed:

> At this point the story that I tell, one that may even have a certain necessity, cannot assume that its referent adequately takes narrative form, since the exposure I seek to narrate is also the precondition of that narration, a facticity, as it were, that cannot yield to narrative form. And if I tell the story to a ''you'', that other is implied not only as an internal feature of the narrative but also as an irreducibly exterior condition and trajectory of the mode of address. (Butler 2005, 38)

In this case, the impossibility of a coherent accounting is invalidated because giving an account of oneself always presupposes a here and now of the scene of address, which in turn presupposes a microphysical dimension of power. Whatever the roles of the I and the questioner are, the scene is always addressed as a dispositive, which therefore calls out the dimension of power-knowledge and specific regimes of truth. Given this singularity of the scene of address, the constitutive incompleteness of every account of oneself follows:

> My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged in this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision. There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account (Butler 2005, 40).

Firstly, there is the constitutive incompleteness of the self—that cannot under any circumstances lead to a definitive account of oneself. Why is a definite account of oneself not possible? According to Butler, for a

variety of reasons: because the emergency of the self is sometimes

inexplicable; because the narrative reconstruction of the self is always

under continuous review; because there are elements of the self for which

no account can be provided. However, the fact that one cannot be

completely consistent in accounting him/herself does not mean that one

is not accountable. As Butler says:

> But does this mean that I am not, in the moral sense,
> accountable for who I am and for what I do? If I find that,
> despite my best efforts, a certain opacity persists and I cannot
> make myself fully accountable to you, is this ethical failure?
> Or is it a failure that gives rise to another ethical disposition
> in the place of a full and satisfying notion of narrative
> accountability? Is there in this affirmation of partial
> transparency a possibility for acknowledging a relationality
> that binds me more deeply to language and to you than I
> previously knew? And is the relationality that conditions and
> blinds this ''self '' not, precisely, an indispensable resource
> for ethics? (Butler 2005, 40)

This dense passage pertinently explains why the constitutive opacity of

the self, which always results in an incomplete account, is a fundamental

condition for accountability. If the self were not substantially opaque, it

would follow that it would *ab initio* and definitely be always

accountable, because it is always and already translated into discursive

regimes. This pure intelligibility of the body would mean a pure

accountability, and a pure accountability would result in a regime of

truth, fixed and permanent. Through it the world would be translatable,

194

purely and simply, made completely and permanently accountable and, therefore, completely subjugated.

A condition that looks like the one narrated by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, in which in a perfectly organised and completely visible world, opacity cannot have place (Huxley 2010).

4 The Second Hermeneutics of the Subject

When outlining his definition of the state of minority in the work *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* (2010), Immanuel Kant provides rather curious examples: a book, a spiritual director and a doctor who prescribes a diet (narrated in Foucault 2011, 37). Foucault himself surmises that there is extensive literature about the *arts de se conduire* (Foucault 2014a, 29) in the contemporary world. Today, the requests advanced by dispositives have exponentially increased and the daily life of any person living in the Western world is heavily bombarded by messages that suggest modes of behaviour. If every dispositive offers a script to be followed, at least in how it influences behaviour, current dispositives generate a high prescriptive regime.

These prescriptions do not only arise in a performative mode ("you must"), but are also shaped through forms of narrative that emerge from the digital world's capacity for data collection—data that is thus narrativised according to algorithmic systems. All new media objects, whether they are created from scratch or converted from analogic media sources, are composed of digital code and are numerical representations, thus all new media objects can be described formally (mathematically) and can also be subjected to algorithmic manipulation. It follows that all the media objects are programmable.

While the previous chapter investigated the first hermeneutics of the subject through the typologies of the unscreaming subject, the free subject, the disembodied subject and coherent subject, this chapter expands its scope to address a different form of narration of the subject, which will subsequently be called the second hermeneutics of the subject. This chapter will focus on the forms of self-narration in which the subject does not play a performative role, but rather are propelled by the feedback the digital machine produces in response to input by the subject. In this chapter, then, the relationship of the subject and dispositives shifts from what people do with digital dispositive*s* to what media dispositives return to subjects.

The chapter will commence with a description of Big Data, followed by a critique of Big Data departing from the notion of the database. A genealogy of Big Data will close the chapter, suggesting, following the related Foucaludian concept, that Big Data is a consequence of the discourse of the master.

4.1 Big Data

Big data is not a strictly scientific or technological definition, but rather a label that identifies a typically contemporary issue. Despite this, one can nonetheless seek to define the object. Big Data will be understood here as an informatics shift in retrieving, storing and processing data, for which

the traditional analytical approaches no longer suffice and the only useful

means of interrogation are statistical inference.

A key feature of Big Data is their volume.[109] Although it doesn't have a

specific size ascribed to it, the sheer magnitude of Big Data reaches a

number of bits never seen before. McAfee and Brynjolfsson state:

> As of 2012, about 2.5 exabytes of data are created each day, and that number is doubling every 40 months or so. More data cross the Internet every second than were stored in the entire Internet just 20 years ago. This gives companies an opportunity to work with many petabytes of data in a single data set—and not just from the Internet. For instance, it is estimated that Walmart collects more than 2.5 petabytes of data every hour from its customer transactions. A petabyte is one quadrillion bytes, or the equivalent of about 20 million filing cabinets' worth of text. An exabyte is 1,000 times that amount, or one billion gigabytes (2012, 62).[110]

Another feature of Big Data is the variety of data stored. It has a

heterogeneous origin, and therefore one of the issues associated with it is

how to build an appropriate taxonomy capable of adequately weighing

different data.[111] Big Data is not only a system of retrieving and storing

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[109] From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_data.

[110] An Exabyte corresponds to 10^{18} bytes. Some other references have been found that argue that Big Data should be measured in zettabytes, or 10^{21} bytes.

[111] A relevant example concerning the heterogeneity of the sources of Big Data is reported here: 'Mobile phones, online shopping, social networks, electronic communication, GPS, and instrumented machinery all produce torrents of data as a by-product of their ordinary operations. Each of us is now a walking data generator. The data available are often unstructured— not organized in a database—and unwieldy, but there's a huge amount of signal in the noise, simply waiting to be released. Analytics brought rigorous techniques to decision making; big data is at once simpler and more powerful. As Google's director of research, Peter Norvig, puts it: "We don't have better algorithms. We just have more data"' (McAfee and Brynjolfsson 2012, 63).

data, but also of processing data. Speed is key here and measures both the generation and processing of data. Big Data is extremely volatile and variable, therefore one must employ a great deal of discretion when deciding what data to collect and how to store and process it. A characteristic effect of statistical inference is the analysis made upon bad data, namely: the correspondence between phenomena that are absolutely heterogeneous and unrelated. Data's veracity must also be considered with regard to Big Data, meaning the possibility that data is correct and entertains a relationship defined with the material substrate from which it derives. An interference in the environment, in this case, may lead to retrieving bad data; in the system of Big Data it is therefore necessary that the "truth" of the data is evident. A final aspect concerning Big Data is the overall complexity of the system. If data exists in amounts never seen before—and moreover all of it is heterogeneous—it necessarily follows that the system related to it is required to be complex, to correctly represent the information that Big Data is believed to convey.[112]

Big Data comprises huge amounts of data that are collected, stored and processed through digital technologies in order to obtain new insight about the state of the world. It is therefore natural that Big Data is a

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[112] As boyd and Crawford note: 'Big Data is notable not because of its size, but because of its relationality to other data. Due to efforts to aggregate and mine data, Big Data is fundamentally networked. Its value comes from the patterns that can be derived by making connections between pieces of data, about an individual, about individuals in relation to others, about groups of people, or simply about the structure of information itself' (boyd and Crawford 2011, 2).

privileged territory for management. As IBM, a leader in the field of

information technology, states:

> Big Data is changing the way people within organisations
> work together. It is creating a culture in which business and
> IT leaders must join forces to realise value from all data.
> Insights from Big Data can enable all employees to make
> better decisions—deepening customer engagement,
> optimising operations, preventing threats and fraud, and
> capitalising on new sources of revenue. (IBM Big Data—
> What Is Big Data—United States).

IBM's statement makes the purpose of Big Data quite clear: it essentially

comprises the provision of appropriate insight to make informed

managerial decisions.[113] Big Data is therefore not a neutral phenomenon,

but is instead born with a precise goal: the territorialisation of data

through increasingly complexifying informatic systems in order for data

to be used for business. Big Data's territory is, alongside with warfare

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[113] As mentioned elsewhere, with a formula that correlates Big Data and management very clearly: ''You can't manage what you don't measure'. There's much wisdom in that saying, which has been attributed to both W. Edwards Deming and Peter Drucker, and it explains why the recent explosion of digital data is so important. Simply put, because of Big Data, managers can measure, and hence know, radically more about their businesses, and directly translate that knowledge into improved decision making and performance' (McAfee and Brynjolfsson 2012, 62). And, in a following passage, the power of Big Data in influencing the culture of management is further underlined: 'Executives interested in leading a big data transition can start with two simple techniques. First, they can get in the habit of asking, "What do the data say?" when faced with an important decision and following up with more-specific questions such as "Where did the data come from?," "What kinds of analyses were conducted?," and "How confident are we in the results?" (People will get the message quickly if executives develop this discipline.) Second, they can allow themselves to be overruled by the data; few things are more powerful for changing a decision-making culture than seeing a senior executive concede when data have disproved a hunch' (66).

and healthcare, business,[114] which the previously quoted paragraph underscores in its compelling illustration of the categorical divisions IBM makes within fields where Big Data can provide managers tools to make decisions. The breadth and quality of the data enables companies to better prevent fraud and threats, identify new opportunities for generating revenue and to optimise information. However, the first category can easily be associated with the discourse that this dissertation carries out: the deepening of customer engagement. From the outset, the customer's engagement with business comprises a structural element of Big Data, thus functioning as a tool to foster the customer's accountability to the business.

Critical comments about Big Data have been raised for several years now, especially in relation to its emphasis on computer science and management with respect to this phenomenon. boyd and Crawford underline one of the first critical points regarding Big Data, which is epistemological in nature:

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[114] Palantir (http://www.palantir.com/) is one of the biggest players in the world of Big Data. This is the exhaustive description of the company, provided by the financial platform Bloomberg, that well illustrates the huge range of human activities that Big Data can cover: "Palantir Technologies Inc. develops and builds data fusion platforms for public institutions, commercial enterprises, and non-profit organizations worldwide. The company offers Palantir Gotham, a platform that *integrates*, *manages*, *secures*, and *analyzes enterprise data*; and Palantir Metropolis, a platform that *integrates*, *enriches*, *models*, and *analyzes quantitative data*. It provides solutions in the areas of *anti-fraud, capital market, case management, crisis response, cyber security, defense, disaster preparedness, disease response, healthcare delivery, insider threat, insurance analytics, intelligence, law enforcement, legal intelligence, pharmaceutical research and development, and custom aspects*" (from: http://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=43580005 [italics are mine]).

> Big Data tempts some researchers to believe that they can see
> everything at a 30,000-foot view. It is the kind of data that
> encourages the practice of apophenia: seeing patterns where
> none actually exist, simply because massive quantities of data
> can offer connections that radiate in all directions. Due to this,
> it is crucial to begin asking questions about the analytic
> assumptions, methodological frameworks, and underlying
> biases embedded in the Big Data phenomenon (2011, 2).

The phenomenon of Big Data is known to generate reports that randomly correlate data curves from different sources, as if there is some sort interdependence between them, when, in reality, they are entirely independent. As emphasised by boyd and Crawford, the need for velocity—a key feature of Big Data, as seen above—can lead to a misguided analysis based on unfounded assumptions, an inconsistent reference methodology and the discovery of non-existent influences.[115]

However, if an epistemological risk is present in Big Data, the ideological risk is even greater. As boyd and Crawford outline:

> Speaking in praise of what he terms 'The Petabyte Age', Chris
> Anderson, Editor-in-Chief of *Wired*, writes: "This is a world
> where massive amounts of data and applied mathematics
> replace every other tool that might be brought to bear. Out
> with every theory of human behavior, from linguistics to
> sociology. Forget taxonomy, ontology and psychology. Who
> knows why people do what they do? The point is they do it,

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[115] Big Data is also leading to a revision of the connection between algorithm and database. The standard hierarchic database seems to be obsolete at the moment of the writing of this dissertation (2015), so that new ways of managing data are nowadays explored. One of them is called "elastic databases". The algorithm itself generates this kind of database, which is arranged in flexible clusters. No specific academic reference can be provided thus far about this topic; the above paragraph was derived from a private conversation with prof. Guido Tattoni, Head of the Department of Applied Arts at NABA Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti Milano, which took place on October 2015.

and we can track and measure it with unprecedented fidelity. With enough data, the numbers speak for themselves" (2011, 4).

Much of the narrative about Big Data is based reneging on the assumption that the number is a carrier of meaning in itself. While the question of whether the number has a semantic meaning or not can be debated, there is no doubt that the countability of things is a next step, rather than any other semantics. Unlike Anderson, this dissertation does not consider the possibility that numbers speak for themselves or convey an independent meaning. As boyd and Crawford subsequently argue:

> Do numbers speak for themselves? The answer, we think, is a resounding "no". Significantly, Anderson's sweeping dismissal of all other theories and disciplines is a tell: it reveals an arrogant undercurrent in many Big Data debates where all other forms of analysis can be sidelined by production lines of numbers, privileged as having a direct line to raw knowledge (4).

boyd and Crawford go to the heart of the problem in the passage quoted above:[116] Big Data (and in general, much of the informational approach)

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[116] boyd and Crawford continue in two following paragraphs: 'Big Data offers the humanistic disciplines a new way to claim the status of quantitative science and objective method. It makes many more social spaces quantifiable. In reality, working with Big Data is still subjective, and what it quantifies does not necessarily have a closer claim on objective truth—particularly when considering messages from social media sites. But there remains a mistaken belief that qualitative researchers are in the business of interpreting stories and quantitative researchers are in the business of producing facts. In this way, Big Data risks reinscribing established divisions in the long running debates about scientific method' (4). They continue, 'in the case of social media data, there is a "data cleaning" process: making decisions about what attributes and variables will be counted, and which will be ignored. This process is inherently subjective. As Bollier explains, as a large mass of raw information, Big Data is not self-explanatory. And yet the specific methodologies for interpreting the data are open to all

considers itself to be a transcript of the quantitative world, and as such objective. That is, the narrative made of the numbers of Big Data would constitute the objective modelling of the raw matter of the world. On the contrary, like all narratives of the human world, Big Data is always relative. First, as shown by Foucault and repeatedly explained in the earlier parts of this dissertation, Big Data is epistemic. In other words, it belongs to the current epistemology of the contemporary era. If the data that is collected depends on a specific location, this data is still dependent on a cartography of the world related to that location, which precedes the collection of the data (Farinelli 2009). If the data relates to a physiological element such as blood pressure, a description of the human being that includes blood pressure must be previously given.[117] In addition to this issue, the description provided by Big Data is based on notions such as information (which has its unit in numerical data coded

sorts of philosophical debate. Can the data represent an "objective truth" or is any interpretation necessarily biased by some subjective filter or the way that data is "cleaned"'? (5).

[117] The notion of a robust encyclopaedia seems to be an integral element in the reflections about Big Data. This encyclopaedia that would be written objectively by measures; or, in other words, a neo-Cartesian conception of the world, that the world would be infinitely stable and reliable, so that a definite description of it, and then an encyclopedia that would be valid forever, can be provided. Since Big Data (usually) work, one is in front of the collapse of the semantics of the information into the pragmatic, for which the information is such that in the moment in which it works. The only variable in this encyclopedia would be the perpetuation of data mining. On the one hand, one would see a reflection of the process of 'technical dominion of the world as a fulfillment of the identification of the being of things with the certainty that the I has about it' (Vattimo 1996, 90 [my translation]). Secondly, it ignores completely any notion of weak thought, whose encyclopaedic model assumes that the rules are geared to the context and semantics incorporates the pragmatic (Vattimo and Rovatti 2010).

in bits) that, as demonstrated by Hayles, has been created within the last sixty years. Secondly, the data does not emerge from the raw matter of the world, but is collected by the person who develops and plants special tools within it. As investigated by the German director Wim Wenders in his film *Lisbon Story* (1994), it is impossible to talk about the world as it is. The narrative does not arise directly from the world, but it comes from a human relationship with the world. To ensure that there is data, it is necessary that there is a source that emits it. This source was first created, and then located by the human being. By these two operations—a technological creation that generates the data and a physical location that orientates it—it is impossible to think a *pure* point of view aimed at collecting data. Each piece of data is never itself absolute, but it pertains to the historical relativity of the human labour that built it. Like the human being, who is a historical construction dependent on the processes of subjectivation, data is a historical construction operated by the human being. Therefore boyd and Crawford definitively considers Big Data as subjective, meaning in this case a result deriving from a historical relativity, according to at least three factors: regarding the retrieving of the data, according to the fact that it is the human being that, in the *here and now*, has made a device that allows the generation of the data; in terms of the ontological status of the data, as its absoluteness is not a deed, and thus instead always depends on the methodological and epistemological frame of reference in which it is placed; and finally, in

205

terms of the epistemology of the data, which is erroneously considered to carry a neutral semantics, when in fact the same semantics is generated from an interpretation grounded and operated according to the human questioning.

To further deepen the critique of Big Data, it is useful to review the theory of the database proposed in Manovich's *The Language of New Media* (2001). Big Data is definitely part of the world of new media that Manovich defines:

> Eventually, in the middle of the twentieth century, a modern digital computer is developed to perform calculations on numerical data more efficiently. In parallel, we witness the rise of modern media technologies which allow the storage of images, image sequences, sounds and text using different material forms: a photographic plate, a film stock, a gramophone record, etc. The synthesis of these two histories: The translation of all existing media into numerical data accessible for computers. The result is new media: graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces and text which become computable, i.e. simply another set of computer data (Manovich 2001, 41).

The first moment, digitisation, consists of two steps: sampling and quantification. In sampling, data is sampled, most often at regular intervals, such as the grid of pixels used to represent a digital image (Manovich 2001, 49). Sampling turns continuous data into discrete data, in other words, data that occurs in distinct units: people, pages of a book or pixels. It follows that, in the second step, each sample is quantified.

If the numerical automation coding of media is accompanied by a modular structure of media objects, the combination of these two elements allow the automation of many operations involved in media creation, manipulation and access. Thus, human intentionality can be removed from the creative process, at least in part. Within Big Data, this phenomenon is evident when the statistical inference made by the machine generates the pattern, the reading of which is entrusted to the machine itself. For example, this is the case of the comparison between curves, which the machine identifies and suggests for the human interpretation even if the two phenomena are completely disconnected from each other. This combination generates a high-level automation of media, implying that a computer understands, 'to a certain degree, the meanings embedded in the objects being generated, i.e. their semantics' (Manovich 2001, 53).

The issue of information retrieval can be added to this scenario. By the end of the 20th century, the problem was no longer how to create a new media object like an image, but rather how to find an object that already exists somewhere. This led to the next stage in media evolution: the need for new technologies to store, organise and efficiently access these media materials. The database is the label under which these new technologies are categorised: 'In computer science the database is defined as a structured collection of data' (Manovich 2001, 194). Data is stored in a database in such a manner that a computer can quickly search and

retrieve it; therefore it is anything 'but a simple collection of items' (194). But the database, originally a computer technology to organise and access data, is 'becoming a new cultural form of its own' (64).[118]

The critique Manovich advances about new media and databases illustrates that the objectivist ideology governing Big Data has no reason to exist. First, virtualisation is at work when switching from an analogic material world to a discrete digital world in the data retrieval process. If Manovich uses the word virtualisation, it seems more appropriate here to speak of a human being's interpretation. In the second place, the data structure and the database that follow are not isomorphic to reality, as if they are directly derived from it. Indeed, they are interpretations which, according to the notion of semiotic paradigm, aggregate the individual items in a set. Third, the algorithm produces a narrative about data. If, as Manovich demonstrates, the algorithm comprises the narrative dimension of new media, it follows that a query to the database, based on

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[118] Of course the issue of taxonomy in databases is ancient. It is this famous passage Foucault at the beginning of *The Order of Things* that problematises the issue of taxonomy of databases in a brilliant way: 'This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that'(Foucault 2002a, xvi).

algorithms, has a narrative component. The meaning of the Latin word

computare is retrieved here in its full sense, which, as discussed in this

dissertation's introduction, originally meant to give order to the world.

Computation is an interpretation of the world in order to give an order to

it. But while the objectivist perspective affirms that the order belongs to

the world, here it is clearly emphasised that each order comes from a

particular interpretation. Again, any assumption regarding the objectivity

of Big Data is, according to several levels of analysis, completely

unfounded.[119]

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[119] To this discourse based on epistemological and ontological issues, one should add also ethical and political critique. boyd and Crawford quote Manovich when they say: 'As Lev Manovich (2011) points out, "only social media companies have access to really large social data—especially transactional data. An anthropologist working for Facebook or a sociologist working for Google will have access to data that the rest of the scholarly community will not'. Some companies restrict access to their data entirely; others sell the privilege of access for a high fee; and others offer small data sets to university-based researchers. This produces considerable unevenness in the system: those with money—or those inside the company—can produce a different type of research than those outside' (2011, 12). Therefore the risk of the presence of large trusts is always incumbent on the Big Data field, in the form of huge concentrations of data in the hands of few entities that are thus able to monopolise any kind of use of these data. For instance, as Lovink observed, the advertisement and the related economic issue is essential to encourage the production of big data, so that the personalisation of advertising based on information retrieving becomes essential (Lovink 2010, 24). However, advertising is perhaps the epiphenomenon that drives a more complex world that definitely finds in the advertisement the mechanism of generation of revenues, but which has a complex epistemic structure. The Google case is exemplary in this regard: 'The most powerful and protean of These Internet gatekeepers is, of course, Google. With control of 63 percent of the world's Internet searches, as well as ownership of YouTube, Google has enormous influence over who can find an audience on the Web around the world' (Rosen 2008). The discourse is about huge concentrations of information, and about equally powerful systems of control of it. It is curious that the problem of the generation of trust is still not felt in this regard, as if the ethical and political loopholes are identified in this regard. For example, like in the following passage, the actions of Google are justified as a new factor in a complex system of balance of power. What is forgotten is that Google is a private company whose purpose is to generate profit: 'As the law professor Tim Wu told me, in order to trust Google, you have to be something of a monarchist, willing to trust the near-sovereign discretion of Wong and her colleagues. That's especially true in light of the Global Network Initiative, the set of voluntary principles for protecting free expression and privacy

Following this critical review of Big Data, this chapter will argue that it

represents, in these times, a second form of digital storytelling of the self,

alongside what human beings normally offer in the accounting of

themselves on digital platforms, as analysed in the previous chapter. This

second form of accountability of oneself takes the name of second

hermeneutics of the subject. The word hermeneutics is adopted in its

specific meaning. It is therefore contended that digital machines, mainly

through the mechanism of Big Data, are able to provide accounts of the

subject regardless of his/her intentionality. While in the first

hermeneutics the subject operates intentionally to provide an account of

him/herself, the intentionality of the subject is lost in the second

hermeneutics of the subject. A machine operates the account in this case,

which begins with data. Since the second hermeneutics of the subject

already assumes a form of accounting of oneself, it follows that a digital

form of accountability is also at work in this case.

The first parameter necessary to define this second hermeneutics of the

subject is found in the subject's simple presence in a physical space and

time. A simple and diffused device like the mobile phone allows a

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endorsed last month by leading Internet companies like Google and leading human
rights and online-advocacy groups like the Center for Democracy and Technology.
Google and other companies say that they hope by acting collectively, they can be more
effective in resisting censorship requests from repressive governments and, when that
isn't possible, create a trail of accountability'(Rosen 2008; see also Zuboff 2014).
Nevertheless, the connection between the big players of data and politics (mostly in
terms of intelligence) is a territory still under investigation and to shed light on (see for
reference Ahmed 2015).

subject's movement in space to be traced by an ordinary GPS network.
Several kinds of software exist to monitor a subject's movement. In some
cases, the subject openly displays the mapping of his/her movement on
social media (for instance, linking Nike+ to Facebook),[120] which
comprises the first level of the second hermeneutics of the subject: to
build an account, in any form, of the movements made by the subject.[121]

However, the representation of the subject's mere presence in a space is
only one figure that the second hermeneutics of the subject may assume.
A fairly recent notion, which builds a taxonomy of the outputs deriving

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[120] For example, through software that allows locating mobile phones in a physical
space, which can give a summary of a person's movements over a defined period (a
day, month, year). Another example is the software that monitors running, which returns
to the subject the quantitative features of performance (distance, average speed, etc.).

[121] The representation of the mere presence in a physical space can become a particular
form of accountability, which is called the accountability of presence. As clearly
identified in the following passage: 'A more useful way to think about this, perhaps, is
in terms of the various accountabilities of particular people's presence and absence in
specific places and at specific times, and accountabilities associated with particular
ways of understanding space and presence. People are accountable to each other for
their presence in—or absence from—specific places in a range of ways, whether that be
one's participation at a business meeting, casual time spent with friends, or the effort to
avoid a school zone, and the very fact of those accountabilities is what marks one's
membership in, and recognition of, social categories. The very fact that an orientation
towards a school or playground is something for which one might be accountable is one
element of what it means to be a member of a social group. Even one's recognition of
particular distinctions as boundaries to which one should be attentive is, itself, a means
of marking social status. Information exchange is one way to deal with these forms of
accountability, but the exchange of information is not the point; socially accountable
participation is. Indeed, the essence of these accountabilities is their contextual nature.
The issue is not where one might be, and when; it is to whom one might be accountable
for one's presence, to whom, under what circumstances, and how one might be called to
account. And further, it has to be noticed that the very questions of "when" (that is,
what kinds of temporalities are relevant, from times of day to times when others are
present) and "where" (that is, sites as defined by factors as disparate as geographical
location or the presence of others) are equally relational' (Troshynski, Lee, and Dourish
2008, 494). It seems clear the derivation of this accountability of presence from the
forms of spatial organisation of regimentation, a form of contemporary panopticism of
today, where the visibility of the subject is constituted by its movements in space.

from the second hermeneutics of the subject, is the *quantified self*.[122] The

quantified self can be summarised as follows:

> The quantified self (QS) is any individual engaged in the self-
> tracking of any kind of biological, physical, behavioral, or
> environmental information. There is a proactive stance toward
> obtaining information and acting on it. A variety of areas may
> be tracked and analyzed, for example, weight, energy level,
> mood, time usage, sleep quality, health, cognitive
> performance, athletics, and learning strategies (Swan 2013,
> 85).

It is worth noting that the intentionality of the subject regarding the

operation of self-tracking is emphasised in this introduction on the

quantified self, which is a form of individual engagement. Moreover, the

quantified self is a proactive attitude towards personal existence. At a

first level of reading, the quantified self arises as a mode of existence

based on a process of accountability regarding the understanding of

oneself. The quantified self is the account of the subject about

him/herself in mathematical terms, concurrent with a discursive

formation that emerges in the modern world. Some parameters according

to which the self can be quantified are presented here:

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[122] The Quantified Self has an official website (http://quantifiedself.com/), that
represents the company founded by Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly, 'that serves the
Quantified Self user community worldwide by producing international meetings,
conferences and expositions, community forums, web content and services, and a guide
to self-tracking tools'. The mission of the website states: 'Our mission is to support new
discoveries about ourselves and our communities that are grounded in accurate
observation and enlivened by a spirit of friendship' (from:
http://quantifiedself.com/about/).

Physical activities: miles, steps, calories, repetitions, sets, METs (metabolic equivalents)

Diet: calories consumed, carbs, fat, protein, specific ingredients, glycaemic index, satiety, portions, supplement doses, tastiness, cost, location

Psychological states and traits: mood, happiness, irritation, emotions, anxiety, self-esteem, depression, confidence

Mental and cognitive states and traits: IQ, alertness, focus, selective/sustained/divided attention, reaction, memory, verbal fluency, patience, creativity, reasoning, psychomotor vigilance

Environmental variables: location, architecture, weather, noise, pollution, clutter, light, season

Situational variables: context, situation, gratification of situation, time of day, day of week

Social variables: influence, trust, charisma, karma, current role/status in the group or social network (Swan 2013, 86).

The heterogeneity of this list is quite surprising. Physical activities refer to the subject's spatiality, or his/her occupation of a given space and movements within a process of accountability. Tracking and restricting the diet according to certain parameters pertains to a dominant medical discourse, in which the quantification of the physiochemical metabolic system comprises an essential element of wellness. The description of psychological states, based on the symbolic quantification of emotions, on the other hand, elicits a different discourse. Scientific measurement is abandoned in this case, asking the subject him/herself to randomly quantify his or her moods. One can clearly see the epistemological weakness of this passage, in which the scientific evidence of the number

is linked, by analogy, to the personal non-evident perception of oneself. An analogy within the process is thus generated, so that the (personal) quantification of emotions is accompanied by the (objectifying) quantification of the physiochemical parameters or geolocation of the subject. This overlapping between different epistemologies generates a distorting effect, for which the understanding of the self can also be quantified. Other aspects of Swan's list also repeat this same overlapping. Pollution is an environmental consideration that belongs to the hard sciences; in cognitive states one finds that IQ, which is derived from a form of pseudo-cognitive epistemology, is combined with creativity, whatever this polysemic, smoky and dubious term means; and finally, nearly indefinable factors such as charisma comprise a social variable linked to a sociological analysis of the position of the subject to the social groups s/he belongs to.

Thus, the quantified self is a mode of accounting oneself based on an inflexible will to quantify what exists, which is grounded in a mix of different epistemologies, some of them spurious and in no way reliable. The quantified self is the will to extend the measurability to parameters that, relying on current epistemologies, are not measurable in themselves.[123] While the goal is to quantify as much as possible, the

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[123] Some statements from a conference about the quantified self are here reported: 'Data is the new oil; The lean hardware movement becomes the lean heartware movement; Information wants to be linked (…); Quantified emotion and data sensation through haptics; Display of numerical data and graphs are the interface; Quantifying is

method seeks to link the data. Unfortunately, all of the epistemological apparatuses that should be applied to such a vast project are definitively ignored and the apparatus of power-knowledge that is undermined in this process is completely concealed. This relationship will be explored in the following section, dedicated to the *Discourse of the Master*.

4.2 The Discourse of the Master

Every form of accounting of the self in which measurability is involved has a precise genealogy. Foucault argued this point at the beginning of his canonical course, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005), which addressed the genealogy of the Western subject. The French philosopher identified two specific processes of subjectivation that characterised the ancient Greek and Latin world: the *gnothi seauton* (know yourself) and the *epimeleia heautou* (the care of the self). The contemporary Western world has been offered the gnothi seauton as the fundamental process of subjectivation, at the expense of the care of the self. Why is the Western subject asked to know him/herself?

Foucault identifies the birth of this dominating process in the Western world at a precise historic-epistemological moment, which he outlined as the Cartesian moment. This moment is obviously associated to the

the intermediary step; Exosenses (haptics, wearable electronic senses) is really what we want; Perpetual data explosion' (in Swan 2013, 87).

French philosopher René Descartes, but it is a synecdoche for the

conception of a human being who was born in the second half of the 17th

century. As Foucault says:

> the Cartesian moment philosophically requalified the gnothi
> seauton (know yourself). Actually, and here things are very
> simple, the Cartesian approach, which can be read quite
> explicitly in the Meditations placed self-evidence (l'*évidence*)
> at the origin, the point of departure of the philosophical
> approach—self-evidence as it appears, that is to say as it is
> given, as it is actually given to consciousness without any
> possible doubt (Foucault 2005, 14).

In his masterworks, Descartes (Descartes 1999; 2000) argues that

evidence is a precondition of any true knowledge. The truth of

knowledge can only be given in the evidence to consciousness. Only this

kind of absolute evidence allows the removal of any doubt in the process

of thinking. The first evidence, theorised by Descartes, is the "I". Indeed,

before embarking on any type of cognitive process and avoiding any kind

of doubt, the subject must have evidence of him/herself in consciousness.

With Descartes, then, consciousness, truth and evidence are related.

Foucault then continues:

> The Cartesian approach [therefore] refers to knowledge of the
> self, as a form of consciousness at least. What's more, by
> putting the self-evidence of the subject's own existence at the
> very source of access to being, this knowledge on oneself (no
> longer in the form of the test of sell-evidence, but in the form
> of the impossibility of doubting my existence as subject) made
> the "know yourself" into a fundamental means of access to
> truth (Foucault 2005, 14).

In this passage, Foucault emphasises the gap that Descartes introduced, which will be a fundamental point of investigation for later philosophy (Kant and Husserl above all). In Descartes, truth of the being and evidence of the subject to him/herself is the same thing, or rather, only a subject crystal clear about him/herself may be capable of truth. In this manner, Descartes grounded the domain of cognition on other aspects of human existence: only knowledge can guarantee access to the truth (and not affection, materiality or any other element reduced by Descartes to almost to raw material). The Cartesian moment is thus the key node of Western culture in which truth, being and knowledge are intimately related.

Of course, Foucault is shrewd enough to point out the following:

> there is a vast distance between the Socratic gnothi seauton and the Cartesian approach. However, you can see why, from the seventeenth century, starting from this step, the principle of gnothi seauton as founding moment of the philosophical method was acceptable for a number of philosophical approaches or practices. But if the Cartesian approach thus requalified the gnothi seauton, for reasons that are fairly easy to isolate, at the same time—and I want to stress this—it played a major part in discrediting the principle of care of the self and in excluding it from the field of modern philosophical thought. (Foucault 2005, 14).

The philosophy of the 17th century, and especially its champion Descartes, was then able to return completely the Greek gnothi seauton in a new epistemology, in which truth of being, truth of knowledge and truth of the subject are made to collapse. The only knowledge is given to

establish what is true, or simply "is". However this shift of the Western

culture to the horizon of knowledge has led to a loss, namely the ancient

Greek paradigm of the care of the self, to which Foucault devotes

numerous analyses and his final work (Foucault 1988).

But why is Foucault so interested in the Cartesian moment, and at the

turn of the Western world towards knowledge at the expense of the care

of the self? One reason is that he identifies the correlation of power-

knowledge that has led to the modern forms of subjugation in the

Cartesian standpoint. To understand this form of subjugation, it becomes

necessary to consider the process of subjectivation that has instead been

overlooked: the care of the self. To understand contemporary

subjectivity, grounded in a certain conception of the truth based on the

domain of knowledge, one should therefore go back to the Greek

paradigm of the care of the self because it proposes a different

relationship between the truth and the subject.

Within the care of the self, Foucault identifies the concept of *spirituality*,

which is defined as follows:

> I think we could call "spirituality" the search, practice, and
> experience through which the subject carries out the
> necessary transformations on himself in order to have access
> to the truth. We will call "spirituality" then the set of these
> researches, practices, and experiences, which may be
> purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of
> looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for
> knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being,

the price to be paid for access to the truth. (Foucault 2005, 15).

The spirituality Foucault mentioned has no ties to the general meaning attributed to this term. It is instead a series of practices, also heterogeneous among themselves, by which the subject takes care of him/herself. These practices do not constitutively include knowledge: that is, they do not have knowledge as subject, but the subject itself. The spirituality that Foucault talks about is therefore a set of processes that relate to the existence.

But what matters for the purpose of this discussion is the relationship between spirituality, truth and subject. As Foucault clearly states:

> Spirituality postulates that the truth is never given to the subject by right. Spirituality postulates that the subject as such does not have right of access to the truth and is not capable of having access to the truth. It postulates that the truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge (*connaissance*), which would be founded and justified simply by the fact that he is the subject and because he possesses this or that structure of subjectivity. It postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself. The truth is only given to the subject at a price that brings the subject's being into play. For as he is, the subject is not capable of truth. (Foucault 2005, 15)

Through the notion of spirituality one is at the antipodes of the Cartesian moment. Descartes postulated that the subject is substantially capable of truth, once doubts are eliminated and he or she has reached evidence. The

premise of this approach is that there is an objective truth, which is immutable and knowable (especially through the use of a suitable method). A point of view regarding truth is unique. Once a subject has arrived there, the truth remains with the subject, who acquires his/her being through this truth. The metaphysical background that underlies spirituality, on the other hand, is the opposite. The subject does not reach the truth through an act of knowledge related to evidence. Instead, it is necessary for the subject to move away from him/herself, through a set of practices, in order to reach the truth. However, this truth is always variable, depending on the conversions that the subject is able to implement. The subject then does not need to acquire a substantial viewpoint based on evidence for the acquisition of truth. The truth is offered only in the continuous conversion of the subject. This conversion is not an act of knowledge, but rather an upheaval that continuously sets practices anew, the result of which is a continuous exploration of otherness. It is the exploration of otherness through practices that constitutes the truth. Why? Because only in the exploration of the otherness implicit in these practices can the subject experiment with the exit of identitary dispositives. Within them, the subject can only find a truth imposed by identitary dispositives. The truth of the subject is instead available through practices. But what kind of truth does the subject attain through spirituality? As Foucault argues:

spirituality postulates that once access to the truth has really
been opened up, it produces effects that are, of course, the
consequence of the spiritual approach taken in order to
achieve this, but which at the same time are something quite
different and much more: effects which I will call "rebound"
("*de retour*"), effects of the truth on the subject. For
spirituality, the truth is not just what is given to the subject,
as reward for the act of knowledge as it were, and to fulfill
the act of knowledge. The truth enlightens the subject; the
truth gives beatitude to the subject; the truth gives the subject
tranquillity of the soul. (Foucault 2005, 16).

Although the author later leaves this viewpoint behind, this moment in

Foucauldian production is nonetheless interesting. Foucault's analysis

aims to illuminate the effects of the return of the truth, because these

justify the cognitive process. The truth—unlike the Cartesian moment—

is not a goal in itself. Truth, conceived as the goal of spirituality, has the

subject itself as its purpose. Through truth this subject is able to find the

peace and bliss. Spirituality inverts the relationship between truth and

subject: truth doesn't make the subject legitimate, but the same subject—

his/her happiness, peace of mind—makes the truth right.

If this is the goal of the truth, it is useful to recall that the truth is not

attained through a cognitive act, but through the practices that the subject

establishes with respect to him/herself. And practices, as noted, are not

knowledge. Foucault perfectly summarises, that modern man—and then

the contemporary man—are born in the Cartesian moment. However, the

French philosopher argues that practices do not have a place in this moment:

> leaping over several centuries, we can say that we enter the modern age (I mean, the history of truth enters its modern period) when it is assumed that what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject's access to the truth, is knowledge (*connaissance*) and knowledge alone. It seems to me that what I have called the "Cartesian moment" takes on its position and meaning at this point, without in any way my wanting to say that it is a question of Descartes, that he was its inventor or that he was the first to do this. I think the modern age of the history of truth begins when knowledge itself and knowledge alone gives access to the truth. That is to say, it is when the philosopher (or the scientist, or simply someone who seeks the truth) can recognize the truth and have access to it m himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject (Foucault 2005, 17).

The result of this approach to truth, that modern man and the contemporary made their own, is that the real human being is the man of knowledge. And this single dimension—knowledge—counts for the construction of the true man. Knowledge is the only process of subjectivation that legitimises man. By this approach, the world of practices is eliminated, which by contrast does not give access to knowledge. If only knowledge saves the human being—in an existential sense—one does not need to practise anything else.

But of course this approach also has drawbacks. A world based purely on *mathesis*—the Greek word that identifies the type of knowledge discussed here—immediately implies two effects. First of all, it generates

222

processes of subjectivation that do not allow an understanding of the human being as a whole: an understanding that, while not exploiting the practices, it rules out any kind of truth that is derived from these. On the other hand, being based on mathesis, the account is only about the one who in the discourse of mathesis can be enclosed. The human being who comes from the Cartesian moment is understandable—and thus made true—only in its quantifiable and mathematical features. All human characteristics that are not classifiable according to this aspect are not worthy of being taken into account.[124] And, secondly, the relatedness with others is defined in purely abstract, quantifiable terms. The fundamental question regarding relationships with others shifts from *how* to live with others to *how much* to live with others. "Much" needs to be quantifiable, made in numbers. In Greek terms, the discourse of *mathemata* does not contain *synousia* (being together), or even necessarily *syzen* (living together). An approach to life based on mathesis lacks the dimension of *syn*, of sharing one's own experience with others. The *syn* is missing here because this sharing should be reduced to abstraction in order to be measured and quantified. Thus, the subject is no longer "complete" in front of the other, but a more abstract and quantified self, who finds his/her legitimacy quantified because s/he know him/herself according to mathesis.

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[124] As Foucault points out, for instance mathesis and simulation (rationalisation and simplification) can't deal with the management of pleasures. Pleasures require a different attitude, based on the *askesis*, that is within the realm of the spirituality (Foucault 1990b).

Not only Foucault, but also Husserl identified this fundamental Cartesian

shift of the modern man in his monumental *Crisis*, which both authors

claim was fatal.[125] As Husserl says:

> What characterizes objectivism is that it moves upon the
> ground of the world which is pregiven, taken for granted
> through experience, seeks the "objective truth" of this world,
> seeks what, in this world, is unconditionally valid for every
> rational being, what it is in itself. It is the task of episteme,
> ratio, or philosophy to carry this out universally. Through
> these one arrives at what ultimately is; beyond this, no further
> questions would have a rational sense (Husserl 1970, 68-69).

According to Husserl, therefore, the objectification of the world

introduced by the Cartesian rationalism had a significant result: only that

which can be categorised according to scientific truth is valid and

legitimate—because scientific truth identifies what is valid for everyone.

Anything that falls outside of this realm therefore would not rationally

make sense. Here "rational" is to be understood in relation to its opposite:

irrational. According to this approach to the world, what is not scientific

knowledge is irrational and—according to a cause-effect relationship

totally unfounded—meaningless.

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[125] Descartes is the interlocutor of Husserl in the whole first part of the *Crisis*, as
underlined by this paragraph: 'That Descartes, however, persists in pure objectivism in
spite of its subjective grounding was possible only through the fact that the *mens*, which
at first stood by itself in the epoche and functioned as the absolute ground of
knowledge, grounding the objective sciences (or, universally speaking, philosophy),
appeared at the same time to be grounded along with everything else as a legitimate
subject matter within the sciences, i.e., in psychology' (Husserl 1970, 81).

In another passage, Husserl himself provides a clear and detailed

explanation of the process that led to the mathematisation of the world:

> Implied in the mathematization of nature, as the idea and the task were understood, was the supposition of the coexistence of the infinite totality of its bodies in space-time as mathematically rational; though natural science, as inductive, could have only inductive access to interconnections which, in themselves, are mathematical. In any case, natural science possessed the highest rationality because it was guided by pure mathematics and achieved, through inductions, mathematical results. Should this not become the model of all genuine knowledge? Should knowledge, if it is to attain the status of a genuine science which goes beyond nature, not follow the example of natural science or, even better, that of pure mathematics, insofar as we have, perhaps, in other spheres of knowledge, the "innate" faculty of apodictic self-evidence through axioms and deductions? It is no wonder that we already find the idea of a universal mathematics in Descartes. Of course the weight of the theoretical and practical successes [of science], beginning immediately with Galileo, had its effect. Thus the world and, correlatively, philosophy, take on a completely new appearance. The world must, in itself, be a rational world, in the new sense of rationality taken from mathematics, or mathematized nature; correspondingly, philosophy, the universal science of the world, must be built up as a unified rational theory *more geometrico* (61).

Husserl keenly illustrates why the mathematical model (abstract and

relational) established itself as the true model: mathematics is applicable

to the entire natural world and, above all, it gets results. These results are

obtained through the application of scientific method to nature. If

mathematics leads to a generalising abstraction, and allows obtaining

results, it follows that mathematics deserves to be applied as much as

possible, to become the absolute king in the realm of knowledge. Thus

philosophy in the first place should embrace mathematics. Since this contamination comes the Cartesian method, as Husserl defines it: a rational theory *more geometrico*.

The conclusion of this process of mathematasing abstraction that operates in knowledge has led to what is called here the *discourse of the master* (Rovatti 2010, 217), in which knowledge (and within knowledge the quantified abstraction operated by mathematics) overcomes the world of practices, generating a subject whose life is enclosed and substantialised in quantifiable identitary dispositives. Although he does not adopt the expression *discourse of the master*, Husserl provides an effective description:

> In a bold, even extravagant, elevation of the meaning of universality, begun by Descartes, this new philosophy seeks nothing less than to encompass, in the unity of a theoretical system, all meaningful questions in a rigorous scientific manner, with an apodictically intelligible methodology, in an unending but rationally ordered progress of inquiry (Husserl 1970, 8-9).

The discourse of the master reduces every meaningful discourse to the substantialised subject of the scientific method. Since the scientific method is based on mathematics, the sense is reduced to that which is quantifiable. It follows that what is not quantifiable is irrational. However, this is not an irrationality that deserves to be explored, but rather an irrationality that indicates absence of sense. With the discourse

226

of the master, sense is only what is quantifiable. What cannot be subjected to the quantifying reason is therefore meaningless.[126]

Thus, in this process of reducing meaning to what is quantifiable, what results is a new way to conceive of the subject. The discourse of the master has dominated throughout modernity, reducing the subject to a subject based on knowledge, forgetting the entire world of practices. And if knowledge is merely grounded in figures, the only feature that restores the truth of the subject is its quantifiability, thus its computability. If this logic extends to the polarisation of true/false, then all that lies beyond a subject's computability is therefore false. The ego is only the dimension of the quantified self. It is worth noting that this applies not only to an economic dimension, but rather is a more complex process of quantification that governs—as shown above in the example of the quantified self— many aspects of the human being: 'accounting numbers are not only involved in the "making up" of economic entities (corporations, profit centres, strategic business units, hospitals, universities); they also help construct the type of persons or identities that inhabit these entities' (Mennicken and Miller 2012, 8).

It is noted above that mathematics undoubtedly generate results. This is certainly true, and one could therefore assert that mathesis can even bring

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[126] It's worthy taking into account the development of the Husserlian philosophy. At the beginning of the 20th century, Husserl tried to match philosophy and science, but the result was a consciousness populated by cold data; the *lebenswelt* was the way by which experience and consciousness were linked again in a pre-logic field.

about results in the subject. In this case, one definitely positive aspect of mathesis about the subject can be highlighted. What would then be the danger of a process of subjectivation based upon pure mathesis? Foucault's response would be clear: even mathesis is a specific regime of truth, and as such it is never neutral. Mathesis conceals a very specific dimension of knowledge and, above all, of power. With its power to obtain results, mathesis arises as a functional, operational and useful regime of truth; as such, it comes to establish itself as the law. But, as Foucault says:

> The spiritual exercise on representations involves the free movement of representation and work on this free movement. Intellectual method will consist, rather, in providing ourselves with a voluntary and systematic definition of the law of succession of representations, and only accepting them in the mind if there is a sufficiently strong, constraining, and necessary link between them for us to be conveyed, logically, without doubt or hesitation, from the first to the second. The Cartesian progression belongs to the realm of intellectual method. (Foucault 2005, 293-294)

The one who practices mathesis as main process of subjectivation does nothing but comply with the law and then, with the *trenchant* formula indicated above, with the discourse of the master. Before the freedom offered by spirituality, which allows the subject to de-subjectify him/herself (and thus to escape dispositives to operate a conversion to others, and therefore in this conversion to find new spaces of freedom), *mathesis* is always a unifying and normalising discourse of the master

who arrogates the power of modernity, outside of which is the privation of sense. Foucault's entire genealogy, undertaken as a method to deconstruct the modern human being, has exactly this goal. Genealogy in this sense serves as a way to free historical knowledge from a unitary theoretical discourse (Foucault 2001, 167). The unitary discourse born with the Cartesian moment has founded the modern subject, subjected to the discourse of the master.

The genealogy of the discourse of the master has shown its historicity, in order to liberate and bring to light a different understanding of the human being (spirituality) that is opposed to this unitary knowledge. Again one could argue: what could the problem of a unitary knowledge be when it brings results? Foucault never tires of repeating that such a powerful regime of truth is inevitably bound with an equally dominant regime of power; and at the same time it excludes other regimes of truth, other possible processes of subjectivation.

In this respect, Foucault distinguishes at several points an important lexical difference between *savoir* and *connaissance* (Foucault 2001, 876). While *connaissance* (knowledge) is a method based on intellectual mathesis, *savoir* is the understanding of the one who is addicted to practices, and therefore exercises his/her freedom in the exercise of differentiating practices in front of the monolithic nature of the discourse of the master. Parrhesia is the main spiritual practice, because it allows

contrasting the regimes of truth generated by the lords of reality in the form of the discourse of the master.

The discourse of the master is fully operational in modernity. The second hermeneutics of the subject is nothing but the result of the contemporary discourse of the master. The account of oneself that digital machines return to the subject is essentially the algoritmisation of the discourse of the master through the form of the information systems of Big Data. In the following chapter, however, the discourse of the master will be situated within the process of digital accountability, in order to reveal the specificity of the new panopticon that everyone lives within nowadays.

5 The New Panopticon

As the first chapter has illustrated, social media statistics are so staggering that we can only fathom them through analogy. As stated by the founder and CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, on August 24, 2015 the platform had a billion active users on the same day for the first time in history (Oreskovic 2015). If Hegel considered newspapers to be the morning prayer of the 19th Century, Facebook seems to have taken up this role in the 21st. For most of the Western world, social media comprises a grounding element in the banality of everyday life. Within this context, banality is to be understood according to the meaning Nietzsche has ascribed to the term: that which is so ordinary that it is not immediately visible and thus remains concealed.

Social media intersects with the quantified self (QS), namely the subject who self-tracks all types of biological information, whether physiological, behavioural or environmental. But the QS is only an intermediate step in the construction of the future self. Kevin Kelly, a leading enthusiast of the contemporary digital world, defines the future self as follows: 'This future self is one that is spatially expanded, with a broad suite of exosenses—the exoself' (Swan 2013, 95). The notion of

exoself seems like a contemporary version of a McLuhanist intuition that

appeared nearly fifty years ago, in terms of reification of media as human

prosthetic apparatus, which has already had brilliant theoretical

developments.[127] However, it is the view and the application of the

exoself within the contemporary context that is relevant for our purposes

here, as reported in the following exhaustive citation:

> [The] self as a concept is a trope that has only arisen recently
> in the scope of human history, perhaps evolving in lockstep
> with the sizeable and complex cultures of modernity. The
> concept of the self continues to shift as individuals react to
> changes in culture and technology. QS activities are a new
> means of enabling the constant creation of the self. Further,
> there is now the notion of the extended connected self in the
> sense that individuals are projecting their data outward onto
> the world (e.g., mobile phones and other devices
> continuously pinging location and other data) while data from
> the world is projected back onto the individual (e.g., network
> nodes notice movement and communicate personalized
> information). Mobile phones, wearable computing, and other
> technology tools are tracking devices used both by humans
> and the ubiquitous data climate. Data quantification and self-
> tracking enable capabilities that are not possible with
> ordinary senses. (Swan 2013, 95)

On the side of social media, Mark Zuckerberg comments upon the one

billion users reached on August 24th 2015 thusly: 'a more open and

connected world is a better world. It brings stronger relationships with

those you love, a stronger economy with more opportunities, and a

stronger society that reflects all of our values' (Oreskovic 2015). Kevin

Kelly predicts a better future generated by subjects who donate their

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[127] For instance, Caronia 1996.

quantified self to networks. In both cases, whether social media or the quantified self, the contemporary subject pledges him/herself to the digital machine, in the form of numerical parameters, images, texts or any other form of expression.

Less enthusiastic about what is happening with respect to the two statements mentioned above, this dissertation offers a genealogical reconstruction of digital accountability, namely the process of subjectivation proper to contemporary subjects compelled to distribute themselves across networks. The purpose of this chapter is to show the power and pervasiveness of digital accountability, so as to delineate a new kind of society, defined the society of accountability, which includes and follows the societies of the past centuries, namely the disciplinary society and the society of control.

Accountability has been defined as the process of subjectivation that defines a subject in the moment that s/he is asked to give an account about him/herself and his/her actions. Then, broadening the sense of accountability, digital accountability has been defined as the process of subjectivation for which "having an account" and "giving an account" are two sides of the same coin. If within standard accountability a traditional system compels the subject to give an account, in digital accountability giving an account is strictly immanent to the process. In other words, when one opens an account and enters into a process of

digital accountability, there is an implicit acceptance that the process of accounting will take place. The account that one provides is in fact an account of the self, which preserves the original aspect of its origin in the world of *computare*, where the sense of order concerns both the experience made by the self and the world experienced.

At this point, the critical synthesis proposed here is based on the idea that digital accountability finds its genealogy in the historical confluence of two processes fundamental to the Western world: the discourse of the master and pastoral power.

As shown in the previous chapter, the discourse of the master is, according to Rovatti, 'built on the absolute priority of knowledge on practices' (Rovatti 2008, 217). Both terms are borrowed from the research Foucault advanced in the years preceding his death, and exposed in the courses he held at the Collége de France, particularly *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005). The French philosopher had identified in this course two specific processes of subjectivation that characterised the ancient Greek and Latin world: the *Gnothi seauton* (know yourself) and the *epimeleia heautou* (the care of the self). The contemporary Western world is grounded exclusively on the fundamental process of subjectivation of the gnothi seauton, at the expense of the care of the self. The Western subject is, first of all, asked to know.

The consequence of this approach to the truth, that modern and contemporary human beings have followed, is that the only real human being is the knowledgeable human being. And this single dimension—knowledge—contributes towards the establishment of the true human being. Knowledge is the only process of subjectivation that legitimises the human being. This approach erases practices, which by contrast do not give access to knowledge. And, in a different philosophical paradigm, Husserl came to the same conclusions. The man derived from the Cartesian moment is understandable only in his quantifiable and mathematical features. All human characteristics that are not classifiable according to this feature are not worthy of being taken into consideration. It follows that the relationship with others is delineated in purely abstract, quantifiable terms. In front of the other there is no longer a whole subject, but only the abstract quantified representation of it. A quantified self, who finds its legitimacy inasmuch quantified.

The discourse of the master, then, imposes this substantialised view of the subject, based on a "scientific" representation of the human insofar as he or she is quantifiable. This view postulates on one hand that quantification is the only system of truth possible in the current environment, with all the political and ethical issues that may result, and on the other hand, that the system of quantification constitutes the only epistemological background where both quantified self and social media can find a place. First of all, social media are forms of data mining aimed

at the generation of data subsequently stored in new computing systems, known today under the name Big Data. Through processes of statistical inference, the information that users post, tweet or upload is interpreted in order to identify behavioural patterns: patterns that are quantified and, consequently, more easily governable. Amazon, Google, Twitter, Facebook are primarily immense reservoirs of data, available to any search for any purpose.

Although the text has provided an epistemological framework for digital accountability by this point, a major issue nonetheless remains unresolved: why does the user of the digital machine voluntarily offer him/herself to be quantified, to become accountable. The answer proposed here is an alternative to the reconstruction of Butler's genesis of accounting (2005). Following Nietzsche, Butler builds the scene of address from the question: *Was it you?* It was shown here that the reconstruction of giving an account of the self Butler provides was not enough to argue the reasons for digital accountability, in which the subject gives an account of him/herself without the need of being pre-summoned, and that a change of the scene of address from which the accounting comes was needed. Therefore, according to the notion of pastoral power developed by Foucault, it is no longer a matter of an interrogator asking for an account in a legal or political framework, but rather that of a shepherd who asks a member of the flock: *Who are you?* The French writer presented the reconstruction of the accounting process

from the definition of pastoral power in his lecture *"Omnes et Singulatim": Toward a Critique of Political Reason* (in Foucault 2002b, 298-325), which legitimises contemporary practices of digital accountability operating in the epistemological context of the discourse of the master. The discourse Foucault provides about pastoral power moves from the analysis of the connection between the state and the individual in terms of power:

> I'd like to suggest in these two lectures the possibility of analyzing another kind of transformation in such power relationships. This transformation is, perhaps, less celebrated. But I think that it is also important, mainly for modern societies. Apparently, this evolution seems antagonistic to the evolution toward a centralized state. What I mean in fact is the development of power techniques oriented toward individuals and intended to rule them in a continuous and permanent way. If the state is the political form of a centralized and centralizing power, let us call pastorship the individualizing power. (Foucault 2002b, 300)

Foucault is interested in understanding how power can govern human beings as individuals, namely how a universal construction such as the power of the State can be allocated to each individual in its singularity. Since power is one side (the other is knowledge), always operating in the processes of subjectivation, the answer to this question (the connection between a universal power and its application to singularities) can shed light on the way in which power can govern singular entities, and, in doing so, can trigger specific governmental processes of subjectivation: *omnes et singulatim*, all together and singularly. In this sense, the

237

discovery of a universal power that works on singularities is the discovery of the individualising power, the specific power that produces individualities.

Pastoral power is this individualising power. It was unknown to the Greek and Latin world, and represents an innovation provided by Christianity. Foucault outlined the first feature of pastoral power as the necessity of the shepherd, the element that gives birth to the flock. While in the Greek world the lawgiver disappears after his political action, the presence of the shepherd must be constant and continuous for pastoral power to be exercised:

> what the shepherd gathers together is dispersed individuals. They gather together on hearing his voice: "I'll whistle and will gather them together." Conversely, the shepherd only has to disappear for the flock to be scattered. In other words, the shepherd's immediate presence and direct action cause the flock to exist. Once the good Greek lawgiver, like Solon, has resolved any conflicts, what he leaves behind him is a strong city with laws enabling it to endure without him. (302)

If the presence of the shepherd must endure, what is his mission? The mission of the shepherd is the salvation of the flock—a salvation, however, that is provided differently than in the Greek world. While the deity provides the conditions for the salvation of the population in the Greek world, the shepherd must take a continuous, daily care of the flock, which is not an abstract set of items, but rather a set of singular

individuals. Thus the shepherd has to take a singular, daily care of each

individual in order to save him/her.[128] As Foucault states:

> He pays attention to them all and scans each one of them.
> He's got to know his flock as a whole, and in detail. Not only
> must he know where good pastures are, the seasons' laws, and
> the order of things; he must also know each one's particular
> needs. (…) The shepherd's power implies individual attention
> paid to each member of the flock (302-303).

The specificity of the meaning of "paying attention" must be outlined.

How does the shepherd pay attention to and take care of each individual?

First of all, the shepherd should be able to give an account of each sheep,

of its actions, and what happens to it (308). But it is important to outline

again that this account is always singular, and it is based on a singular

knowledge of the singular sheep. Being the knowledge singular, it

follows that it individualises. Foucault says:

> Christian pastorship implies a peculiar type of knowledge
> between the pastor and each of his sheep. This knowledge is
> particular. It individualizes. It isn't enough to know the state
> of the flock. That of each sheep must also be known. The
> theme existed long before there was Christian pastorship, but

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[128] 'The shepherd's role is to ensure the salvation of his flock. The Greeks also that the
deity saved the city; they never stopped declaring that the competent leader is a
helmsman warding his ship away from the rocks. But the way the shepherd saves his
flock is quite different. It's not only a matter of saving them all, all together, when
danger comes nigh. It's a matter of constant, individualized, and final kindness.
Constant kindness, for the shepherd ensures his flock's food; every day he attends to
their thirst and hunger. The Greek god was asked to provide a fruitful land and abundant
crops. He wasn't asked to foster a flock day by day. And individualized kindness, too,
for the shepherd sees that all the sheep, each and every one of them, is fed and saved.
Later Hebrew literature, especially, laid the emphasis on such individually kindly
power: a rabbinical commentary on Exodus explains why Yahweh chose Moses to
shepherd his people: he had left his flock to go and search for one lost sheep. Last and
not least, it's final kindness. The shepherd has a target for his flock. It must either be led
to good grazing ground or brought back to the fold' (Foucault 2002b, 302).

it was considerably amplified in three different ways. The
shepherd must be informed as to the material needs of each
member of the flock and provide for them when necessary.
He must know what is going on, what each of them does—
his public sins. Last but not least, he must know what goes on
in the soul of each one, that is, his secret sins, and his
progress on the road to sanctity. (309-310)

Thus, in pastoral power, the power is exercised by the shepherd, who is
indispensable to the existence of the flock, which is never governed by
the shepherd as a whole because the shepherd knows each one of his
sheep. By knowing each one individually, the shepherd governs them by
a form of individualising power that is the trigger of specific processes of
subjectivation, by which each sheep is a member of the flock but, at the
same time, always a singular subject.[129]

The summary of pastoral power offered above could easily be swapped
with the fourth chapter, one need merely replace shepherd with digital
dispositive and flock with user. The digital dispositive does not quantify
the community of users as a whole, but on the contrary tries to generate
the most accurate profiling of the individual user. The individual user
must have his/her needs met in order to satisfy the need just-in-time,

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[129] Along the development of the lecture, Foucault illustrates the functioning of pastoral
power in modern States. He shows, for instance, how in some treatises of the 17th
century pastoral power assumes different names, maintaining its core regardless. For
instance, this is the definition of police in Turquet: 'The police includes everything. But
from an extremely particular point of view. Men and things are envisioned as to their
relationships: men's coexistence on a territory; their relationships as to property; what
they produce; what is exchanged on the market. It also considers how they live, the
diseases and accidents that can befall them. What the police sees to is a live, active,
productive man. Turquet employs a remarkable expression: "The police's true object is
man"' (319).

according to good post-Fordist practices. There are algorithms so sophisticated (those of the best e-commerce platforms, such as Amazon, eBay or Yoox) that they can provide suggestions for purchase that even activate a desire about which the user was not aware, but that becomes necessary and urgent at the moment the suggestion is displayed. Not only the user's physical location on the planet is known (which as seen above is called accountability of presence), but also what s/he eats, who s/he meets and politically supports, what kinds of books and music s/he prefers, and so on. The digital dispositive is able to process even a ghostly figure of the user, unknown to the user him/herself, which can be derived from processing identity logs the user generates on the Internet: an account that is sometimes out of step with the knowledge that the user has of him/herself, a user who tends to suppress most of his/her navigation in favour of what s/he considers important.

But framing the scene of address in pastoral power, and identifying in it the genesis of digital accountability, still does not explain the question of the user's engagement in digital accountability. In other words, the transition from the question of the pastoral power: *Who are you?* to the question rooted on the perfect engagement: *Who am I?* is still not clear. Echoing Foucault's reflections on the theme of confession, exposed here in the second chapter, it appears that the Christian in the moment of confession is subjected to a process of knowledge that led him to "tell-the-truth-of-him/herself". Which regime of truth is at work in this

context? Foucault's analysis of Christian confession has identified a Copernican revolution in the analysis of the relationship between subject and truth. The subject does not account truth in the confession, but rather s/he makes him/herself true. A similar process is present within the exercise of the pastoral power: 'In order to ensure this individual knowledge, Christianity appropriated two essential instruments at work in the Hellenistic world—self-examination and the guidance of conscience. It took them over, but not without altering them considerably' (310). However, Christian confession is an even more refined instrument as it makes the subject's opinion irrelevant. It is not the content of knowledge that becomes true; it is the Christian him/herself. As explained in the second chapter: it is not true what the Christian thinks; the Christian his or herself is true in the moment s/he speaks about him/herself in the moment of the confession.

This conclusion is a calibrated harmony between confession as a process of truth and subjectivity as the submission of the Christian subject to some type of governmentality. The consequence is *trenchant*: if the Christian subject is saved when s/he subjectifies in the process of subjectivation of confession, this moment is genealogically the emergence of the modern subject, who materialises him/herself in the regimes of truth imposed by governmentality. However, this emergency would be a classic Foucauldian analytical tool, independent of the case of confession, if within the confession an additional element is not found:

namely that the subject in the confession tells the truth of him/herself. The fundamental consequence of what has just been exposed is that the contemporary Western human being, genealogically Christian, is true when s/he qualifies, preaches, objectifies and accounts him/herself—when s/he says the truth into the governmental dispositives that repair Christian confession. In digital accountability the Christian confession finds its paroxysmal state, so that the necessity of the question: *Who are you?* no longer makes sense, having been replaced by a subject that is fully involved, committed and engaged in accounting him/herself as a form of self-fulfilment. *Who am I?* is the fundamental question of the subject quantified in networks, as he or she is devoted to digital accountability in order to fulfil the need to reiterate the truth about him/herself.

But what is the plan of salvation within which the subject establishes the truth of itself? Or, in other words, what is the scenario in which the subject finds the truth about itself? To answer these questions, one still has to resort to Foucault's *Discipline & Punish* (1995). Even in this case, in fact, the birth of disciplinary systems is the origin of the plan of contemporary salvation. The purpose of this research is to prove that the current plan of salvation is first quantifiable, but secondly it is argued that this quantification is not random but responds to a specific system of power-knowledge: the norm.

The power of the norm is illustrated in a chapter of *Discipline and Punish* entitled 'The means of correct training'. First, Foucault aims to explain that the norm does not reside in a legal system, but 'it enjoys a kind of judicial privilege with its own laws, its specific offences, its particular forms of judgement. The disciplines established an 'infra-penality'; they partitioned an area that the laws had left empty; they defined and repressed a mass of behaviour that the relative indifference of the great systems of punishment had allowed to escape' (177-178). Since the law and its punitive systems are not able to cover any kind of infraction and deviance, it becomes necessary in disciplinary systems that a further means of coercion act on the behaviours of each individual. So this further disciplinary device concerns behaviours, but without classifying them according to the guilty / not-guilty dichotomy, punishable / non-punishable. Rather, 'the definition of behaviour and performance on the basis of the two opposed values of good and evil; instead of the simple division of the prohibition, as practised in penal justice, we have a distribution between a positive pole and a negative pole; all behaviour falls in the field between good and bad marks, good and bad points' (180). Thus, in disciplinary systems human actions begin to be placed within immanent hierarchies, based on the Good / Evil axis. This apparatus of hierarchical classification, however, works differently from the legislative apparatus because it allows to place each behavior on a scale of values according to a progressive approach to Good rather than a

244

binary Right / Wrong binomial. In this way, all human behaviours firstly can be captured and framed accurately, secondly they can be placed on a hierarchical scale. As Foucault states, 'the perpetual penality that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes' (183).

A further element needs still to be explained. Disciplinary apparatuses are able to classify any human behaviour according to a scale of values. But how is this scale of values generated? It is based on the principle of the *standard*. Each disciplinary system requires a certain kind of performativity of behaviour, because this performativity represents the optimum, in terms of the Best for the discipline itself: a certain degree of physical training for the soldier, some degree of knowledge for the learner, some degree of healthiness for the population, so that the Army, the Education system, the State can perform at their best. The norm is the best standard for the health of the apparatus, and the health of the apparatus is, starting with disciplinary systems, the health of the individual, and vice versa. In the transition from the right to death to power over life, precisely the epochal shift of the eighteenth century (Foucault 1990a), 'the power of the Norm appears through the disciplines. (...) Like surveillance and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age' (Foucault 1995, 184). The norm thus establishes a principle of 'formal

equality' (184), which represents the optimisation of individuals with respect to the apparatus. All individual differences, which may constitute perturbations in the health of the apparatus, can be reset by the power of the norm, which makes behaviours homogeneous and makes them more easily governable. Through the complementary technique of examination, each individual is rendered a single, classified, and hence homogenised case. In other words, there exists the possibility for every individual to be *normalised*.[130]

The norm does not require a judicial apparatus to function because it is based on small constraints that lead the subject to the introjection of the norm itself. A certain level of health, of physical well-being, of wealth, of knowledge: it is not required by the legal system that the subject meets some standards in these activities. The individual itself, in order to become true in the apparatus, *internalises the norm*. The norm has the great power to engage every single individual, which, consequently, makes itself accountable in front of it. As highlighted by Sinclair, 'Personal accountability is fidelity to personal conscience in basic values such as respect for human dignity and acting in a manner that accepts

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[130] 'It is the examination which, by combining hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgement, assures the great disciplinary functions of distribution and classification, maximum extraction of forces and time, continuous genetic accumulation, optimum combination of aptitudes and, thereby, the fabrication of cellular, organic, genetic and combinatory individuality' (Foucault 1995, 192).

responsibility for affecting the lives of others. (…) Because it is enforced by psychological, rather than external, controls, personal accountability is regarded as particularly powerful and binding' (Sinclair 1995, 230).[131]

Resuming the above list of QS activities, it is clear how each of them can be subject to the power of the norm, so that the individual meets the standard required by the apparatus: how many miles or steps do we walk per day; how much physical activity we do; how many calories we consume each day, divided into carbs, fat, protein, specific ingredients; what emotions we daily express in each of our activities (and what the right mix of them is with respect to the performance goals required); a certain level of intelligence and / or knowledge and / or competence; the number and kind of people we aim to be surrounded by; the way we spend free time, etc. Each of these elements falls outside the power of the law, but within the power of the norm. In the list above, everyone can easily classify its behaviors and analyse the scales of values within which they are framed, and the origin of these scales of value.

But it is necessary to add to the power of the norm, the power of the panopticon gaze: 'the constant scrutiny of a Panoptic gaze which penetrates right to the very core of each member's subjectivity creates a climate where self-management is assured' (Sewell, Wilkinson 1993,

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[131] As Mulgan pointed out, the concept of responsibility also had the same trajectory from exteriority to interiority: 'After all, the term 'responsibility' itself has travelled a similar route from the external to the internal, from the capacity to 'respond' or answer to someone else, to the capacity to act freely and 'responsibly'' (Mulgan 2000, 561).

284). Digital accountability is morphing into a new form of panopticism, which determines a subject's visibility according to his or her quantifications on digital dispositives. This panopticon disciplines and governs the visibility of subjects according to their exposures on digital dispositives. While its essence (that digital accountability as a main process of subjectivation, derived from the merging of the discourse of the master with pastoral power and normalization) is brand new, some features can nevertheless be seen as a remediation of past issues, already present in previous panopticons, namely the ones of disciplinary societies and control societies. An outline of the analogies and discontinuities between different forms of panopticon will follow.

 All panopticons deal with individuals. Foucault already hints at this when he describes the first form of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*: 'The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities' (Foucault 1995, 201). Supervision and the processes of numeration keep individualities separated, the effect of which is the solitude of inmates, 'sequestered and observed' (201). While the dimension of observing singular individualities is definitely still at work in the contemporary panopticon, solitude is erased and transformed into the membership in a community by the effect of the pastoral power.

Like the original panopticon, the contemporary one also does not need

the one who exercises power to be a specific human being (as opposed to

the matter of sovereignty in absolute power). Foucault explains the

panopticon as follows:

> It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and
> disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much
> in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies,
> surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal
> mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are
> caught up. The ceremonies, the rituals, the marks by which
> the sovereign's surplus power was manifested are useless.
> There is a machinery that assures dissymmetry,
> disequilibrium, difference. Consequently, it does not matter
> who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at
> random, can operate the machine. (202)

The same way to exercise power is also retrieved in digital dispositives.

First of all, users basically deal with interfaces. But, secondly, the digital

machine conceals human beings exercising power behind algorithms.

Very few know, or can describe, who is behind the power exercised in

the digital world. Even though some founders of digital platforms have

reached the status of celebrities, the power that the user meets in his/her

daily practice is not the power of a specific person, but it is instead the

power of the platform, namely the power of the algorithm.

The first episode of the third season of the *Black Mirror* television series,

Nosedive (2016), is the perfect representation of this invisibility of the

panotical machine, in a world where every social interaction is subject to

immediate and normative appraisal by the environment. Each individual

249

corresponds to a scale of values ranging from one to five stars. The average of the received ratings continuously returns a value that defines every person in society, in his economic possibilities, in accessing essential services (health system, but not only) and so forth. On the one hand, the machine that generates algorithms that handle Lacie's life is completely invisible, and it is manifested only through an application of Lacie's smartphone (the invisible feature of the digital panopticon: what is the materiality of the Silicon Big Company Valley?). Already Zuboff had noticed this aspect of the new informatic panopticon: 'The counterpart of the central power is a video screen' (Zuboff 1989, 322). On the other hand, Lacie is perfectly accountable from the digital point of view: she does not question the master's speech, which judges and categorises every action of her life; she is led by the digital shepherd; she obsessively tries to respect the norm (a numeric threshold established by the system, which allows her access to higher social status communities and more qualified services). At the same time, the episode brutally reveals the inclusion and exclusion mechanisms of digital accountability, to the point that the protagonist is excluded from the marriage of her best friend due to her low social score.

And, like the former panopticon, the contemporary one is characterised by efficiency and scalability. Foucault observed about the panopticon: 'In each of its applications, it makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power. It does this in several ways: because it can reduce the number of

those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on whom it is

exercised' (206). The same feature can be identified in the contemporary

panopticon: a project designed to be efficient (some huge platforms can

be managed by very few people) and scalable (the power of the hardware

is the only limit for the inclusion of new members, which can be

constantly increased). If the amount of users in the major social networks

is well known, the efficiency and scalability of the platform allow the

inclusion of as many people as possible not only in social media. At the

government level, it is meant to point out, for example, the Unique ID of

India. India is the most populous world democracy, with about one

billion and two hundred million people. One of the country's constant

problems is the census, so that the actual population is always under

control and numbered. That is why the Indian government is

implementing the largest biometric project ever existed: the Unique

ID.[132] It consists of a set of biometric data, starting from the fingerprint,

which allows to register each individual in order to better govern it, even

in basic services (for instance, distribution of food to less wealthy

individuals). This digital identification program, which has raised many

discussions, is possible because of the efficient and scalable features of

digital panopticon.

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[132] See http://www.wsj.com/video/can-technology-solve-india-biggest-

problem/80D7413C-3EE3-49FA-A921-29DD1A1A3E1A.html?mod=e2twi.

Additionally, as Foucault keenly observes about the panopticon of the disciplinary societies: 'it is possible to intervene at any moment and because the constant pressure acts even before the offences, mistakes or crimes have been committed' (206). The digital panopticon has refined this feature. It is not matter of precognition, like in some sci-fi productions. The digital dispositive is able to provide a sophisticated analysis of users' behaviours in order to create behavioural patterns close to the profile of the specific individual. What in *Minority Report* still seemed to be science fiction, it actually has a widespread application today. There are numerous software (Risk Terrain Modeling,[133] HunchLab,[134] PredPol,[135] the Italian Keycrime[136] for example) that support police in identifying geographic areas, communities, and - in some cases - the most potential criminal individuals. These software work according to a reductionist principle, namely an algorithm that classifies communities as risky, basing its induction on past delinquency presence. This creates a spiral, so that it identifies crime where crime already exists. However, it is useful to point out that these software actually work, and have led to the reduction of crime in the areas where

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[133] http://www.riskterrainmodeling.com/.

[134] https://www.hunchlab.com/.

[135] http://www.predpol.com/.

[136] http://www.keycrime.com/en/.

they were adopted through the work of risk management (discipline from which the predictable police genealogically derives).

Thus, the suggestion advanced by the digital machine is so accurate that it seems to be delivering a message from the future, while it is simply the effect of a statistical inference. The user has this kind of feeling when Amazon suggests a book that the user includes in his/her wish list, or when Facebook suggests a friend from the past. The algorithm's effectiveness is understood here as a kind of precognition. The contemporary panopticon remediates an allure of immateriality, of ethereality. Foucault states: 'in these conditions, its strength is that it never intervenes, it is exercised spontaneously and without noise, it constitutes a mechanism whose effects follow from one another. Because, without any physical instrument other than architecture and geometry, it acts directly on individuals; it gives 'power of mind over mind' (206)

The essence of the panopticon is that its hardware, and the staging of it, must be reduced to the minimum. The presumed virtuality of the contemporary panopticon has reached the limit of its immateriality, opening the door to some reflections about the connection between the absence of hardware and digital dispositives. In this sense, the power of mind over mind is brought to its paroxysm, for which the concealment of the hardware is directly proportional to the amount of power.

253

The influence of the disciplinary society is also felt in the panopticon's design, which must be rapid and effective:

> There are two images, then, of discipline. At one extreme, the discipline-blockade, the enclosed institution, established on the edges of society, turned inwards towards negative functions: arresting evil, breaking communications, suspending time. At the other extreme, with panopticism, is the discipline-mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come. (209)

Rapidity and effectiveness of dispositives, among which the panopticon can be considered, are not qualities of a good design. As brilliantly guessed by Foucault, they are ways by which the exercise of power is improved. The qualities of digital dispositives—a rapid response time, for instance, in order to provide a good user experience—function to improve the exercise of power. The better the user experience, the greater the chance of the digital dispositives' success in subjugating the user. Yet the panopticon was the essence of disciplinary societies. How can we then find the connection between the new panopticon and the above-defined society of accountability? In the following quote about disciplinary societies at least two key elements can be found to define this connection:

> they were expected to neutralize dangers, to fix useless or disturbed populations, to avoid the inconveniences of over-large assemblies; now they were being asked to play a positive role, for they were becoming able to do so, to increase the possible utility of individuals.

> (…) the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted. Sometimes the closed apparatuses add to their internal and specific function a role of external surveillance, developing around themselves a whole margin of lateral controls. (210–213)

First of all, the panopticon aims to increase the utility of individuals. The same feeling is found even in the contemporary panopticon, where digital dispositives seem, at least, to be functional to the satisfaction of the users' needs. Secondly, methods of control are immanent to digital dispositives, in a way that can continuously be adapted to the emergencies coming from the environment. All these features make the panopticon assure, eventually, 'an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations' (216), where "infinitesimal" can assume the meaning, in the contemporary world, of infinitely quantifiable.

What is happening in China is significant to the purpose. According to the Financial Times (Clover 2016) and the Wall Street Journal (Chin, Wong 2016), the Chinese government is working on the first governmental project based on the principle of creditworthiness not only as a financial factor but also as a social factor. Creditworthiness is, in fact, born within the financial field, in order to measure the ability of a person or institution to repay a debt. The Fair Isaac Corporation[137] created an algorithm to measure the creditworthiness of each individual

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[137] http://www.fico.com/.

or institution: the FICO index, now adopted globally. In simple terms, the FICO measures the possibility that an individual has to return the money that is lent to him. Born as a financial concept, it seems that the Chinese government intends to extend it to the social sphere and to include social parameters, to give birth to the *social credit score*. The social credit score will consist of a single number determined by a series of algorithms that will restore the individual's social reliability. Not only financial solvency, but also a series of other behaviors (small offenses, fines, family location for example) are included in the system, in order to classify each citizen with a single rating of *good citizenship*. And, like in the Black Mirror episode cited above, each citizen's score will mean access to certain services of more or less poor quality: education, health, employment (to name a few). From the point of view of the individual, s/he must always be accountable to his actions in front of the governmental system. Again, even in this case there is a regulatory and non-legal based response to political issues; and it is no coincidence that it happens in a country - China - that for cultural issues has received, through Marx and Mao, the rationalist spirit of government: 'On the one side, exercising accountability therefore involves elements of monitoring and oversight. Its mission includes finding facts and generating evidence. On the other side, the norm of accountability continues the Enlightment's project of subjecting power not only to the rule of law but also to the rule of reason.

Power should be bound by legal constraints but also by the logic of the public reasoning' (Schedler 1999, 15).

At the end of this parallel between the panopticon of the disciplinary societies and the panopticon generated by the digital accountability, despite all the possible and historically necessary divergences, one may subscribe to what Foucault summarised about the disciplines:

> the peculiarity of the disciplines is that they try to define in relation to the multiplicities a tactics of power that fulfils three criteria: firstly, to obtain the exercise of power at the lowest possible cost (economically, by the low expenditure it involves; politically, by its discretion, its low exteriorization, its relative invisibility, the little resistance it arouses); secondly, to bring the effects of this social power to their maximum intensity and to extend them as far as possible, without either failure or interval; thirdly, to link this "economic" growth of power with the output of the apparatuses (educational, military, industrial or medical) within which it is exercised; in short, to increase both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system.
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> (…) what was new, in the eighteenth century, was that, by being combined and generalized, they attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process. At this point, the disciplines crossed the "technological" threshold. First the hospital, then the school, then, later, the workshop were not simply "reordered" by the disciplines; they became, thanks to them, apparatuses such that any mechanism of objectification could be used in them as an instrument of subjection, and any growth of power could give rise in them to possible branches of knowledge; it was this link, proper to the technological systems, that made possible within the disciplinary element the formation of clinical medicine, psychiatry, child psychology, educational psychology, the rationalization of labour. It is a double process, then: an epistemological "thaw" through a refinement of power relations; a multiplication of the effects of power through the

formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge.
(218-224)

Despite any arguments about the fracture between disciplinary societies

and contemporary societies, the new panopticon of the digital

accountability is, for all intents and purposes, a disciplinary system.

But Gilles Deleuze in a dense text first published in 1992, *Postscript on*

the Societies of Control, outlines in the notion of control a possible

prosecution of disciplinary societies:

> We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the
> environments of enclosure—prison, hospital, factory, school,
> family. The family is an "interior," in crisis like all other
> interiors—scholarly, professional, etc. The administrations in
> charge never cease announcing supposedly necessary
> reforms: to reform schools, to reform industries, hospitals, the
> armed forces, prisons. But everyone knows that these
> institutions are finished, whatever the length of their
> expiration periods. It's only a matter of administering their
> last rites and of keeping people employed until the
> installation of the new forces knocking at the door. These are
> the societies of control, which are in the process of replacing
> disciplinary societies. "Control" is the name Burroughs
> proposes as a term for the new monster, one that Foucault
> recognizes as our immediate future. (Deleuze 1992, 4)

As stated by Barbrook, 'Gilles Deleuze – a veteran New Left philosopher

– warned that new information technologies were providing the

surveillance and monitoring infrastructure of the emerging authoritarian

'society of control'. Instead of emancipating the masses, the advent of the

Net threatened to reinforce the power of their oppressors' (2007, 271).

While the difference between discipline and control is still a matter for a debate that there is no intention to delve into here,[138] some issues raised by Deleuze deserve further explication. First of all, Deleuze identifies a difference between disciplines and control: while disciplines are distinct[139] and analogical, control is based on numerical modulation ('the different control mechanisms are inseparable variations, forming a system of variable geometry the language of which is numerical (which doesn't necessarily mean binary)' (4). While an analysis of the notion of modulation would fall outside of the purview of this dissertation, Deleuze surely was able to recognise one of the main features of the development of disciplines nearly twenty years ago: numerability, which found a definite explosion with digital technologies.[140] Another one of Deleuze's arguments is linked to digital technologies:

> In the societies of control, on the other hand, what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a "password" (…). The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become "dividuals," and masses, samples, data, markets, or "banks." (5)

[138] Deleuze himself, while writing this text in 1992, underscored the possibility that societies of control were the following stage of disciplinary societies. This dissertation takes analogies between the two paradigms into account more than differences.

[139] 'In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything—the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation' (4).

[140] It is worth pointing out that Gilles Deleuze, though he died in 1995, was able to see and use one of the first consumer network infrastructures: French Minitel, developed in 1982 by the French telecommunications ministry.

In the societies of accountability, *the password has become the account*, which is not only a login procedure but also a profile, rich with information. Being denied access to information is no longer a common practice, since more accounts are provided in digital accountability. The more accounts are provided, the more subjects can be governed. Out of the dialectics individual/dividual, it is certain that the subject is reduced to data. Therefore, Deleuze has been able to detect some signs of development within disciplinary societies that, independently from the label of control, are surely manifest in the society of accountability, sometimes on a paradoxical level.[141] But in the societies of accountability the numerical language is not only a tool for accessing information and for being controlled, but also *the digital extension through which the subject is normalised, guided, interrogated: in other words, governed*.

At this time, the account that is perhaps closer to a total governmentality does not come from the Western world but from China, which should be viewed as the new digital frontier. This is WeChat,[142] that in 2016 was numbered around one billion accounts. WeChat, developed by the big digital Chinese player Tencent,[143] is an application of instant messaging

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[141] 'Accountability is sometimes taken to be more than just a mechanism of control; it becomes identified with control itself' (Mulgan 2000, 563).

[142] http://www.wechat.com.

[143] https://www.tencent.com/en-us/index.html.

that includes several other functions, which made it to become the more complex digital account ever existed:

- Messaging: text, voice, one-to-many (like Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger);

- One-to-one sharing: photos, videos, locations (like Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger);

- Conferencing and streaming (like Skype, Whatsapp, Facebook live, Periscope);

- Official accounting, in order to gather and push followers (like Facebook);

- Social feeding: texts, images, comments, music, links (like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter);

- Mobile paying and sending money, through a digital wallet that interacts with QRcodes (like a credit cards, Paypal, Amazon, but with more features);

- Booking: hotels, transportations, appointments (like Booking, but with more features);

- Reading QRcodes, so to get more information from digital or physical tags;

- Finding entities in the physical surroundings, like friends or shops (like Tinder, Foursquare, Aroundme)

- Researching (like Google);

- Digital marketing (like Google, Facebook).

It has been calculated that 90 minutes a day are spent on WeChat by each user.[144] It is worth underlining two more aspects of this account: The first is that it is controlled by the censorship of the Chinese government, even in non-Chinese accounts, as the servers are located in China. The second aspect is that, in 2017, the WeChat Index has been launched. It measures the popularity of an account on a timeframe from 7 to 90 days. The Index includes data such as sharing, likes received, views, and readings. As far as it can be reported when writing this research, WeChat is the tool closest to the unique account ever designed.

In conclusion, the new panopticon is a new development of the previous one. In the society of accountability fear, which was the main engine of the Orwellian Big Brother, has disappeared, and has instead been replaced by a insidious form of happiness: 'At the root of each apparatus lies an all-too-human desire for happiness. The capture and subjectification of this desire in a separate sphere constitutes the specific

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[144] All information about WeChat is from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WeChat.

power of the apparatus' (Agamben 2009, 8). The fundamental aesthetic tune is the Kunderian second tear, namely: Kitsch (Kundera 1999).

In a contemporary world in which visibility has become data itself, Foucault's lessons about practices should not go forgotten if TruYou (Eggers 2013) one day appears on the horizon of world life.

The digitally accountable human being is thus the one who follows the disciplined human being and the controlled human being. This shift is not a change of paradigm, but provides another layer to describe the superimposition of the disciplinary paradigm and the paradigm of control. The advent of digital dispositives is the necessary moment for the birth of this new paradigm. Its essence is digital accountability, a specific process of subjectivation that finds its dimension of knowledge in the discourse of the master and its dimension of power in the pastoral power and the power of the norm. Contemporary wo/men operate within the society of accountability.

As Frederic Gros brilliantly summarises, the practices of the self 'are programs as stylisation of existence that only make sense within the horizon of freedom: a freedom, however, that is not understood as a fundamental nature but as a game of differentiating practices' (Gros 2008, 298). If anonymity and anomie are human limit-conditions, involving radical and schizoid de-subjectivations, a free play of accountability seems now to be the only feasible way to an exercise of

freedom, so that the modern human being does not remain a prisoner of itself.

6 Conclusion: Playing Accountability

The critique advanced in this dissertation requires that one take a stance regarding his or her presence on digital media. The basis of individual freedom in this regard lies in a paradoxical relationship with visibility. One can choose to be visible or invisible, accountable or silent. One can satisfy the desire for appearance or exercise the practice of the disappearance (Rovatti 2010, 158). An individual's freedom thus finds the conditions of its possibility in-between these two polarities. Furthermore, these two polarities mirror another dichotomy: the common impulse of digital media users towards visibility as opposed to a critique that encourages silence and invisibility. But, as Rovatti keenly observes:

> it is easy to ascertain that the paradox is reproduced when we acknowledge that we are all within this dispositive of power (and of "subjectivation"), that no lines of escape exist really immune of it, and that a praise of the unappearance, of the "pure" unappearance, is not a realistic strategy, namely it is not reachable in our standard life style. (158 [my translation])

On the contrary, a strategy of invisibility on social media is perhaps harmful, because it places the subject outside of common daily practices and, in doing so, outside of history.[145]

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[145] For the same reason—the distance with the ordinary life—the powerful, wide and radical theorisation of the Body without Organs (BwO), proposed by Antonin Artaud (1975) and theorized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), has not been taken into account here. The French authors have defined the BwO as follows: 'At any rate, you have one

Even the notion of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (Bey 1991) is useless, as it is a utopian, outlandish absolute-Outside, very far from the standard contemporary human condition. The T.A.Z. would operate like a dispositive that allows the re-territorialisation of any kind of possible life that a subject might have, *par essence* ek-static. But the dispositive— the notion upon which this dissertation is grounded—cannot be a T.A.Z. as it is exactly the opposite: a formation of knowledge-power that triggers specific processes of subjectivation. The position (*setzung*) of the dispositive denies the possibility of the T.A.Z'S existence, and vice versa. When the subject is placed in a T.A.Z., s/he is consequently asked to design his/her diagrams as strategies of existence. The subject must re-territorialise him/herself and his/her own environment while being

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(or several). It's not so much that it pre-exists or comes ready-made, although in certain respects it is pre-existent. At any rate, you make one, you can't desire without making one. And it awaits you; it is an inevitable exercise or experimentation, already accomplished the moment you undertake it, unaccomplished as long as you don't. This is not reassuring, because you can botch it. Or it can be terrifying, and lead you to your death. It is nondesire as well as desire. It is not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices. You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, and it is a limit. [...] The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and signifiances and subjectifications as a whole (151). Secondly, while this dissertation is grounded on the notion of the self, the BwO is the radical removal of any hypothesis of foundation of the subject on the notion of self: 'The field of immanence is not internal to the self, but neither does it come from an external self or a nonself. Rather, it is like the absolute Outside that knows no Selves because interior and exterior are equally a part of the immanence in which they have fused' (156). Thirdly, this dissertation is an investigation about processes of subjectivation, while the BwO is the radical de-subjectivation that eradicates the self inasmuch self: 'To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes disarticulation (or n articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, experimentation as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never interpret!), and nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification)' (160). Lastly, the practice of the BwO has been understood has harmful by the same authors: 'if in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from significance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death (160).

removed from the historical time and separated from all remaining processes of subjectivation. Again, one finds a subjective existence that has lost any possible link with ordinary daily life.

But at the same time, the critique advanced in the present dissertation has outlined that a real practice of freedom on digital media is difficult to say the least. The discourse of the master has been demonstrated to securely govern contemporary subjects, having found a powerful tactical instrument in digital media: a subject whose desire has been quantified, whose autobiography is fragmented in sterile digital items and who is alienated from the other through his/her computerised representation. Thus, in order to provide a conclusion to the discourse about freedom within—and not outside of—contemporary digital dispositives, the proposal advanced begins first faces the notion of entropy,[146] which should be verified as the epistemological ground for the ethical practices of existence.

Vilèm Flusser's notion of the technical image, which he advances in his text *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (2011), provides the first step for the analysis of the notion of entropy. [147] In introducing the notion of technical image, Flusser proposes a taxonomy of them:

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[146] A short definition of entropy is provided by Prigogine and Stengers: 'the entropy law describes (…) the evolution toward a "disorder," toward the most probable state' (Progogine and Stengers 1984, 19).

[147] One can find similar arguments in the text that Flusser dedicated to photography: *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (2006).

> This essay is about the universe of technical images, the universe that for the past few decades has been making use of photographs, films, videos, television screens, and computer terminals to take over the task formerly served by linear texts, that is, the task of transmitting information crucial to society and to individuals. (5)

And, soon after, a more theoretical definition of the notion is

provided:

> technical images rely on texts from which they have come and, in fact, are not surfaces but mosaics assembled from particles. They are therefore not prehistoric, two-dimensional structures but rather posthistorical, without dimension. We are not turning back to a two-dimensional prehistory but rather emerging into a posthistorical, dimensionless state. (6)

Flusser consequently deduces that, unlike traditional images, technical

images do not represent a state of things, but are instead representation of

concepts. Technical images are created by techno codes, which allow the

transformation of concepts into images. The photographer, for instance,

does not reproduce a state of things, but s/he represents the concepts

related to what makes signification for the state of things. And the

concepts themselves are not completely free, in the sense of the free

choice of the photographer. The photographer is asked to select a

concept, appropriate for that specific state of thing, but only from a

limited set of concepts: the ones that the photographic "apparatus" (as

Flusser names it) allows to exist. Flusser states: 'if we look more closely,

we can confirm that the photographic gesture, in fact, does somehow

carry out the apparatus's inner instructions. The apparatus does as the

photographer desires, but the photographer can only desire what the

apparatus can do' (20).[148] McLuhan had already demonstrated that the

medium is the condition of possibility for the existence of any

expression, and the limit of the medium is the limit of the expression.[149]

Flusser's discourse is consistent with this McLuhanian assumption, yet

he goes further insofar as he has been able to connect the apparatus (a

more powerful notion than medium) with its specific epistemological

background. Media apparatuses produce technical images, but are

themselves the result of the application of some scientific knowledge. It

results that the photograph a photographer takes here and now is the

effect of a media apparatus that is the effect of a scientific knowledge.

Flusser advances a strong theoretical assumption: namely, that the world

of technical images (whose boundaries can be extended to any digital

production) is subjugated by a hidden level of power-knowledge,

constituted by the scientific knowledge through which the technical

apparatus is built. Even if Flusser did not apply this terminology, one can

nonetheless see the discourse of the master at work, which exerts a

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[148] The connection between desire and apparatus is clarified very precisely in a
following paragraph: 'human freedom no longer consists in being able to shape the
world to one's own desires (apparatuses do this better) but to instruct (program) the
apparatus as to the desired form and to stop (control) it when this form has been
produced.' (73)

[149] Aesthetics of communication aims to explore this link. See, for instance, the work of
Mario Costa *L' estetica della comunicazione. Come il medium ha polverizzato il
messaggio. Sull'uso estetico della simultaneità a distanza* (1999).

powerful and effective influence in creating the conditions of possibility for technical images.

But Flusser's discourse is not limited to grounding a hidden political and epistemological layer of the production of technical images. Flusser makes an impressive conceptual effort to situate the production of technical images within the context of evolution, thus he also takes notions like probability, information and entropy into account. The first connection regards probability and information:

> '"Probable" and "improbable" are concepts from informatics, in which information can be defined as an improbable situation: the more improbable, the more informative. The second law of thermodynamics suggests that the emerging particle universe tends toward an increasingly probable situation, toward disinformation, that is, to a steadily more even distribution of particles, until form is finally lost altogether.' (17)

If information is linked to improbability, it follows that what is not informative is more probable. The second law of thermodynamics is entropy, for which everything in the universe is destined to lack form and information (disinformation). Following the law of entropy, disinformation is the more probable state of the universe. Flusser is able to situate apparatuses in this scenario, which he claims aim to generate improbable situations. He adds one more element to the dichotomy of improbable/information versus probable/disinformation: visibility. While the probable, characterised by invisibility, tends towards the absence of

form, the improbable (whose informative content is higher) is defined by

its visibility. It follows that:

> image-making mechanisms were invented, namely, to
> produce improbable, informative situations to consolidate
> invisible possibilities into visible improbabilities.[…] The
> apparatus is programmed to generate improbable situations.
> This means that such improbable situations are in their
> programs and do not arise as errors, as in the program of the
> universe, but as situations that are deliberately sought, that
> become more probable as the program runs. (18)

But Flusser himself reveals that every apparatus is linked to another

apparatus, with a progressive *mise en abyme*:

> Around these transmission points sit functionaries who press
> the keys of apparatuses, especially those that compute
> images. For these images model the behavior, perception, and
> experience of all other functionaries. The functionaries
> instruct the images about how the images should instruct the
> receivers. The apparatuses instruct the functionaries how they
> are to instruct the images. And other apparatuses instruct
> these apparatuses about how the functionaries are to instruct.
> Throughout this seeming and self-obscuring hierarchy of
> instruction, one senses a general entropic tendency toward a
> global metaprogram, and no one and nothing other than this
> implacable self-determination is behind it all. (75)

Thus, at the end of the relationship between human beings and

technical apparatuses one finds the entropy of the metaprogram.

Entropy is to be understood in its physical meaning: a global state of

indifferentiation ruled by the probable. As entropy increases,

everything in the universe naturally tends to deteriorate and loses its

specific difference from its surroundings. Things move from the

least to the most probable state, from a state of organisation and

differentiation in which distinctions and forms exist, to a state of

chaos and sameness. If this discourse is translated into the dialectics

of the Same and the Other, entropy should be understood as the

dominion of the Same over the Other. This argument seems to run

counter to the common thinking about human production, which

aims to produce novelties. Flusser takes this possible objection into

account:

> But it is human to oppose entropy. This is why humans
> produced the apparatus in the first place: to produce
> improbable situations. They lost control of the apparatus, and
> now it produces the probable automatically. And so the
> question is, can they regain control and so achieve the opposite
> of the probable, the opposite of a totalitarian apparatus? (76)

A physician could answer that, even if entropy is unavoidable in closed

systems, entropy is nonetheless not inevitable in presence of external

sources of information or energy. It can even decrease in open systems.

The opposite of entropy is negentropy, namely negative entropy. It

designates the temporary reversal of the process of entropy, which occurs

when differentiated structures and systems emerge in the midst of

disorder. In this regard, Prigogine and Stengers (1984) define the relation

between entropy and information, or between information theory and

thermodynamics, as ambiguous.[150] They label the islands of negentropy

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[150] The whole text *Order Out of Chaos* is devoted to clarify the notion of entropy under
several issues, where the ignorance of the observer plays a relevant role: 'There should

that form in the river of time 'dissipative structures', which relate to a form of super molecular organisation (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984, 143). These structures work against entropy, in the sense that they work against its tendency towards dissipation. They are, in a certain way, forms of organisation that arise in a macroscopic scale in systems far from the equilibrium. Dissipative structures "fight" against entropy and, in so doing, enable the appearance of novelties in a world moving towards indifferentiation due to the work of entropy. Prigonine defines the moment in which novelty appears as bifurcation, which warrants the existence of a future:

> Nature's form of choice is what I call bifurcation. In complex natural systems, just as in society, the future is not given. Within bounds, it can go this way or that. Events in nature correspond to novelties that we find at all levels, from cosmology to microbiology. We may thus speak of the creativity of nature. (Prigogine 2004)

Prigogine expresses the conviction that information technology has brought contemporary human beings to a significant historical moment of bifurcation. This bifurcation results from a new, specific assembly of the human condition that we call the networked society. Prigogine asks himself: 'Will the networked society act more like large ant colonies or a civilization of free people?' (Prigogine 2004). But individual choices

exist only irreversible processes. This is the stumbling block for all universal interpretations of entropy that concentrate on our ignorance of initial (or boundary) conditions. Irreversibility is not a universal property' (239).

nonetheless play a role in this scenario, so one need not necessarily be

pessimistic. Even in the networked society,

> the future is not given. Especially in this time of globalization
> and the network revolution, behavior at the individual level
> will be the key factor in shaping the evolution of the entire
> human species. Just as one particle can alter macroscopic
> organisation in nature, so the role of individuals is more
> important now than ever in society. (2004)

Prigogine and Stengers warn of the risk of linking entropy to the human

condition,[151] yet a provisional summary about the insertion of the notion

of entropy in this dissertation shall still be provided. Entropy has been

defined thus far as the irreversible evolutionary tension towards a

probable and undifferentiated state. Furthermore, Flusser has suggested

that contemporary technical apparatuses favour entropy, instead of

fighting it. Translating this discourse in Foucauldian terms: contemporary

digital dispositives trigger processes of subjectivation that lead the

subject to the undifferentiated. Entropy would result from the basis of

contemporary processes of subjectivation, which aim to reduce the

subject to the Same instead of giving the subject the possibility of the

exploration of the Other. Thus the digital world's processes of

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[151] 'It is not surprising that the entropy metaphor has tempted a number of writers dealing with social or economic problems. Obviously here we have to be careful; human beings are not dynamic objects, and the transition to thermodynamics cannot be formulated as a selection principle maintained by dynamics. On the human level irreversibility is a more fundamental concept, which is for us inseparable from the meaning of our existence. Still it is essential that in this perspective we no longer see the internal feeling of irreversibility as a subjective impression that alienates us from the outside world, but as marking our participation in a world dominated by an evolutionary paradigm' (1984, 298).

subjectivation may likely lead to holding individual subjects to a common standard, that would have—according to Flusser—a totalitarian flavour. Consequently, the only strategy the subject has left at its disposal in order to escape processes of subjectivation—which aim to reduce the subject to an identitary model—is a constant fight against the Same.

First, the cybernetic model is taken into account. Niklas Luhmann states: 'For an observer, a system is entropic if information about one element does not permit inferences about others' (Luhmann 1995, 50). This definition works within closed self-referential systems. In fact

> as an evolutionary universal, meaning finally corresponds to the hypothesis of the closure of self-referential system formations. The closure of the self-referential order is synonymous here with the infinite openness of the world. This openness is constituted through the self-referentiality of meaning and is continuously reactualized by it. Meaning always refers to meaning and never reaches out of itself for something else. Systems bound to meaning can therefore never experience or act in a manner that is free from meaning. They can never break open the reference from meaning to meaning in which they themselves are inescapably implicated. (63)

But even self-referential systems are just a contemporary version of the discourse of the master. In the above-mentioned quotation, "master" should be read instead of "observer". It results that entropy appears in the discourse of the master at the moment that new information cannot be linked to any precedent information. At this epistemological level, the digital dispositive is a self-referential system, able to reduce the infinite

openness of the world to the same meanings. Given this, the subject can assume any ethical position against an informational background because every practice of freedom is included in the system from the very beginning.[152] The fight against the Same cannot be played in a cybernetic system, and thus other battlefields must be sought.

The first figure of the Same taken into account here is being-in-fashion. In order to understand the meaning of the being-in-fashion, one should first consider the second Untimely Meditation written by Friedrich Nietzsche in 1874, titled *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life* (Nietzsche 1997, 57-124). At the beginning of the Meditation, Nietzsche states:

> This meditation too is untimely, because I am here attempting to look afresh at something of which our time is rightly proud—its cultivation of history—as being injurious to it, a defect and deficiency in it; because I believe, indeed, that we are all suffering from a consuming fever of history and ought at least to recognize that we are suffering from it. (60)

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[152] Deleuze keenly proved the connection between information and control: 'What is information? It is not very complicated, everyone knows what it is. Information is a set of imperatives, slogans, directions—order-words. When you are informed, you are told what you are supposed to believe. In other words, informing means circulating an order-word. [...] We are not asked to believe but to behave as if we did. That is information, communication. And outside these orders and their transmission, there is no information, no communication. This is the same thing as saying that information is exactly the system of control.' (Deleuze 1998, 320-321)

Untimeliness is thus a disconnection from the present time. In his short and dense text *What is the Contemporary?* (2006, 39-54), Agamben comments upon the above mentioned quote from Nietzsche as follows:

> Nietzsche situates his own claim for "relevance" […], his "contemporariness" with respect to the present in a disconnection and out-of-jointness. Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant. (40)

What is timely is relevant, and what is untimely is irrelevant. But Nietzsche locates his contemporariness in his being untimely. How can this overturning occur? How can the subject be untimely and contemporary at the same time? Agamben provides a provisional answer: 'precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time' (40). The subject who is untimely to his/herself and to his/her contemporary world is the only one who can perceive his/her own time. So a contemporariness grounded on an untimely position is a point of view that offers a real comprehension of the world. The complete definition of contemporariness provided by Agamben sheds more light on this specific condition:

> Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism. Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not

277

contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it. (41)

A subject who is too deeply immersed in his/her time is not able to "see" it, inasmuch s/he is immersed in it. Only the one who is able to observe his/her time from the outside is the one entitled to be contemporary. Contemporariness is grounded on a distance between the subject and his/her time. This is not a subject who takes shelter in another epoch, but conversely a subject who is able to live his/her time, but from the outside. Agamben proposes a second description for this condition: 'The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness' (44). Thus, the subject has firstly to position him/herself out of the world in which s/he lives; secondly, s/he is required to observe, from this point of view, the darkness of his/her era. The analogy between visibility and lights of the century on the one hand, and darkness and obscurity of the other hand, is quite clear. Nevertheless, Agamben is aware of the extreme metaphoricity of his discourse, thus he feels the urge to explain his conception of darkness:

> Why should we be at all interested in perceiving the obscurity that emanates from the epoch? Is darkness not precisely an anonymous experience that is by definition impenetrable; something that is not directed at us and thus cannot concern us? On the contrary, the contemporary is the person who perceives the darkness of his time as something that concerns him, as something that never ceases to engage him. Darkness is something that—more than any light—turns directly and

278

singularly toward him. The contemporary is the one whose
eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his
own time. (45)

Contemporariness is an ethical issue, before being epistemological. It is a description of the ethical relationship between the subject and his/her time. The contemporary is the subject who can engage in discovering what is dark, hidden, concealed and not illuminated by the strong lights of the century. While lights are addressed to the crowd, darkness affects the single subject, which it needs in order to provide an ethical response. Going back to Nietzsche, the contemporary subject is the one who is at the same time untimely and irrelevant to his/her time, because s/he is not involved in the process of absolute visibility on which each time grounds itself. Being contemporary and untimely means being irrelevant and, so to say, unproductive. The contemporary is noxious to his/her time, insofar as s/he is unproductive.

The answer that the present time offers to the contemporary subject is to include him/her in the figure of the being-in-fashion. As Agamben claims, 'Fashion can be defined as the introduction into time of a peculiar discontinuity that divides it according to its relevance or irrelevance, its being-in-fashion or no-longer-being-in-fashion' (47). Being-in-fashion is the opposite of the always irrelevant untimely. As the untimely implies the quest for darkness, it follows that being-in-fashion is a condition of pure visibility, a way in which the subject lives the lights of the century.

279

But Agamben argues that being-in-fashion also has a very specific

temporal dimension:

> The time of fashion, therefore, constitutively anticipates itself
> and consequently is also always too late. It always takes the
> form of an ungraspable threshold between a "not yet" and a
> "no more."' (48) The being-in-fashion is a life spent on a
> threshold, because 'the "now," the *kairos* of fashion is
> ungraspable: the phrase, "I am in this instant in fashion" is
> contradictory, because the moment in which the subject
> pronounces it, he is already out of fashion". (49)

Being-in-fashion is thus a paradoxical condition. The subject who wants

to be-in-fashion (namely: to be relevant to his/her time, to be enlightened

by the lights of his/her century) will never accomplish his/her mission.

Being-in-time is a condition that, even though it can never happen, is

able to trap the subject forever,[153] because the fulfilment of this condition

is destined to always be deferred. In the moment the subject believes s/he

has fulfilled it, s/he is asked to renew his/her effort, *ad infinitum*. The

pure visibility of being-in-fashion is more than social status: it is a

process in which the subject is asked to continuously relaunch his/her

search for visibility—because once one thinks that s/he has attained

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[153] Manovich comments the power of the being-in-fashion: 'The Web 2.0 paradigm
represents the most dramatic reconfiguration of the strategies/tactics relationship to date.
According to De Certeau's original analysis, tactics do not necessary result in objects or
anything stable or permanent; "Unlike the strategy, it [the tactic] lacks the centralised
structure and permanence that would enable it to set itself up as a competitor to some
other entity… it renders its own activities an "unmappable" form of subversion." Since
the 1980s, however, consumer and culture industries have started to systematically turn
every subculture (particularly every youth subculture) into a product. In short, the
cultural tactics evolved by people were turned into strategies now sold to them. If you
want to 'oppose the mainstream', you now had plenty of lifestyles available – with
every subcultural aspect, from music and visual styles to clothes and slang – available
for purchase." (Manovich 2008, 38)

complete visibility a more complete visibility will be offered. The search

for visibility falls under the domain of the Same, since it is grounded on

the perfect presence of the subject within his/her time. Being-in-fashion

is a figure of the Same in the form of the relevance to the present time.

Facebook—as synecdoche for social media—is certainly a dispositive-in-

fashion. Rooted in the dynamics of the present time,

> it is the quintessence of the being-in-fashion, if this
> coincides with the triumph of the ephemeral. It is the
> ephemeral of a constant daily update, an update that, day
> by day, promises an exposition of oneself that, potentially,
> can last a lifetime (Kirckmayr 2010, 101).

The figure of the Same operates thusly on social media, while the

untimely subject can be regarded as a primary figure fighting the domain

of the Same. The second figure will be defined as the being-offline

subject, proposed by Zielinski (2012).

The being-offline subject is theorised from the notion of moveability.

This is a property of the subject, asked to find an orientation in a world

that consistently offers heterogeneous stimuli. Zielinski defines

moveability as follows:

> Arts and theories that possess an affinity to advanced
> thinking and advanced technologies demand maximum
> moveability. This moveability is not the same as the mobility
> that is demanded of us day in, day out, and proclaimed as an
> inherent necessity. Moveability does not offer itself for
> exploitation and, in turn, it does not exploit. Our moveability
> gets by with a minimum of possessions albeit carefully
> selected ones. It cultivates a life of wandering and attempts to

orient itself in the world without prescribed disciplines.
(2012, 29)

Moveability is thus a specific attitude—a process of subjectivation—of

the subject who is able to place him/herself outside of disciplinary

systems. It is the liminal condition of the subject who places him/herself

in territories where disciplines have not yet been born. It results that 'it is

in the best sense undisciplined. It cannot be disciplined' (29). Can the

network be taken into account as the specific place to practice

moveability? The answer Zielinski provides is *trenchant*:

> This is a plea for theory and practice situated in the in-between
> of disciplines, between staked-out territories, between the
> dispositifs of power, which Michel Foucault identified above
> all as sexuality, truth, and knowledge. To this we can add the
> network. (29)

Zielinski lists several arguments for which moveability cannot be

practiced in networks, which at on the contrary are considered effective

disciplinary systems: the life in technology societies as a permanent

testing situation (30); the dissipation of time and energy in trying occupy

the centre of technological power (31); the hard and paradoxical balance

between visible and invisible (33); and an existence that is required to

deal with its temporal dimension either too much or too little (34). But,

above all:

> To be permanently connected and perpetually wired rapidly
> tires the mind and the body. (My feet are so tired, my brain is

so wired, sang Bob Dylan in "Love Sick".) This state is
comparable to a prolonged artificial paradise, the stretching of
time that only drugs can induce but machines can simulate. The
Long Now[154] is an obscene project that was developed by
engineers and programmers who want to play God. (33-34)

However, the subject cannot avoid the disciplinary systems that governs

him, network included. Moveability is the answer to this impossibility.

Thus the practice of moveability can be grounded in what Zielinski

defines "a conscious split" between existing online and being offline:

> We work, organise, publish, and amuse ourselves in
> networks. We rhapsodise, meditate, enjoy, believe, and trust
> in autonomous, separate situations, each to his/her own and
> sometimes with other individuals. This adds up to a balancing
> act: in a single lifetime we have to learn to exist online and be
> offline. If we don't succeed in this, we shall become mere
> appendages of the world that we have created, merely its
> technical functions. We should not allow cybernetics, the
> science of optimal control and predictability, this triumph.

One can hear the echo of the Husserlian notion of life-world in

Zielinski's argument. Moveability—which encompasses activities such

as rhapsodising, meditating, enjoying, and believing—are proper to the

pre-logic world, in which the subject can experiment processes of

subjectivation outside of the disciplinary systems. If existing online is a

practice that one cannot avoid, the risk is that the subject will be

completely absorbed by this practice. The consequence is a life

completely under the control of the cybernetic dispositive, whose largest

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[154] The Long Now is a Foundation founded in 1996 and based in San Francisco. It aims
to think the destiny of the world on the long-term of 10.000 years (http://longnow.org/).

contemporary manifestation is the network. Being-offline is the attitude that allows an escape from this slavery.

And in the practice of moveability the subject encounters other subjects. The subject is, always and forever, a self who is exposed to other selves. The relationship with others can be delineated in the form of the friendship. Adding a friend is one of the most popular labels in Facebook, yet as Turkle observes, on social networks, 'we treat individuals as unit. Friends becomes fans' (2012, 168). Friends are viewed on networks as an indiscriminate mass; the commitment to cultivating friendship becomes a superficial dispatch. Instead of unique and whole persons, one finds an indiscriminate simulacrum of them. Friendship on a social network is a pale representation of a complex relationship: intimate, free from evaluation, rooted in a shared happiness, based on the enthusiasm for the same interests, views, tastes and feelings. In fact friendship is an interpersonal relationship based on the suspension of the balance of powers. Friendship can be rooted on shared activities, and implies—above all—a commitment to each other as unique persons. Friendship cannot be translated in the form of a quantified function. For these reasons, the third figure considered here is the friend. While talking about friendship, a famous sentence from Aristotle is often quoted: '*Oi philoi, oudeis philos*'. The common translation is 'Oh friends, there is no friend', which underscores the difficulty of dealing with true friendship. Agamben has recently suggested that it should be interpreted 'He who

has (many) friends, does not have a single friend' (Agamben 2006, 27), which emphasises the exclusivity of friendship. Following this argument, Agamben then defines the friend as *heteros autos* (other self), and friendship as community—but with some restraints: 'What is a friendship other than a proximity that resists both representation and conceptualization?' (31). Is Facebook able to retain this sense of proximity? If one considers proximity to be a purely spatial relationship then the answer should be negative, but one must nonetheless accept that the subject today is immersed in continuous flows of information. S/he surfs in a more fluid way than in the past. What was once strictly related to the physical world has nowadays been contaminated by the digital flow and should be reviewed from this perspective. Adopting this point of view offers the subject the possibility of assuming a new ethical position for to build new sociality and, in a certain way, new politics. For instance, 'the group should not be an agonic bond that links individuals within a hierarchy, but rather a constant generator of deindividualisation' (Foucault 2001, 1240 [my translation]). Assuming that deindividualisation is a practice of individual freedom, then the new ethical choice should comprehend how to adopt a mode of behaviour on networks that deal with proximity in order to transform a connection on Facebook into another self.

Contemporariness, moveability and friendship are three possible processes of subjectivation that actively fight against the Same.

Contemporariness makes the subject irrelevant to his/her time and, doing so, it pushes him/her to search for the Otherness in the darkness. Moveability puts the subject in territories uncovered by the disciplinary systems (also including the network), so that the subject is not conditioned by pre-defined regimes of truth. Friendship is a way, pre-logic and de-individualising, to deal with other(s) in a space outside of the discourse of the master. The above-mentioned processes of subjectivation all require an accountable subject. But here the accountability must be practiced by the subject to his or her self. In this case, the subject must above all be accountable to him/herself: in engaging him/herself in the search for darkness, in committing to avoiding comfortable disciplinary systems, and in cultivating friendship. This relationship of the subject to his or herself must therefore dismiss a constitutive foundation of the notion of "self", that—as has been shown several times during this dissertation—is easily imprisoned by the discourse of the master. The abandonment of a subjugated (in the form of quantified) self can bring the subject to a different dimension of accountability, namely: the accountability of life. Locating the foundation of the subject in life, rather than in the foundation of the self, has been the main task of Foucault's late research. His return to the analysis of the Greek world is better understood if one considers that, at the end of his production, the French philosopher was not looking for a different way to understand the self, which would have just represented

another way to delineate the discourse of the master, but a different understanding of the entire subject. This understanding has been found in the notion of life and its practices. As Foucault claims:

> I want to show that the general Greek problem was not the *tekhne* of the self, it was the *tekhne* of life, the *tekhne tou biou*, how to live. It's quite clear from Socrates to Seneca or Pliny, for instance, that they didn't worry about the afterlife, what happened after death, or whether God exists or not. That was not really a great problem for them; the problem was: Which *tekhne* do I have to use in order to live well as I ought to live? (Foucault 1997, 260).

The *tekhne tou biou*, the practices of life, are the set of actions by which the subject can be accountable to him/herself. Where does this idea of accountability find a place in this discourse? Namely, why are the techniques of life accountable? The reason is clearly explained by Foucault himself: 'No technique, no professional skill can be acquired without exercise; nor can the art of living, the *tekhne tou biou*, be learned without an *askesis* that should be understood as a training of the self by oneself' (1994, 208). The continual effort, the endeavour the subject makes to take care of his/her practices of life, within the dimension of the perpetuation of the exercise, is a practice of accountability of the subject to his or her self. And this practice can play out in any identitary dispositives, since it is a relationship of the subject with him/herself out of any regime of truth.

Foucault died suddenly in 1984. His last public appearances took place at the Collège de France some months before, while holding the course *The Courage of the Truth* (2012, first published in French in 2009). The course aimed to explore the relationship between truth and care of the self. In a twist of fate, he was late to deliver his last class on the 28th of March, so the final words he intended to address to students were never spoken, although we can find them in the manuscript of that class. His last sentence was supposed to be:

> what I would like to stress in conclusion is this: there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the *other world and the other life*. (Foucault 2012, 340)

This dissertation has humbly aimed to demonstrate that Foucault was right. A real accountability is always paradoxical, because it can be practiced only outside of the discourse of the master. The real truth of accountability is the report that the subject provides when asking him/herself: am I living well? The subject can only find an answer outside of the domain of the Same and outside of the domain of quantification: only in the exploration of a life that is always *Other*.

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