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‘Love Thy Social Media!’: Hysteria and the Interpassive Subject

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‘Love Thy Social Media!’: Hysteria and the Interpassive Subject

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Abstract

According to the 2020 docudrama, *The Social Dilemma*, our very addiction to “social media” has, today, become encapsulated in the tensions between its facilitation as a mode of interpersonal communication and as an insidious conduit for machine learning, surveillance capitalism and manipulation. Amidst a variety of interviewees – many of whom are former employees of social media companies – the documentary finishes on a unanimous conclusion: *something* must change. By using the docudrama as a pertinent example of our “social media malaise,” and while remaining aware of the problems and unethical practices encompassing international digital/social media companies, this paper will argue that we continually refrain from the very question(ing) that would call these companies to account: what does the algorithm desire? In approaching this question, this article will draw from Lacan’s ‘hysterical’ position in accordance with Robert Pfaller’s notion of interpassivity. Together, these concepts will be used to provide a psychoanalytic account of how our subjectivization in social media renders an unconscious endorsement that both frames our awareness of the dilemmas encompassing social media, while also positing an inherent limitation that may offer a possible path out of its impeding affects. This subjective ambivalence – delegated yet reluctantly disavowed – offers an opportunity to realign discussions on the lost object of desire (*objet a*) and its reproduction in social media algorithms. In so doing, the case will be made that an account of interpassivity can help lay bare the hysterical significance underscoring our digital subjectivization.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S THE DILEMMA?

Released in 2020, *The Social Dilemma* offers a critical exposition of our online habits, specifically, our use of digital social media platforms, such as Facebook. With interviews from former social media employees, the documentary articulates a number of concerns regarding the extent to which our social media practices are governed and orchestrated by an algorithmic system. By comprising a sophisticated profile of its users, the algorithm is denounced for its manipulative capabilities, from which the suggestion is made that social media companies now have the capacity to “change you”. The impact of this on an assumed social cohesion, is believed to be the biggest threat – one echoed in the various references to a number of conspiracy theories (Flat Earth Society, Pizzagate),¹ which were spread online via the Facebook algorithm.

Unperturbed by the representation, Facebook provided a predictable response, drawing attention to and, thus, denouncing, the unfavorable “mad algorithm” that was portrayed in the documentary (“What ‘The Social Dilemma’ Gets Wrong”). Though the portrayal of the algorithm as a “Frankenstein’s Monster”, bent on infiltrating your very sense of being, was easily deflected by Facebook, the company was also decidedly open as to the algorithm’s purpose: an instructive tool, used to “learn” its users, offering them relevant services and information. In light of this, Naughton argued:

Where [*The Social Dilemma*] fails is in its inability to accurately explain the engine driving this industry that harnesses applied psychology to exploit human weaknesses and vulnerabilities. A few times it wheels on Prof Shoshana Zuboff, the scholar who gave this activity a name – “surveillance capitalism”, a mutant form of our economic system that mines human experience (as logged in our data trails) in order to produce marketable predictions about what we will do/read/buy/believe next. Most people seem to have twigged the “surveillance” part of the term, but overlooked the second word. Which is a pity because the business model of social media is not really a mutant version of capitalism: it’s

¹ The Flat Earth Society argues that NASA has fabricated the fact that the Earth is spherical. The Pizzagate conspiracy theory occurred during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. It argued that members of the Democratic Party conspired in a child sex ring. A Pizza restaurant was an establishment believed to be tied to the accusation.

just capitalism doing its thing – finding and exploiting resources from which profit can be extracted. Having looted, plundered and denuded the natural world, it has now turned to extracting and exploiting what’s inside our heads. And the great mystery is why we continue to allow it to do so.

Naughton’s claim highlights a number of important points, most notably, the sense in which the algorithm remains a useable and functioning tool, exploited by the capitalist logic of a social media business model, predicated largely on advertising. What is of greater concern, however, is that, despite *The Social Dilemma*’s concluding segments – which predictably advocate the concern that we need more knowledge on how algorithms work and function, before finishing on Jaron Lanier’s claim to “Get out of the system!” (as opposed to rearticulating the system)² – it would seem that the algorithm remains beholden to a logic that functions on our very resistance to it.³ Though it can be argued that our interaction with algorithmic practices is one predicated on the knowledge that we are using but also being used by algorithmic systems, ultimately, this knowledge does not prevent us using the very services that rely on these systems. Key to this assessment is that it upends the claim that knowledge trumps practice. In contrast to the Althusserian contention that “when knowledge of ideology replaces ignorance, new practices will emerge” (Rothenberg, *Excessive Subject* 27), we can assert that, as per recent “scandals”,⁴ we all know what is wrong with the use of algorithms, yet we nonetheless act as if...

These contentions will serve to underscore the discussion that follows. Indeed, with much of *The Social Dilemma* focusing on the problems with social media – specifically, as a form of surveillance capitalism – subsequent attention will be given to exploring how the position of the hysteric can help divest attention away from perceptions, which center the algorithm as a source of knowledge, towards a consideration of the algorithm as an object of interpassivity. In the conclusion, it will be

² Jaron Lanier is a computer philosophy writer who appears in the documentary.

³ This consideration is primarily drawn from the work of Matthew Flisfeder (*Algorithmic Desire*).

⁴ Here, one can think of the “Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Data Scandal”, which involved the British company, Cambridge Analytica, collecting Facebook users’ data without their consent. Building a psychological picture of the user, Cambridge Analytica used the data to assist the Presidential campaign of Donald Trump.

argued that an understanding of interpassivity can both challenge and reframe our algorithmic relations: relations that must ultimately be reinterpreted as a form of love.

OBJET A AND THE AMBIGUITY OF THE SIGNIFIER

In the same way that “The dissatisfaction of subjects is the result not just of social requirements ... but ... of every social order’s foundation in language” (McGowan, *Real Gaze*, 79), we can observe how it is this “dissatisfaction” which our online interactions seem to encourage – one based upon the elicitation of our desire to click here, reply to this, send that. There is, in this instance, always “something more” that must be sought: a cause of desire, a founding of surplus-enjoyment, an object that the subject seeks but which the Other (or the internet) does not have. Lacan’s name for this object is the *objet petit a*. Indeed, “this object of fantasy, this object-cause of desire, is generated in response to the double lack of the subject and the Other” (Hook 282). Though desired, this object is never articulated nor confronted in reality.

Accordingly, though for Flisfeder, “Algorithmic media, ... enjoin us in a constant search for the impossible lost object” and, thus, it is in this “way that the *objet petit a* is inscribed into the algorithmic” (*Algorithmic Desire* 108, italics added), this inscription is one that remains akin to a “glitch” within the algorithm itself – yet, a productive one nonetheless. In fact, what this paper will argue, is that it is on this ground that the algorithm continually fails to inscribe the *objet a*. Much like the subject, the algorithm cannot inscribe the *objet a* if only on the grounds that its “extimate” nature is never centered but is, instead, a decentred feature of the lack that constitutes both the subject and the algorithm.⁵ It is in this way that algorithms “reproduce the lack constitutive of subjectivity” (Flisfeder, *Algorithmic Desire* 108); a reproduction which, in the subject’s desire for the *objet a*, continually decenters the subject, thus signifying the subject’s constitutive otherness.⁶ To help articulate the very way in which the reproduction of this

⁵ The argument being traced here is one grounded in the following from Žižek: ‘Lacan’s name for this extimate core which de-centers the de-centered subject’s Other itself is, of course, the *objet a*, surplus-enjoyment, the object-cause of desire. This paradoxical object functions as a kind of bug or glitch in the big Other, as an immanent obstacle to its full actualization. ... Without the glitch, there would have been no subject, the Other would have been a complete, smoothly running order’ (*Less than Nothing* 786-787).

⁶ To this end, “the process of subjectivization” occurs – and here we can draw a comparison to our “online subjectivization” – when “the signifier installs desire in the subject’s *objet a*” (Rothenberg, “Twisting ‘Flat Ontology’” 205).

lack remains central to the elicitation of desire and the *objet a*, we can consider how such decentrement is brought to bear when the subject is confronted with the desire that the *objet a* evokes.

This confrontation is perfectly demonstrated in *Blade Runner 2049* and, specifically, in Bove's analysis of the character, Joi (Ana de Armas): an artificially intelligent being (AI) and companion to the show's protagonist K (Ryan Gosling). Joi is a purchased AI model and, as such, there are numerous "Jois" that can be procured. As a pet name, Joi refers to K as "Jo", so that, in a certain manner, "Jo" is K's very own *objet a* (that which is in him, more than himself). Yet, in an important scene, K comes across an advertising billboard, where the advertisement's "interactive Joi" greets him as "Jo". Quickly, K realizes that his "Joi" is not unique; the pet name is itself a marketing and programmable function, no doubt used by all Jois. But, as Bove asserts, "it is only through the advertising motto that Joi can speak from the position of the big Other, the symbolic order which grants K recognition by the Other but in doing so also alienates him from his desire" (162). This "alienation" and radical decentering from *his* desire aptly demonstrates that K's desire for Joi was never *his*, but, rather, a programmable element in the Joi AI itself.

What remains significant in this example is how the (non-)relation between K and Joi remains ambiguous, with Joi later helping K in a way that seems to go beyond her programming. Consequently:

Joi's "dying" words, "I love you," can be read either as a final moment of authentic consciousness, a true "human" feeling just as she is destroyed, or as an automated response generated by the dictates of the program that runs her (exactly what Jo ["K"] would want to hear). But what lies behind this radical ambiguity is not so much that Joi is an artificial intelligence run by a computer program, but rather, the fundamentally ambiguous nature of the signifier – that any declarative statement inevitably carries its own negation, its hauntingly insistent surplus meaning raising the question, "but why are you saying this to me?" (Bove 162).

This radical ambiguity is constitutive of the Other and the algorithm. The Other's desire is, in the example of Joi, not clearly articulated, but indecisively formed by the ambiguity of the signifier (Joi's dying declaration). These signifiers, however, have important effects, not least in their evocation of the Real. What is more, this ambiguity posits the subject itself; or, as the following section will consider, the divided hysterical subject.

THE "OBJET A WILL NOT BE DIGITALIZED"

In his discourse of the hysteric, Lacan describes how "the subject confronts an authority and demands that this authority live up to its promises to deliver on *jouissance*" (Rothenberg, *Excessive Subject* 148). The result, however, is that this authority/Master does not possess the "remedy" to such questions and, thus, the Master – or, in this case, the algorithmic big Other – simply bombards the hysteric with more knowledge that never suffices and only prolongs the *objet a*'s absence. What stunts the hysteric's realization is that, in the face of its constant questioning, "the Hysteric does not come to any realization about the impossibility of *objet a*" (Rothenberg, *Excessive Subject* 149). If we – albeit simplistically – refer to this failure as a "bad" hystericism (in short, a failure to acknowledge the *objet a*'s "impossibility"), then it remains pertinent to explore the hysteric as an articulation of the relation between signifier and signified and how this relation proves significant with regard to the algorithm's desire.

To do so, we can affirm Žižek's contention that "the external limit of language – the limit that separates it from reality it refers to – is simultaneously its internal limit, making language itself incomplete, never able to achieve full self-identity as an instrument of communication" (*Failed Absolute* 229). The effect of this is that the signifier and signified fail to correspond: the "signified always slides beneath the signifier, eludes it, it can never be firmly identified" (Žižek, *Failed Absolute* 229). Despite this failure, undoubtedly, language does manage some form of stable meaning, "a kind of short-circuit, ... at which [the] signifier falls into signified" (Žižek, *Failed Absolute* 229). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the conferring of a "name", which procures the hysterical pronouncement: "Why am I what you're saying that I am?" (Žižek, *Failed Absolute* 230). In this instance, new knowledge is sought by the hysteric through the very question it directs to the Other.

By focusing on this hysterical position, we can begin to draw attention to the sense of ambiguity that the signifier prescribes; an ambiguity not unlike that expressed in the aforementioned *Blade Runner* example. Indeed, if “hysteria is the first analysed instance of the subject’s essential division, its questioning and refusal of social dictates” (Copjec 51), and, if “the signifier here is what determines the subject for all of the other signifiers; yet at the same time, the signifier is also the one for which all of the other signifiers determine the subject” (Flisfeder, *Algorithmic Desire* 168), then, it is on this basis that the signifier remains an ambiguous determination that both affirms and negates the subject’s supposition. The effect of this ambiguity is that it can be identified in the hysteric’s questioning of the Other – “Why am I what you’re saying that I am?” – which produces both an affirmation of the subject – reduced to object – as well as the negation of that very object – posited in the question itself. This position is brought to bear in that impossible object – the *objet a* – upon which the very uncertainty of the subject, determined by the ambiguity of the signifier, can ask: “what *objet a* am I for the Other’s desire?”. However, the key hysterical point to make – and this is reflected in K’s relation to Joi – is that “we have no image of the Other’s desire (it remains indeterminate), and it is this very lack that causes our desire” (Copjec 55). In this sense, the hysteric’s discourse remains generative of desire: one that, in the act of questioning, gestures towards the Other’s lack. Exposing this lack is constitutive of the very ambiguity – the affirmation and negation – that characterizes both the signifier and the symbolic order it structures.

More importantly, the ambiguity of the signifier (and, thus, the inconsistency of the symbolic) to represent the subject is itself a hysterical gesture, *par excellence*; one echoed in the very failure to interpellate the subject in the algorithmic process. Ultimately, what such acknowledgement prefigures is the radical decentring of the subject’s *objet a* “in” the Other. The path traced here is one that “makes subject, ... not a category of ideology, but one of emancipatory agency” (Flisfeder, “Object Oriented Subjectivity” 132).⁷ This agency is derived, in the first instance, from the hysteric’s question: the position from which the subject questions the Other’s desire. Indeed, there is an important “reflexive turn” to this questioning:

⁷ Flisfeder bases this claim on Dolar, “Beyond Interpellation”.

The hysterical subject is above all the subject who asks himself a question while at the same time presupposing that the Other has the answer, that the Other holds the key. In the dialectical process, this question asked of the Other is resolved through a reflexive turn in which the question begins to function as *its own answer*. (Žižek, *Sublime Hysteric* 109)

This dialectical procedure does not lose the Other, so to speak, but rather, proposes the subject's separation *in* the Other, upon which the subject recognizes itself "in this gap that separates the Other from itself" (Žižek, *Wired Brain* 72); or, for the hysteric, in the very place from which this subject desires – that of the Other.

It is in asking this question of the Other's desire that we return once more to the location of the *objet a*. Indeed, if, for De Vos, we can claim that the "*objet a* will not be digitalized" ("Fake Subjectivities" 26), then the underlying assertion to be made is that this "mystery object" remains an impossible point of inscription, not just for the subject, but for the algorithm itself. In the case of fantasy, it remains pertinent to both the subject and algorithm to achieve this aim, but, again, to accede to this path is to confront the limits of the subject itself – a limit best reflected in the hysterical question: what is to be ascribed in the algorithm?

WHAT IS TO BE ASCRIBED IN THE ALGORITHM? KNOWLEDGE, BELIEF AND THE IMPOSSIBLE *OBJET A*

It has been argued thus far that it is the hysteric's discourse which continually bombards, antagonizes and troubles the Other, questioning not just the position of the hysteric but also the position from which the hysteric desires. This latter position is one that is founded in the desire of the Other; an ambiguity that can never be fathomed. Indeed, this ambiguity can be identified in the connection between the big Other and the algorithm, and how "when we think we are acting against something, ... we are operating on a level of conformity to a big Other that eludes our conscious grasp" (Tutt 6). This is aptly demonstrated in Flisfeder's account of how the algorithm provokes our desire (*Algorithmic Desire* 138). In light of this, it has been demonstrated how a hysterical questioning of this desire can open a point of productive tension. What is being traced

here is a short circuiting of the algorithm's logic, which exposes not only our connections to and with the algorithmic Other, but also our interpassivity as subjects. It is by approaching this interpassive subject that we can readdress the algorithm in a way that can help build new identifications with social media.

Emerging from the work of Robert Pfaller, interpassivity refers to a subjective gesture whereby the subject (actively) transfers their "passivity" to an Other.⁸ While early applications of the concept were related to art and interactive installations, the applicability of the notion is best reflected in a number of everyday scenarios. For example, take the Professor who spends all afternoon photocopying pages from books, safe in the knowledge that the photocopier is doing the "reading". The academic may never have the time to read the pages, but the sense of satisfaction achieved by performing the task is one echoed in the use of canned laughter, which "laughs" for us; the digital television boxset, which records and "watches" our favorite shows; as well as the strange "unboxing" phenomenon, where one watches another "unbox" a new product that the viewer does not own. What is key to this notion, is the sense that it is the "inter" – that is, the transference itself – which allows the subject to "enjoy", despite never directly enjoying the book, television show, or unboxed product.

Nowhere is interpassivity more apparent than in our digital and virtual environments. Though I am never online 24/7, my online avatar and social media page "passively" are. In fact, De Vos highlights how:

We are more and more relieved of our duties as increasingly algorithms take over and take care of a good deal of our being human: now, instead of our *homunculus psychologicus* or our brain, it is our digital avatar who is living our life in our place. ("Fake Subjectivities" 13)

Rather than "taking over", what remains significant is that the subject is fully aware of this inter-passive transference. It would seem, therefore, that we live with a paradox, whereupon our better knowledge does not necessarily prevent us from doing the obverse

⁸ Following the understanding that passivity refers to something which is done to the subject, we can consider how, when we watch a television show and "laugh", the "show" has done *something* to us.

– in fact, we find pleasure in acting against this knowledge. It is this formal structure which, again, bears witness to the supposed power of the algorithm as well as the very tension it enacts when we stay fully cognizant of its possible manipulations and failures, while all the while remaining fully implicated in its capacity to know (for us). As noted, however, this knowledge, held by the algorithmic Other, remains contradictory – in that, for the hysteric, such knowledge is both inquired and doubted.

By way of approaching this contradiction, we can consider the relation between knowledge and belief. For both Pfaller and Žižek, our capacity to “believe” is itself an interpassive gesture. Indeed, we do not “own” our belief, but, instead, always believe through an Other, who guarantees the belief (be it an external object, another subject or an imagined/virtual Other). Think of Father Christmas (Santa Clause) and how you would be hard-pressed to identify anyone who believes in him, yet, nonetheless, through our collective engagements, we “believe”.

Certainly, this logic closely follows that of cynical disavowal: “The ‘better knowledge’ contained in the first clause of the logic of disavowal [‘I know very well...’] enhances the capacity for the pleasure implied in the second clause [‘but even so...’]” (Friedlander 93). Though the second clause posits a negation (“but even so...”) of the first affirmation (“I know...”), our recognition of belief *is* the very avowal of a *separation* that remains implicit to the subject: the subject’s belief is never its own, and this capacity to believe is dependent on a “subject supposed to believe”, a naive Other who *really believes* (Pfaller 234-238). Boncardo elaborates:

while interpassive subjects might appear outwardly to be engaged in the practices of some belief system like Christianity or capitalism, their interpassivity allows them to attribute a sincere adherence to these doctrines to a “naive” other – someone who precisely isn’t them. (309)

What is unique to this logic is that it is the Other’s belief in the “illusion”, which allows us to maintain a certain space to the illusion itself. In fact, rather than the subject simply being subjectivized into a group, we face a form of sociality that is tied to the acknowledgement of the constituting falsity of this very subjectivization.

Therefore, if we consider that, for the subject, belief is attributable to the Other, whereas, in the case of knowledge, the subject can never “know” the Other’s knowledge (that is, the Other’s knowledge can never be known, only questioned), then, it is the Other’s belief that is founded on its naivety – a naivety which, nevertheless, binds the subject to the belief’s *Otherness*. Our relation to this Otherness is attributable to the ambiguity of the signifier: we *negate* a belief only to then *affirm* it. The collective potential in this action is emphasised by Friedlander:

this naïve observer does more than register our enjoyment through our performed acts; it is also acts as an agency which confers a social, symbolic reality. As the virtual “owner” of our beliefs, the naïve observer plays a powerful role in binding together the social community. It provides the necessary fictional guise for us to engage together in shared pleasures, which put communal commitment ahead of individuals’ ego-fortification. Pfaller’s insights, thus, offer nothing less than an antidote to the reactionary modes of asceticism and cynicism, which threaten to rob us of both our pleasures and our public spheres. (102).

Evident in the above is the strange realization that our most collective endeavors are grounded on a certain level of (hysterical) “doubt”. This doubt plays a unique role in alluding to the Other’s inconsistency – it’s very naivety – and one that bears a clear linkage to the hysteric’s question.⁹ What remains unique to this process, however, is that this doubt is no longer made in advertence to the Other’s supposed knowledge, but to the sociality of a “fictional guise” that conditions the Other’s belief: “Doubt is not an impediment to belief, but rather its condition of possibility” (Friedlander 96).

To help elicit this possibility, we can consider how the algorithm’s “authority” is one based upon a certain “fictional guise”, albeit, a virtuality, that is itself based upon the algorithm’s inherent inconsistencies and ambiguities. Indeed, “It is this ambiguity that provides the pretense for our [online] activity” (Flisfeder, *Algorithmic Desire* 67); a “pretense” grounded just as much in the elicitation of our desire, as it is in the “belief”

⁹ In the sense that, if we can doubt the Other, due to its ascribed naivety, then any assumed “consistency” is challenged.

that we attribute to the algorithm's functional capabilities. Certainly, this "pretense" in meaning, and its associated hysterical doubt, can, to our detriment, be falsely subverted into a cynical display – which, despite its "knowledge", undeniably maintains an assumed knowledge in *some* Other supposed to know. Nonetheless, such doubt can also confer the possibility of a shared belief in the very inconsistency and ambiguity of the algorithmic system. Setting aside the resistant antagonisms that prefiguratively underpin the algorithmic system, we can begin to use the algorithm as a source of belief *in* the inherent contradictions of the "impossible" *objet a*.

A "PRODUCTIVE NOTHINGNESS"

The line being traced between the hysteric and the interpassive is a thin one, with the possibility of a recourse to a hysterical "anxiety" reflected in the fact "that the Other(s) perceive [... the hysteric] in the passivity of their Being, as objects to be exchanged, enjoyed, or otherwise 'manipulated'" (Žižek, "Interpassive Subject"). This is evidenced in Contreras-Koterbay's account of AI, which considers how the development of AI may result in a discursive structure (a Symbolic order) that remains entirely untranslatable to the subject. Denoting "a failure of interpassivity", Contreras-Koterbay considers how our AI technologies could "become perfectly alienated Others" (179). Contreras-Koterbay continues:

But what happens when the *objet petit a* stops being a source of castration? What happens when it evidently is unconcerned with our passivity? What happens when the castration isn't even imaginable? Part of the matrix of interpassivity is the belief that the externalized object is a receptacle for our subjectness, but what happens when it refuses? Even more pointedly, what happens when it transforms itself from an active refusal to a passive refusal? (179)

Though important, it can be said that the above questions go too far down the hysteric's path, with each question assuming an Other "supposed to know", which, at its worse,

ends up becoming an AI that is perfectly rendered as an “alienated Other”.¹⁰ What this surpasses is the very fact that this AI – and the algorithm that it will no doubt be founded upon – is already inherently alienated from itself; indeed, an alienation shared by the subject.

Therefore, rather than *reducing* the interpassive subject to the hysteric’s unending questions, we can instead view them as *interlinked*: we can expose a latent interpassivity founded in the hysteric’s question, which, in its very recognition, serves to aver the subject’s object(ive) passivity – its position as the Other’s *objet a*. Accordingly, what our interpassivity avows is a form of hysteria evidenced by the fact that one’s passivity for the Other – what *objet a* am I for the Other? – requires a certain endorsement on behalf of the subject. Žižek explains:

if I am to function as pure activity, I have to externalize my (passive) Being – in short, I have to be passive through another. This inert object that “is” my Being, in which my inert Being is externalized, is the Lacanian *objet petit a*. Insofar as the elementary, constitutive structure of subjectivity is hysterical, in other words, insofar as hysteria is defined by the question “What am I for an object (in the eyes of the Other, for the Other’s desire)?”, it confronts us with interpassivity at its purest. (“Interpassive Subject”)

Note the path taken in Žižek’s account: the hysteric’s question “confronts” us with our interpassivity; in other words, the hysteric’s question posits the subjective externalization of an object (*objet a*), which is subsequently recognized as a constituent feature of the Other’s desire (what *objet a* am I?). What is more, despite the subject’s passive externalization, the hysteric’s question (even without an answer) implies a certain level of “activity”, prescribed *by* the very question itself.

¹⁰ The assumption here, and which Contreras-Koterbay gestures at, is that there would be no *objet a* for the AI; or, that the “impossible” *objet a* would have, in some way or another, been inscribed entirely into the AI and its algorithm. However, such “perfect” alienation would render an AI entirely separated from the subject, and, thus, one would have to assume that such an alienated AI would be unrecognisable to the subject. There is “alienation” in Contreras-Koterbay’s account, but no “separation”.

What the algorithm posits, therefore, is a “hysterical” short circuiting of the subject’s externalization that is brought to bear via the “belief” that our interpassivity avows. The concern that the algorithm remains a source of “knowledge” is an illusory one; there is no definite “knowledge” which could, in the guise of the algorithm, assure the subject – there is, in short, no *objet a* that the algorithm possess. It is only in recognizing our interpassivity that the very space opened up by the hysteric provides an opportunity to recognize that the subject’s lack (the *objet a*) is constitutive of a shared lack *in* the Other. More importantly, there is a “productive nothingness” that underlies this lack (Khan 220), one that can refrain from a path of complete hysteria towards one acquainted with the sociality of belief.

Indeed, if we consider that one of the problems of confronting our lack stems from the realization that reorientating our desire involves recognizing that the lack which it requires can never be fulfilled – the object we desire is not contingent, but a constitutive *objet a* – then, it is in the interpassive form that we can posit a unique take on our relation to desire and, more specifically, our relation to algorithmic media. In its delegation of enjoyment to the Other’s belief, the interpassive subject experiences pleasure in the very delegation itself – one that is not ignorant of such delegation, but for whom the act of delegation opens up a certain space from which one can obtain pleasure without the demands of fully acceding to a desire dictated by the Other.¹¹ It is in this delegation that belief presents a “productive nothingness”: a *nothingness* drawn from the illusion ascribed to the Other’s naivety (its “belief” in the illusory), but which *produces* for the subject nothing more than the very *nothingness* it ascribed (Khan 220).

My take on this process is that it is one that can be reconciled to the hysteric’s question and, more importantly, from the separation that is achieved in the recognition of this question to the Other: a question which functions as its own answer, its own source of pleasure. Along these lines, we can consider how “The movement towards the hysteric’s discourse ... occurs when the subject recognizes that, even though it cannot heal its self-division, this self-division is emancipatory” (Flisfeder, “Apostle of Reason” 206). The ability to *recognize* this emancipatory potential, however, requires a level of

¹¹ Here, the Other can be conceived in the required split between the ego-ideal (the agency for whom the subject seeks to impress) and the superego (the same agency who the subject never seems to impress).

interpassivity that views the question itself as the very condition of our freedom to a desire beholden to the algorithm. This recognition is pertinent to the fact that “the hysteric”, in accordance with its question to the Other, “must decide for him- or herself how to decide” (Wells 136).

It is on this basis that the notion of interpassivity works to reveal the formal emptiness of the Law, the naivety of the Other and the inherent lack that constitutes the Symbolic order. Though the *objet a* posits a certain surplus remainder that will never be accessed by the subject or inscribed by the algorithm, it is only on the grounds of our hysterical questioning of the algorithm that we can make clear the fact that we can never be sure of *our* desire. To this end, the Lacanian formulation that one should not “give up on his or her desire” is encapsulated in the interpassivity that constitutes our digital relations. Indeed, if Lacan sought to prescribe desire “a certain utopian edge” (Fink 207), then this remains an “edge” that is afforded an emancipatory potential via the interpassive recognition that the impossibility of desire is constitutive. Algorithms are made and, more importantly, they are made *by* and in accordance *with* our desire.

What is more, we can now begin to perceive how our interpassivity is deeply embedded in a knowledge of “not-knowing”. This is not an accepted form of ignorance, but a knowledge that is attributable to the separation afforded by our relation to belief. Indeed, for De Vos, there remains a certain “not-knowing” which is, itself, constitutive of how humans live and interact – a form of living that could, theoretically, be eradicated by an algorithm so “complex” that it could calculate the “proper way to live” ((*Inter*)*Subjectivity* 14). In this case, what becomes of the subject and the *objet a*? Interpassively, the only way to remain open to – indeed, to believe in – the (im)possible Otherness that constitutes the *objet a* is to give credence to the hysteric’s question and, more importantly, to make the ambiguous decision (without guarantee; and, perhaps, just like “K”) to “love thy social media”. As the concluding section will outline, this ethical stance is one that can help establish a space through which the hysteric’s questioning of the algorithm can be upheld.

LOVE THY SOCIAL MEDIA!

By way of concluding this argument, we can provide one final precis on the possibilities that our interpassivity engenders, one akin to that of love. In contrast to a conception of love as an affirmation of one's *self*-realization – it is not that the Other simply proves amiable to one's own image – love is instead founded on an Other that is *unknown*: a 'Neighbor [that] remains an inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence that hystericizes me' (Žižek, "Neighbors and Other Monsters" 140-141). What is recognized by this hysterical subject is amicable to an interpassive gesture: a *realization* of the Other's unattainable presence.

Considered by Žižek as a key legacy of the Jewish tradition, the command to "love thy neighbor", possesses a clear hysterical injunction that continues to confound the subject. Certainly, this does not propose a lack of altruism; rather, what it does posit is a hysterical recognition of the command itself. To "love thy neighbor" is to remain open to the fact that such a command affirms its own negation, one founded upon the hysteric's retort: but, why? The task of traversing this question – indeed, of accepting the very ethical stance of approaching the Other as an impossible presence and ambiguity, forever tied to the subject's desire and forever missing the *objet a* – is to recognize that it is a question that prefigures its own answer.

We see here how *The Social Dilemma* ultimately fails in its approach to social media and in its concerns regarding the algorithmic practices that social media platforms ultimately rely upon. In this way, the proposals provided by *The Social Dilemma* go no further than simply accentuating their own hysterical dilemmas. That is, when mired in an account of moral panic and when read in the Lacanian register, such concerns work to propose an algorithm without lack, indeed, an Other "supposed to know". As the above discussion has highlighted, such traps fall foul of a hysterical quagmire that neglects the interpassive significance underpinning our algorithmic relations. Instead, the equivalence to be drawn is one that links our interpassivity with the algorithm as neighbor. To "love thy neighbor", and, thus, to truly engage in an interpassive gesture – which is founded on the Other; cognizant of the hysteric's questioning of the Other's desire; and then conciliant to the very recognition that underscores the hysteric's question – one requires, in short, a leap of faith: an act that carries no answers or assurances, beyond *the act* itself. Such a "leap of faith" avers the contradiction that is brought to bear in "love" (Flisfeder,

Algorithmic Desire 176-177). For McGowan, love remains the very position upon which the subject and Other's difference is transferred into contradiction, so that, in effect, "The lover and the beloved become one in their way of finding satisfaction over their own by adopting the other's satisfaction as their own" (*Emancipation* 99).¹² This satisfaction closely follows the attribution of the Other's belief and, specifically, the satisfaction that the subject achieves in doing so. In short, belief – much like love – avers contradiction.

This contradiction both in and with the Other is not one in which we merely give way to our capacity to enjoy the beloved, but instead is that which acknowledges the non-relation between subject and Other: a "separable" space whereby the subject acknowledges the ambiguity of desire and the incomprehensibility of its (and the Other's) being. It is this insistence which is maintained and upheld in the question: what does the algorithm desire? Stripped of its symbolic veneer as well as the often cited "power" that the algorithm thus possesses (the supposed knowledge which it sustains), we encounter the algorithm as that which must be "loved", as a traumatic injunction that asks just as much of ourselves as it does the adequacy of a technological form that can sustain our collective sense of being – the very sociality inscribed in our social media.

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¹² For an application of McGowan's account of love in the *Black Mirror* episode "Hang the DJ", see Flisfeder (*Algorithmic Desire*).

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