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Voyeurism and Exhibitionism on the Internet: The Libidinal Economy of the Spectacle of Instanternity

Introduction

Today, in the situation that we call the *instanternity* of the digital age, the visual aspect of social (and power) relations is ever more important. The majority of human interactions on the Internet are happening in the field of vision. In this field, human desire follows the scopic drive, which is, according to Freud, expressed in the ambivalence of voyeurism and exhibitionism.

The notion of instanternity marks the constellation of reality in today's digitalized world, but can also be used as a broader name for the digital age itself. In this, say, historical sense, instanternity is the name of the period that comes after "postmodernity" and is currently on the rise. Conceptually, it denotes the restructuring of our perception of time induced by digitalization, concerning, in the first place, the relation between finitude and infinity, which deeply affects the constitution of subjectivity and socio-economic structures.[1]

An analysis of voyeurism and exhibitionism on the Internet, that is, in the spectacle of instanternity as the reality irreversibly permitted and determined by the digital virtual, will therefore – this is what is at stake in of this article – help us understand a certain aspect of the mechanisms constituting the social tissue to-

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[1]   We have coined the notion of "instanternity" as a conceptual crossbreed between the "instant" and "eternity". While in the traditional analogue perception of time the moments of the now represent the inexistent, always already lost reality, today, with the emergence of the virtual environment, the moment, *the instant*, becomes the merging point of reality as it is. The reality of the digital era builds upon a certain "preservation" and accumulation of present moments in a topological arrangement of time. In an enthralling way, the shift in our perception of time taking place with digitalization corresponds to the "timelessness" of the unconscious. This has enormous effects on the constitution of subjectivity and of the world today. It affects everything: psychic and socio-economic structures, the distribution of power, the relation between the particular and the universal, the mechanisms of grounding the political, and the human account of nature.

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day, especially their inner hindrances as well as their transformative potential. This analysis, of course, exceeds the spatial limitations of one article. Of the three steps of the analysis, we will, at this point, only focus on the first one: the relation of voyeurism and exhibitionism to the scopic aspect of the spectacle of instanternity. What we want to trace here are the shifts, the minimal structural and phenomenal leaps triggered by the outspread of the digital virtual, which, even if they might not be immediately recognizable as the "break" with reality as it was (before digitalization), they nevertheless break with reality as it was.

In order to reach this goal, we will need to execute certain preliminary elaborations on: 1) the relation of voyeurism and exhibitionism to the scopic field, that is, to the field of vision determined by the gaze and the light, and to its functions (the eye, the gaze, the picture, the image, the lure); 2) the relation of the scopic field and its functions to what Debord called "the spectacle", that is, "a social relation between people, which is mediated by images"[2]; 3) the relation between Debord's old spectacle and the spectacle of instanternity; 4) The relation between the screen and the mirror; 5) the unprecedented aspects of the function of the computer screen.

This topic, in a broader sense, tackles the inscription of the subject within the digital virtual spectacle, which deals with the relation between the individual's imaginary and symbolic identification, that is, between the *ideal ego* and the *ego ideal* (the first step of the analysis executed in this article), with the enigmatic liaison between the subject's genuine ability to "play with the screen" and the processes of interpellation (the second step), and, finally and most importantly, with the question of the activity and passivity (or interpassivity) of the political subject, focusing on the prospects of their social activation (the third step).

Adhering to Lacan's comment that "there are many ways of being wrong about the function of the subject in the domain of the spectacle,"[3] we should make several preliminary remarks here:

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[2]   Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. K. Knabb, London, Rebel Press, 2005, p. 7.

[3]   Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, London, W. W. Norton & Co., 1998, p. 97.

1. The inscription of the subject in the digital virtual field does not function exclusively in the digital virtual environment understood as some sort of a meta-world separated from (and imposed on) the "real" one. This is because a) these two worlds cannot be radically separated, and b) in a purely Deleuzian sense, both the actual and the virtual are real.[4] What is reali-

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[4]   The *virtual*, for Deleuze, possesses full objective reality, and cannot be confused with the *possible*, which lacks reality. Whereas "the possible is the mode of identity of concepts within representation, the virtual is the modality of the differential in the heart of Ideas," as Deleuze states (Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, Continuum, London, New York, 2004, p. 350). Ideas are, thus, pure virtuality: "All the differential relations brought about by reciprocal determination, and all the repartitions of singularities brought about by complete determination, coexist according to their own particular order in the virtual multiplicities which form ideas." (*Ibid*., p. 349.) As Freud notes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "everything that can be an object of our internal perception is *virtual*" (Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text*, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, Basic Books, New York, p. 606.). The relation between the virtual and the actual is, in Deleuze's view, "as though everything has two odd, dissymmetrical and dissimilar 'halves'," each dividing itself in two: "an ideal half submerged in the virtual and constituted on the one hand by differential relations and on the other by corresponding singularities; an actual half constituted on the one hand by the qualities actualizing those relations and on the other by the parts actualizing those singularities." (*Ibid*., p. 350.) Lacan, speaking about the imaginary plane and the scopic field, differentiates between the "real image" as a representation in my mind of an object which I look at directly, and the "virtual image" as the mirror image of the object, that is, a representation in my mind of an object which I look at with the mediation of a mirror. In this article, the differentiation between the *actual* and the *virtual*, which refers specifically to the difference between the non-digitally intermediated reality and the digitally created reality, somewhere echoes both Deleuze's and Lacan's notions. As for Deleuze, also for us both the actual and the virtual possess full objective reality, and are perplexed in the spectacle of instanternity as "two odd, dissymmetrical and dissimilar 'halves'." However, if we were faithful to Deleuze (and we will refrain from this here), we would need to say that 1) both the non-digital actual reality and the digital virtual reality have their "virtual and actual half", and that 2) at the same time, neither the non-digital actual reality nor the digital virtual reality function beyond the plane of representation, identities, similarities, and contradictions, like Deleuze's virtuality and actuality of differen*c*iation and repetition do, but are both largely connected to this plane. On the other hand, we can fully adhere to Lacan's notion of the virtual as that of an image in the mirror, for the computer screen is itself acquiring a certain "derailed" function of a mirror. At the same time, we are transforming Lacan's differentiation between the real and the virtual image into the division between the actual and the virtual image, where both of them are real. Our notion of "reality" basically refers to Hegel's definition of reality [*Realität*] as an existent quality [*seiende Qualität*], which contains negation as determination: "Quality, in the distinct value of *existent*, is *reality*" (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. G. di Giovanni,

ty today is the very merging of the digital and the non-digital, the merging which is but a (repetitive, continuously boosted) stream of traversing the unsurmountable gap between them.[5]

Ad a) From the moment of the emergence of the digital, the actual world cannot be separated from its determinate negation as the non-digital. In the age of instanternity, the pre-digital turns into a myth. At the same time, in its striving to take supremacy over the actual physical existence as something that needs to be sublated (say, with multi-sensory technologies), the digital virtual can only exist in relation to the non-digital. Only in this sense – and not in the sense of a nostalgic idealization of "real life" as some primordial harmonic relation between the individual and the world, which has allegedly become lost forever throughout the industrial and post-industrial processes of alienation – should we understand Debord's statement that the spectacle is a "visible negation of life."[6]

Ad b) Or, as Debord expresses himself: "objective reality is present on both sides."[7] He understands the connection between the spectacle and actual reality as a dialectical process of "reciprocal alienation", where

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Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 85.), and "Reality itself contains negation; it is existence, not indeterminate or abstract being" (*Ibid.*, p. 88.).

[5] One of the possible prospects of the future is that the gap between human self-awareness and external reality might well close, thus sublating the traditionally "transitional" character of man, and radically changing the status of the subject: "Once a direct connection of our brains to a digital network crosses a certain threshold (which is a quite realistic prospect), the gap separating our self-awareness from external reality will collapse (because our thoughts will be able to directly influence external reality and *vice versa*, and we will also be in direct contact with other minds)." (Slavoj Žižek, "Apokalipsa ožičenih možganov" [The Apocalypse of a Wired Brain], *Problemi*, Vol. 57, Nos. 7-8, Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 2019, p. 21.) From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: "*Ko bo neposredna povezava naših možganov z digitalno mrežo presegla določen prag (kar je precej realističen obet), se bo vrzel, ki ločuje naše samozavedanje od zunanje realnosti, sesedla (ker bodo naše misli lahko neposredno vplivale na zunanjo realnost in obratno, poleg tega pa bomo tudi v neposrednem stiku z drugimi umi)*." The question is, however, whether closing the gap between the non-digital actual and the digital virtual is a direct consequence of closing the gap between human self-awareness and external reality or not. Or, put differently, is the gap between human self-awareness and external reality a condition of the possibility of the gap between the non-digital actual and the digital virtual or not?

[6] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 9.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

the two beings-in-themselves (the reality of the spectacle and actual reality) mutually negate (and therefore determine) each other: "The spectacle cannot be abstractly contrasted to concrete social activity; each side of such a duality is itself divided. [...] The spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real product of that reality. Conversely, real life is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it."[8] Reality, therefore, "emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real."[9]

2. Instanternity marks both the constellation of reality in today's digitalized world and its spatio-temporal predispositions.[10]

3. The digital virtual cannot be reduced to its spectacular aspect, but the spectacular aspect represents a good part of it. As far as we consider or investigate the digital virtual from the perspective of the scopic field, the digital virtual reality, in a fundamental dialectical intertwinement with the non-digital actual reality, *is* the spectacle.

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[8]   *Ibid.*

[9]   *Ibid.*

[10]   Due to the limitation on the length of this article, the spatio-temporal aspect underlying the reality of instanternity is left aside here. However, it is possible to argue that even before Heidegger's project of the "temporalization of being (and its consequent ontologization of time)" (Bara Kolenc, "Is it too late?", *Problemi International*, Vol. 58, Nos. 11-12, Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 2020, p. 115.) and Hegel's "way towards a de-ontologization of time through the temporalization of the original cut as the co-determination of being and nothing/non-being" (*ibid.*), one of the most prominent philosophical fathers of the thus defined "instanternity" was Fichte and his philosophy of the I positing itself and the world right here, right now. While previous philosophies relied on some timeless frame of ontological categories, Fichte's I is entirely thrown into the full urgency of the present moment in which it must emerge. See especially Jure Simoniti's reading: "Fichte did not stumble upon a foundation, which metaphysics was still supposedly capable of finding, but he, quite to the contrary, revealed that very groundlessness of being that must be filled out only here and now." (Jure Simoniti, "Ko je svet začel gledati skozi nas. Fichte in ekološki argument" [When the World Started to Look Right Through Us. Fichte and the Ecological Argument], *Problemi*, Vol. 60, Nos. 5-6, Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 2022, p. 190. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: "*Fichte ni trčil na temelj, kot ga je dozdevno znala najti metafizika, temveč je, nasprotno, razkril tisto breztemeljnost biti, ki jo je treba zapolniti šele tukaj in zdaj.*"

4. The scopic field, the field of vision within which the spectacle operates, is not related solely to, or limited to, the image.[11] Beyond the geometral parameters of the image, it is determined by the gaze and the light.

5. Debord's notion of the "fundamentally spectalist" society should therefore be extended beyond the concept of the image in order for some of his insights to be applicable to instanternity as the unprecedent assembling of reality invoked by digitalization.

6. As long as the digital virtual needs the gaze and the light as its conditions of possibility, it operates within the scopic field, even if it does not handle images. To this extent, the digital virtual, in a dialectical relation with the non-digital actual, forms *the spectacle of instanternity*. In this sense, the spectacle, in Debord's words, "represents the dominant model of life."[12]

7. In the scopic field, the spectacle takes place on two scales: on the level of the image and on the level beyond the geometral parameters of the image. The inscription of the subject in the spectacle of instanternity therefore refers to a) the image of the body, in a narrow sense (dealing with the individual's imaginary identification, the *ideal ego*), and to b) the subject's emergence in the field of the gaze and the light beyond the image, in a broader sense (that is, on the level of symbolic identification, the *ego ideal*). Both levels are interconnected. As Lacan demonstrated with the optical model of a phantom bouquet, the symbolic order structures the imaginary: "My position in the imaginary is only conceivable insofar as one finds a guide beyond the imaginary, on the level of the symbolic plane."[13]

8. In this respect, the inscription of the subject in the spectacle of instanternity a) cuts across the gap between the digital virtual and the non-digital actual, and b) traverses not only the geometral parameters of the image,

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[11] Here, we are referring to Lacan's notion of the image, which leans on a definition of the image in optics: "to every point on the object there must correspond a point on the image, and all the rays issuing from a point must intersect again somewhere in a unique point." (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 123.)

[12] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, pp. 8-9.

[13] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, p. 141.

but also the field of the gaze and the light beyond the image, linking the scopic field with the field of language, as well as computer language.

9. As long as the scopic drive is expressed in the dialectic of voyeurism and exhibitionism, these two mechanisms represent the privileged entry for the analysis of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the spectacle of instanternity.

You Never Look at Me from the Place from Which I See You and What I Look at Is Never What I Wish to See

Generally speaking, the apparition of the subject in the scopic field involves a *lure*: "The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see."[14] The lure unravels the relation between exhibitionism and voyeurism as non-complementary. It is not a simple symmetric inverse in the sense "I wish to see what you show, and what I show is what you wish to see." Because desire, unlike need, is structurally insatiable (what I desire is always "not that"), what triggers desire in the voyeuristic, exhibitionistic interplay is the very discrepancy between *what one shows and what the other wishes to see*, on the one hand, and between *how one wishes to be seen* and *what the other sees*, on the other. It is the very failure, the very impossibility of the fulfilment of exhibitionistic and voyeuristic desire, which drives their mechanisms.

What, in love, is a reproach – *you never look at me from the place from which I see you* and *what I look at is never what I wish to see* – has a certain relation to the logic of desire in exhibitionism and voyeurism. Here we are dealing with the relation of the subject to another subject as the object of desire. The first sentence, *you never look at me from the place from which I see you*, refers to exhibitionism. In my desire, I show myself, I put myself into sight (*donner-à-voir*), thus putting myself under the gaze of the other. I make myself a picture, aspiring to trigger the other's desire. I want the other to look at me from the place from which I see him or her. But I necessarily fail. Not because the other is unable to "look through my eyes," but because it is structurally impossible for the other to enter the origin of my vision. The thing is that even if the other would somehow magically manage to crawl into my eye, he or she would still not be able to look at me

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14   Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 104.

from the place from which I see him or her. For the true origin of my vision is not in my eye – it is displaced in the symbolic.

The place from which I see you is the place of my symbolic identification, I(A), of the *ego ideal, Ich-ideal.* When making myself a picture, I am reaching beyond the geometral parameters of my imaginary identification, *i(a)*, that is, beyond the identification of my self-reflective consciousness with my image in the mirror, which is represented in my mind as the "image of myself", and in reference to which I recognize myself as a whole and a self-identical entity, forming thereby the instance of the *ideal ego, Ideal Ich,* instituted, from Lacan's developmental perspective, with the notorious "*Aha-Erlebnis*" in the "mirror stage". The subject emerges in the scopic field where the imaginary reveals itself to be structured by the symbolic:[15] "Imaginary identification offers the support of recognition in the image, i.e. in an 'objectified' ego, through which the ego comes to itself, whereas identification through desire establishes the place of the subject as irreducible to any representation, as a void beyond all possible representa-

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[15]   Lacan's elaboration of the scheme of the phantom bouquet, an optical illusion described by George M. Hopkins in his *Experimental Science* from 1890, defines the relation between the imaginary and the symbolic, and, thereby, also the relation between one's imaginary and one's symbolic identification. The picture of the bouquet in a vase, which I see in the plane mirror with the help of a concave mirror, is only an illusion (for actually the bouquet is not in a vase, only the play of the mirrors represents it as if it were). With a shift in the direction of the gaze (if I step to the side), the bouquet "falls out of the vase" and what I considered to be "real" reveals itself to be merely an illusion. The shifted direction of the gaze is the true origin of one's vision set on the symbolic plane. The imaginary perspective is, therefore, always illusory: "where the subject sees himself," that is, where he recognizes "the inverted image of his own body" in the plane mirror as himself (the ideal ego), "it is not from there that he looks at himself." (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 144.) The place from where he looks at him, namely, is not the gaze in his eye, but the offset place of the barred subject as a symbolic guide governing the angle of the plane mirror. It is from this place from which he forms his symbolic identification, the ego ideal.
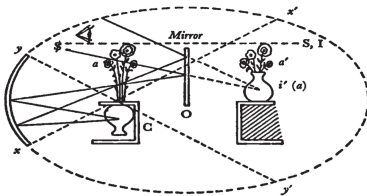
tion, and thus also as the inner agent and principle of the articulation of representations."[16]

The second sentence, *what I look at is never what I wish to see,* refers to voyeurism: *what one shows the subject is never what he or she wishes to see.* As a voyeur, I relate to the object of my desire – I want to see what is not shown to me, what is hidden, and what is forbidden to be seen. I want to see "that". In trying to grasp what is beyond what one shows me – an indefinite something that I assume is hiding behind the curtain – I fail again. There is nothing behind what one shows. For the subject is itself but a picture, a lure, a play with a screen. But as the very impossibility of satisfaction is the lever of desire, what drives a voyeur is exactly the object as an absence: "What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain."[17]

Because exhibitionism and voyeurism are the two forms of the rudimentarily ambivalent scopic drive, every exhibitionist is unconsciously also a voyeur – and the other way round.

The Ambivalence of the Scopic Drive: Voyeurism and Exhibitionism

"Visual impressions," remarks Freud in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, "remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused."[18] Scopic drive, which is represented in the pair of opposites – *Schaulust*, the pleasure in looking, often translated into English as *scopophilia,* or *voyeurism*[19], on the one hand, and *exhibitionism – Zeigelust*, the pleasure in show-

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[16] Mladen Dolar, *Samozavedanje: Heglova Fenomenologija duha II.* [Self-Consciousness: Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit II.], Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 1992, p. 23. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: "*Imaginarna identifikacija ponuja oporo prepoznanja v podobi, torej v nekem "objektnem" Jazu, preko katerega Jaz pride do samega sebe, nasprotno pa identifikacija skozi željo vzpostavlja mesto subjekta kot nezvedljivega na katerokoli reprezentacijo, kot praznino onkraj možne reprezentacije, s tem pa tudi kot notranje gonilo in princip členitve reprezentacij.*"

[17] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 182.

[18] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905)*, trans. J. Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press, 1949, p. 161.

[19] Consistently, Freud couples exhibitionism with *Schaulust,* and not with *voyeurism,* which for him denotes specifically the aspect where *Shaulust* as a normal function of the hu-

ing, on the other hand – is not only one of the most important players in an individual's psychic constitution, but has, for Freud, a specific conceptual importance. Not only does it serve, along with sadism and masochism, as a prominent example of the ambivalence of drives, but it also allows him to elaborate, specifically in *Instincts[20] and its Vicissitudes,* on the complex intertwinement of a) the two vicissitudes of the drives (out of four, sublimation and repression being left aside in this study), that is, the reversal into its opposite [*Verkehrung ins Gegenteil*][21], and turning round upon the subject's own self [*Wendung gegen die*

man psyche turns into a perversion. For example, Freud uses the couple *voyeurism-exhibitionism* in claiming the ambivalence of drives: "Whenever we find in the unconscious an instinct of this sort which is capable of being paired off with an opposite one, this second instinct will regularly be found in operation as well. Every active perversion is thus accompanied by its passive counterpart: anyone who is an exhibitionist in his unconscious is at the same time a *voyeur*." (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905)*, p. 167.) For Freud, *Shaulust* is itself a normal function of the human psyche, which turns into a perversion under specific conditions: "On the other hand, this pleasure in looking [scopophilia] becomes a perversion (*a*) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (*b*) if it is connected with the overriding of disgust (as in the case of *voyeurs* or people who look on at excretory functions), or (*c*) if, instead of being *preparatory* to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it. This last is markedly true of exhibitionists, who, if I may trust the findings of several analyses, exhibit their own genitals in order to obtain a reciprocal view of the genitals of the other person." (*Ibid.*, p. 157.) A perversion, further on, turns into a pathological symptom, if "instead of appearing merely *alongside* the normal sexual aim and object, and only when circumstances are unfavourable to *them* and favourable to *it*— if, instead of this, it ousts them completely and takes their place in *all* circumstances—if, in short, a perversion has the characteristics of exclusiveness and fixation—then we shall usually be justified in regarding it as a pathological symptom." (*Ibid.*, p. 161.) In this article, we use the terminological couple of *voyeurism-exhibitionism* as the two aspects of the scopic drive, which can be understood on a scale from the "normal" functions of a psychic apparatus, to perversions, and to pathological symptoms. *Schaulust*, on the other hand, is used as the *economic* term, expressing the "third great polarity" of human psyche, that of pleasure-unpleasure, and can be, in this sense, coupled not with the term *exhibitionism,* but *Zeigelust*, the pleasure in showing. The scopic drive is therefore understood in the ambivalence of *voyeurism-exhibitionism* from the perspective of the polarities activity-passivity and object (external world) and subject (ego), and in the ambivalence of *Schaulust-Zeigelust* from the perspective of the polarity of pleasure-unpleasure.

[20] James Strachey, the translator of The Standard Edition of the Collected Works of Sigmund Freud, consistently translated Freud's term "*Trieb*" with "instinct". As Freud distinguishes between "*Instinkt*" and "*Trieb*", "drive" is a more accurate translation for the latter.

[21] Regarding the reversal of a drive into its opposite, Freud traces two different processes here: a change from activity to passivity, and a reversal of its content. While the second

eigene Person], and b) two out of the "*three great polarities that dominate mental life*,"[22] i.e. the polarity of subject (the ego) and object (the external world), and the polarity of activity and passivity.[23]

It is through the elaboration of the two "best-known sexual instincts that appear in an ambivalent manner,"[24] voyeurism-exhibitionism and sadism-masochism, where Freud draws a clear line between the polarity of activity-passivity, on the one hand, and the polarity of subject (ego) and object (external world), on the other, while, at the same time he points to their fundamental interweaving. For Freud, the "antithesis active-passive must not be confused with the antithesis ego-subject – external world-object."[25] An important observation here is that the reversal in the polarity of activity-passivity affects the *aims* of the drives, where "the *active aim* (to torture, to look at) is replaced by the *passive aim* (to be tortured, to be looked at),"[26] whilst the reversal in the polarity of subject-object accounts for the change of the *object*, the aim remaining unchanged: "The turning round of an instinct upon the subject's own self [*die eigene Person*] is made plausible by the reflection that masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject's own ego [*das eigene Ich*], and that exhibitionism includes looking at his own body."[27] Nevertheless, we cannot fail to notice, states Freud, that both in

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one, the transformation of a drive into its "material" opposite, is explained through the single example of love (which admits not only of one, but of three different opposites – loving-hating, loving-being loved, and the complex of loving-hating as the opposition to unconcern or indifference), the first one, a change from activity to passivity, is elaborated through an analysis of the two pairs of opposites: voyeurism-exhibitionism and sadism--masochism.

[22] Sigmund Freud, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes (1915). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, trans. J. Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1957, p. 140.

[23] Although the third polarity, that of pleasure-unpleasure, is not specifically addressed in Freud's elaborations on exhibitionism and voyeurism, it is, of course, the driving force of both exhibitionism as *Schaulust* and voyeurism as *Zeigelust,* running to a good extent on the masochistic enjoyment detected by Freud as the initially incomprehensible pleasure in unpleasure.

[24] Freud, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes (1915). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, p. 132.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 134.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 127.

[27] *Ibid*.

voyeurism-exhibitionism and in sadism-masochism "*the turning round upon the subject's self and the transformation from activity to passivity coincide.*"[28]

The change of the object coincides with the change of the aim: with the turning of a drive upon the subject's own self, the active aim turns into a passive one, or, which is the same process, the shift from the active aim to the passive one results in the turning of the drive upon the subject's own self. In the case of an exhibitionist, who shares in the enjoyment of his or her exposure, this means that, simultaneously, the external object (a mother or any other person, her genitals, or any other part of her body, or a fetish) has been replaced by the subject's own self (his or her own genitals or any other part of his or her body), and the active aim (to look at) has been substituted by the passive aim (to be looked at). An exhibitionist is therefore showing off, exposing parts of his or her body (a change in the object, which now becomes the subject's own self) in order to be looked at, to become an object of desire of the other (a change in the aim from active to passive).

What we can notice here is that for Freud – somewhat counter-intuitively – the voyeur is the active agent, while the exhibitionist is the passive one. Our intuition normally follows the well-known mantra of passive observers, spectators–consumers, who are unable to change the order of things, *versus* active performers, the actors in the spectacle, the players on the world's stage holding the conductor's stick. For Freud, an exhibitionist is indeed very much active in showing himself[29], but in following his aim, in his desire, he occupies a passive position: what he desires is not to look at (to see, to perceive, to notice), but to be looked at (to be seen, to be perceived, to be noticed). An exhibitionist invests much of his effort into putting on all the masks, the costumes, the make-up, the personas, running around, laughing and speaking loudly; he is super-active, but at the end of the day, all of these activities are subordinated to pursuing his passive aim. He makes all this circus only to make himself be looked at. He is all active to make himself passive. The true position of the exhibitionist is a passive one: this is the locus of his desire and enjoyment. The one who is truly active, in Freud's view, the one following his active aim to look (to see, to perceive, to notice), although he might remain unnoticed himself, is the voyeur.

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[28] *Ibid*.

[29] For ease of reading, from this point onwards in the text, male pronouns shall also be considered to include both sexes.

There is a certain close connection between narcissism and the scopic drive – the myth of Narcissus falling in love with his own image clearly points to this. The autoerotic pre-phase of the scopic drive, in which "the subject's own body is the object of the scopophilia," must be, states Freud, "classed under narcissism."[30] The basic predisposition of narcissism is, namely, the turning round upon one's own self, the choice of one's own body as the libidinal object, which, subsequently, corresponds to the passive aim of "being looked at" rather than "looking", of "being loved" rather than "loving", and even of "being tortured" rather than "torturing". This is why, according to Freud, in the later development of the active scopic drive into voyeurism, narcissism is left behind, while the passive scopic drive, that is, exhibitionism, still "holds fast to the narcissistic object."[31] Narcissism, therefore, defines the scopic drive, especially the exhibitionist's part therein.

The autoerotic pre-phase of the scopic drive coincides with and, in this sense, importantly defines primary narcissism. Subsequently, the "mirror stage" establishes the scene not only for the development of the "normal" object-related psychic constitution with more or less expressed narcissistic traits, but also for the development of secondary narcissism, that is, of a predominantly narcissistic psychic constitution of a grown-up person. The narcissistic traits in a psychic constitution of a grown-up person are formed through a complex dialectics between the individual's imaginary identification, that is, his relation to the *ideal ego*, and his symbolic identification, that is, his relation to the *ego ideal*.

In the immanent critique of the notion of the "pathological narcissist" put forth by American ego psychology (Kernberg, Kohut, Winnicot) and popularized by Christopher Lasch in his book *The Culture of Narcissism* from 1979[32], Žižek, in an article from 1985[33], exposed one crucial feature of the so-called "pathological narcissist" as the predominant subjective constitution of the neoliberal age

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations,* W.W. Norton, New York, London, 1991.

[33] Slavoj Žižek, "'Patološki narcis' kot družbeno-nujna forma subjektivnosti" [The "Pathological Narcissist" as the Socially-Necessary Form of Subjectivity], *Družboslovne razprave = Social Science Forum*, II, Vol. 2, Slovensko sociološko društvo: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Ljubljana, 1985, pp. 105–141.

(along with the *borderline*[34]). In reference to Lasch, who was the first to point to the replacement of the ego ideal with the "anal" superego as a fundamental feature of late capitalist bureaucratic society, the product of which – especially due to changes in micro and macro social structures (de-hierarchization, the dismantling of authority, the critique of identitarianism, and so on) and the associated permissive upbringing – is the "pathological narcissist", Žižek points out that what basically defines the "pathological narcissist" is the *unsuccessful symbolic identification*.

With symbolic identification, the subject submits to symbolic authority, integrates the law, and, in a purely Kantian sense, takes it as his own, entering into a *symbolic covenant* as his own ethical position to which he is accountable, and in relation to which he is *responsible* (accountable to the other). By accepting the law as his own determinant, the subject frees himself from the irrational demand of the superego and enters the field of desire, which constitutes him in the symbolic. Here, it is crucial to maintain a strict distinction between the concepts of the superego, the ideal ego, and the ego ideal, which correspond to the trinity of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic: "The feature that separates the ego ideal and the ideal ego from the superego is, of course, *identification*."[35] The superego excludes all identification; it appears as an "irreducibly alien, noninternalized, traumatic, unperceived, terrifying command, i.e. something *real* in the sense of the impossible-unsymbolized."[36] For the narcissist, therefore, so-

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[34] Žižek notes that the two disorders systematized by Otto. F. Kernberg are alike in showing both psychotic and hysteric characteristics and symptoms, which was inconceivable from the perspective of traditional psychoanalytical theory.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 118. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: "*Poteza, ki Ideal-Jaza in idealni jaz loči od nadjaza, je seveda identifikacija.*"

[36] "The feature that separates the ego ideal and the ideal ego from the super-ego is, of course, *identification*; the ego ideal and the ideal ego are two modes of identification, the symbolic and the imaginary, or, in Lacanian mathemes, I(A) and *i(a)*, identification with the 'unary trait', S1, the signifier in the Other representing the subject, and identification with the mirror-image, while – as J. A. Miller remarks – the super-ego excludes all identification, it appears as an irreducibly alien, noninternalized, traumatic, unperceived, terrifying command, i.e. something *real* in the sense of the impossible-unsymbolized." Translated from Slovene by B. K.: "*Poteza, ki Ideal-Jaza in idealni jaz loči od nadjaza, je seveda* identifikacija*; Ideal-Jaza in idealni jaz sta dva modusa identifikacije, simbolni in imaginarni oziroma, v lacanovskih matemih, I(A) in* i(a)*, identifikacija z 'enotujočo potezo', S1, označevalcem v Drugem, ki zastopajo subject, in identifikacija z zrcalno podobo, medtem ko – kot opozarja J.-A. Miller – nadjaz izključuje sleherno identifikacijo, nastopa kot ireduktibilno tuji, nepono-*

cial laws are merely the "rules of the game", which do not bind him internally. Since in the "pathological narcissist" the moment of symbolic identification is absent, the image of the Self, by itself, without the support of symbolic identification, performs the function of "integration": "instead of an *i(a)* 'mediated' by an I(A)," we have to deal with "an *i(a)* that relies directly on a cruel, mad, 'irrational', 'anal' superego."[37] All that the "pathological narcissist" can lean on, therefore, is his imaginary identification, which is the only thing that structures him and which responds to the impossible, capricious demand of his superego, expressed in the paradoxical imperative of enjoyment.

Following this consideration, we can state that *the aspect of the image as the geometral part of the scopic field is pivotal for the constitution of "pathological narcissism"*. Because of the lack of symbolic identification, the elemental feeling that defines the "pathological narcissist" is anxiety, a sense of inner emptiness that the narcissist tries to fill with euphoria, eccentricity, excess, promiscuity, the abuse of substances, workaholism, and so on, and which he strives to soothe with the phantasmal entity of the "grandiose Self", with the help of which he is supposed to receive the eagerly awaited validation from the superego. The "grandiose Self" is not only a fantasy, but a performed Persona, which the "pathological narcissist" creates as a hollowed image of himself. Subsequently, "pathological narcissism" is expressed as a more or less overt exhibitionism – in a secret ambivalence with covert voyeurism.

The Autoerotic Pre-phase of the Scopic Drive: The Original Split Between the Eye and the Gaze

As in sadism-masochism, Freud traces three developmental stages in voyeurism-exhibitionism: "a) Looking as an *activity* directed towards an extraneous object. b) Giving up of the object and turning of the scopophilic instinct towards a part of the subject's own body; with this, transformation to passivity and set-

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tranjeni, traumatični, nedojeti, grozljivi ukaz, torej nekaj *realnega v pomenu nemogočega--nesimboliziranega." (Žižek,* "'Patološki narcis' kot družbeno-nujna forma subjektivnosti" ["Pathological Narcissus" as the Socially-Necessary Form of Subjectivity], p. 118.)

[37] Žižek, "'Patološki narcis' kot družbeno-nujna forma subjektivnosti" ["Pathological Narcissus" as the Socially-Necessary Form of Subjectivity], p. 119. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: "*Pri 'patološkem Narcisu' imamo torej namesto i(a), 'posredovanega' z l(A), opraviti z i(a), ki se neposredno opira na kruti, nori, 'iracionalni', 'analni' nadjaz.*"

ting up of a new aim - that of being looked at. c) Introduction of a new subject to whom one displays oneself in order to be looked at by him."[38] These stages, on the one hand, pertain to the development of a child, but are, in a grown-up person, co-existent – this is what Freud's idea of the *ambivalence of drives* basically refers to.

However, what Freud notices at some point is that the parallel between sadism-masochism and voyeurism-exhibitionism – as the two examples of the reversal of a drive into its opposite regarding the (combination of) the polarities of activity-passivity, on the one hand, and that of subject-object, on the other – somewhere hits a limit. The thing is that unlike in sadism-masochism, a certain autoerotic pre-phase takes place in the scopophilic instinct, which precedes the three developmental stages evident in both phenomena.

The autoerotic pre-phase serves Freud to present the *diagrammatic picture of the scopophilic drive*:

(α) Oneself looking at a sexual organ	=	A sexual organ being looked at by oneself
(β) Oneself looking at an extraneous object (active scopophilia) [*aktive Schaulust*]		(γ) An object which is oneself or part of oneself being looked at by an extraneous person (exhibitionism) [*Zeigelust, Exhibition*]

The autoerotic pre-phase is represented in the first row of the diagram (α). In the second row, the scopophilic (i.e. scopic) drive develops into (β) voyeurism and (γ) exhibitionism.

This autoerotic pre-phase, remarks Freud, is interesting, "because it is the source of *both* the situations represented in the resulting pair of opposites."[39] Out of this stage, voyeurism (*aktive Schaulust*) and exhibitionism (*Zeigelust,*

38   Freud, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes (1915). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, p. 127.

39   *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Exhibitionism) develop "according to which element in the original situation is changed."[40] If the change concerns the *object* (a baby swaps one of his own organs as the object of his gaze for someone else's, usually one of his mother's) – the aim here remains unchanged – the pre-phase turns to voyeurism as the active aspect of the scopophilic drive. If the change concerns the *aim* (the baby swaps from actively looking at his own organ to the passive aspect of his organ being looked at by someone else, usually his mother) – here, the object remains unchanged – the pre-phase turns to exhibitionism as the passive aspect of the scopophilic drive.

What is pivotal here is that this pre-phase is not diachronic, rather, it reveals the bare structure of all the players and forces that will later be stretched into a temporal sequence of the three developmental stages. The autoerotic pre-phase of voyeurism-exhibitionism displays the situation where a baby is looking at his own sexual organ *at the same time* as his own sexual organ is being looked at by himself. He *is* at the same time the active and the passive agent of the scopic drive (looking and being looked at), and he *is* both a sexual organ (object) and his own self (subject). In a sort of a limbic state, he is entirely turned into his own body, because the instance of the ego and a relation to the external world have not yet been established. However – in contrast to other examples of sexual excitation in autoeroticism as the primary phase of a child's sexual development, such as thumb sucking, where the polarities active-passive and subject-object have not yet been substantiated – the autoerotic pre-phase of the scopic drive establishes some sort of a "differentiation of the undifferentiated," a minimal distance between looking and being looked at, between the object (the baby's own sexual organ) and the subject's own self.

In the autoerotic pre-phase of the scopic drive, I actively look at my own organ and I am at the same time passive towards my own gaze. We can see how a certain externalization takes place here, setting the ground of *extimacy* on the very fundamental level (that is, before the instance of the *ego* and the relation to the external world are established, and before the process of alienation through one's imaginary and symbolic identification takes place), where, on the one hand, *my own sexual organ becomes the object of my desire*, and, on the other

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[40] *Ibid*.

hand, *my own gaze turns into the gaze of the other.*[41] Followed by the three stages of voyeurism-exhibitionism in the later development of a child, that is, the turning of the subject to the external world, the formation of dialectics between the ideal ego and the ego ideal, and the development of voyeurism and exhibitionism proper, the constellation of the autoerotic pre-phase – and this is crucial – is not simply overcome, but persists in the psychic apparatus as a fundamental constellation, *as the elemental setting of the split between the eye and the gaze.*

The Representational and the Specular Screen

There is a basic relation defining the scopic field: the relation between the *screen* and the *mirror.*

In the classical idealist conception of introspection, that is, of a self-reflective consciousness observing the world with the gaze resting in one's eye, when viewing an external, physical object, I create an *image* of this object in my mind. Like some sort of a screen set between the eye (which possesses the gaze) and the object, an intermediate layer is thought to be formed onto which the object, lit by light, is "projected", thereby creating a representation of the object in the mind of the observer. This screen – let us name it a *representational screen* – has always been understood as a kind of mirror: a reflection of the world in one's mind. The idea of a mirroring of the world in introspection supports the psychic construction of the "I", the thinking self (ego) woven around the illusion of self-identity, which is largely caught in the imaginary parameters, that is, in the organization of the field of the gaze and the light (i.e. the scopic field) through geometral points.

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Beyond the imaginary of introspection, however, there is a certain pre-existence of the gaze – as Lacan pointed out following Merleau-Ponty[42] – which de-

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41   That is, *my own sexual organ becomes the object of my desire as desire of the other,* and *my own gaze is in dissonance with, yet resonates in, the gaze of the other.* All Lacan's propositions regarding the scopic field seem to be inscribed in the pre-phase of the scopic drive. In the autoerotic cocoon of the scopic drive, the gaze extricates itself from the eye and starts lingering around as the gaze of the Other, the subject turns into a picture, while the object is detached from the subject as forever lost, but persistently present in its absence.

42   Lacan's introduction of the split between the eye and the gaze is inspired by Merleau-Ponty *Le Visible et l'invisible* and *La Phénomenologie de la perception,* which demasks the

fines the subject's inscription in the scopic field: "It is no doubt this *seeing*, to which I am subjected in an original way."[43] What is, according to Lacan, the original constellation of a subject in the scopic field is not a self-reflective consciousness observing the world through the gaze in their eye, but the split between the eye and the gaze: "The eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field."[44] The gaze is not an exclusive possession of the eye as an organ, but floats around, as an inconceivable point of light which cannot be pinned on a geometral map: "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides."[45] This sets the subject as a blurred and ephemeral apparition in the field of vision, as a *stain*, in relation to which the "I", the "self", and its representations turn out to be a mere illusion of a self-reflective consciousness and an effect of an individual's striving for self-identity. On the very fundamental level, I am not the one observing the world, but the one *being observed*: "We are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world."[46] In this sense, exhibitionism is an original constellation of the subject in the scopic field, underlying the forms of exhibitionism and voyeurism proper.[47]

While a self-reflective consciousness believes that it sees the world as an *image*, in the original constellation of the scopic field, conversely, the subject makes itself a *picture* for the gaze of the Other. What is crucial here, however, is that in this shift from the idea of the image as something perceived and imagined in the illusion of introspection, forming, together with many other images, a representative base of the conscious "I", towards the subject *qua* picture, Lacan's differentiation between the image and the picture not only serves the purpose of

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illusion of introspection: "That in which the consciousness may turn back upon itself – grasp itself; such as Valery's Young Parque, *as seeing oneself seeing oneself* – represents mere sleight of hand. An avoidance of the function of the gaze is at work there." (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 74.)

[43] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 72.

[44] *Ibid*., p. 73.

[45] *Ibid*., p. 72.

[46] *Ibid*.

[47] "And, incidentally, in the same sense, exhibitionism – being exposed to the Other's gaze – is not simply a symmetrical reversal of voyeurism, but the original constellation that supports its two sub-species: exhibitionism proper and voyeurism." (Slavoj Žižek in the chapter "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!" in the book Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, London, Verso, 2000, p. 117.)

turning around the perspective on the subject, but at the same time puts forth a certain conceptual distinction between the two: differently from an image, a picture exceeds and evades the geometral parameters of representation. A picture operates in the field of the gaze and the light even beyond the imaginary scope.

Just as in the conception of introspection, also in the constellation of the split between the eye and the gaze the screen plays a central role as "the locus of mediation"[48]. But differently from the representational screen, which is set between the eye (self-reflection) and the world (external objects), the screen – let us call it a *specular screen* – is now set between the subject *qua* picture, on the one side, and the gaze, which lingers around as a point of light, on the other. The subject makes itself a picture in such a way that it plays with a screen (for Lacan, a genuine ability of human beings[49]), projecting itself on the screen as a splash of its transient emergence in the glow of the gaze and the light. In this scheme, again, the screen functions as a mirror. Here, however, the screen is not a mirror reflecting the world in one's mind, but a mirror reflecting the world directly. The subject reflects the world not in representation, but directly, as a *speculum mundi*, a mirror of the world:[50] "That which makes us consciousness institutes us by the same token as *speculum mundi*."[51] The specular screen is a mirror-screen on which the picture projected on it, which is the subject, is at the same time the mirror-image of the world.

In the scopic field, the gaze occupies two functions at once: a) the function of the elusive *objet-petit a*, marking the relation of the subject to the object, which can only be defined negatively, as a lack,[52] and b) the function of the Other, marking the relation of the subject (as barred, constituted upon a lack) to the

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48   *Ibid*., p. 107.

49   "Desire that is the essence of man—is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? Insofar as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze." (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 107.)

50   In his book *Speculum mundi* from 1635, John Swan presents an original idea that the world is actually a mirror reflecting God. Since God created the world in six days, there should be six mirrors, each showing one perspective of God's creation: hence, the world should take the shape of a hexadreon.

51   Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 75.

52   "*The* objet a *in the field of the visible is the gaze.*" (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 105.)

phantasmal entity of control and also of protection (the Other not only watches me, but also watches over me) within the realm of intersubjectivity to which the subject ultimately responds and which is a referential point of his symbolic identification, i.e. his ego ideal. In this second function, the gaze turns into the Gaze. In the original split between the eye and the gaze, the subject is therefore set in the space of the Other: "But, certainly, it is in the space of the Other that he sees himself and the point from which he looks at himself is also in that space."[53] Like in the realm of language, also in the realm of vision, the subject emerges in the field of the Other through alienation as the fundamental procedure of its institution, which is defined by its very disappearance, *aphanisis*. When the subject is playing with the specular screen, making himself a picture, he is playing with the reflection of light, trying to, simultaneously, distract the gaze – like annoying someone with a mirror by reflecting light into his eyes – and to show itself as a stain, a blurred spot of a bare reflection, a present absence, as something that is at the same time being lit by light and absorbing it.

Both schemes, the representational and the specular, are at work in the scopic field. The representational illusion of a self-reflective consciousness is persistently fractured by the subject's fragmented and transient apparition in the field of the gaze and the light, as a picture evading the geometral parameters of images. What is pivotal for our further analysis, however, is that in both schemes *the screen functions as a mirror* and that in their geometral representation drawn by Lacan as two non-equilateral triangles – which is, of course, only approximate, because it is itself limited to the imaginary scale – *these two screens, the representational and the specular, overlap.*[54]

The Computer Screen as an Actual-Virtual Object

What the spectacle brings about is a certain *physical* (or *corporal*, to use Derrida's term) *materialization of the screen*. In this sense, the screen functions as a *prosthesis*. However, even if we do not go into a detailed elaboration of the

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53   Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 144.

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The gaze   image screen   The subject of representation
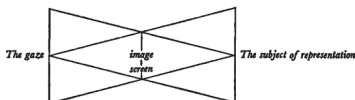
prosthetic theory as regards the digital virtual media – adhering here to Freud's understanding of prosthetics as the mediator between mind and body, between internal and external, and between conscious and unconscious, and to his description of man as a "prosthetic God"[55], or to Marx's basic formula of alienation stemming from the blurred line between man and the materialism of commodities, to which later theories of prosthetics refer (Marshall McLuhan, Henry Ford), and to the aspect of amputation as the flip side of the prosthetic extension of a human body stressed by Heidegger, an idea that was further developed in McLuhan's theory of autoamputation accompanying any extension of media, we can immediately notice a certain fundamental structural difference between the prosthetic function of the screen of the old spectacle, that is, the TV or the cinema screen, on the one hand, and the prosthetic function of the screen of the digital virtual spectacle, that is, the computer screen, on the other hand.

While we can well read a desktop computer as the apotheosis of McLuhan's idea of media convergence, that is, of a certain self-absorption of media and their ability to perform an incessant transformation of form into content ("the medium is the message"[56]), and, in this sense, can see the digital virtual media as a continuation and intensification of the procedures of the old uni-directional media, we can, from another perspective, notice a certain shift, or a leap between the old spectacle and the digital virtual one. A desktop computer represents a certain turning point, where the prosthesis is not only an externalized extension of the human body, but the human body itself, as some sort of prosthesis of a prosthesis, becomes an externalized extension of the computer. This only makes it a real prosthesis, a real amputation – but at the same time, this prosthesis makes possible a new realization of reality, which is not only a negation of actual physical reality (so-called "artificial reality"), but is, exactly through negation, its very affirmation.

Despite Debord's visionary understanding of "everyday reality" and the reality of the spectacle as fundamentally intertwined and mutually determining each other in their "reciprocal alienation", the two realities are, in the old spectacle,

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[55] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey, New York, London, W. W. Norton & Co., 2010, p. 19.

[56] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York, London, MIT Press, 1994, p. 9.

still detachable from each other. Only the spectacle of instanternity fully realizes Debord's theoretical setup in blurring the difference between one reality as primordial (so-called "everyday reality") and the other as only secondary (so-called "artificial reality"). In the spectacle of instanternity, we are on both sides: we not only try, like in the old spectacle, to domesticate the new artificial universe, which is alienated from our physical existence, but we equally try to domesticate the old physical reality, which is alienated from our digital existence. From this perspective, both "everyday reality" and "artificial reality" appear as only mythical.

In the sense of a voyeuristic-exhibitionistic ambivalence, the computer screen not only shows something, like a TV screen, but it also watches (as a camera is integrated in it). At the same time, the user of a computer not only looks at the screen, like at a TV, but also shows himself on the screen.[57] What is pivotal for an understanding of the old spectacle, and what has not yet been clearly put forth, is that in the old spectacle, the fundamental split between "everyday reality" and the reality of the spectacle is *not* the divide between the spectator as the allegedly passive voyeur, on the one hand, and the spectacle as the active exhibitionist on the other. Such a division of roles, namely, is only a consequence of a more radical split between the two realities, and a symptom of a certain blockade brought about by the old spectacle. The crucial point here is that *the abruption of the old spectacle is not that it divides the roles within the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay, but that it fully sabotages the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay itself*, which is at work in the original ambivalence of the scopic drive. The true difference between the old spectacle and the spectacle of instanternity, therefore, lies not in an individual's simple passage from a passive to an active position (say, from a spectator to a user), which is the usual argument of

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57   With the emergence of the digital virtual reality, which induced an unprecedented supposition of physical *isolation* and digital social *interaction,* man is entering a novel existential condition – *intersolation*. While the formula of the old spectacle is *isolation + passive reception*, the formula of the spectacle of instanternity is *isolation + active interaction*. Instead of passivizing, the virtual digital spectacle rather forces individuals into constant activity (it could be for leisure or work, or for political, romantic, sexual, etc., purposes), which demands physical isolation (remember the common image of teenagers sitting on a bench together and communicating with each other via their smartphones?). This leads to some sort of an (obsessive) neurotic situation, where one is caught in an endless loop: the more one is physically isolated, the more one engages in digital interaction – and the more one is physically isolated.

leftist cultural criticism:[58] but the fact that the old spectacle blocks the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay, while the spectacle of instanternity enables it. Only when the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay in the non-digital actual reality is extended and intertwined with the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay in the digital virtual reality, can the two realities, through their reciprocal alienation, become the two sides of one reality.

The subject's genuine ability to play with the specular screen as the basic mechanism of his scopic inscription in the field of the Other is, in the spectacle of instanternity, affected by the mediation, or rather, the intrusion of a new form of a physically materialized screen – the computer screen. When using a computer screen, an individual plays with this screen, making himself a picture on it. In this sense, the computer screen acquires the function of the materialized *specular screen*. At the same time, he uses the screen as a representational plane of how he sees the world. Here, the same computer screen acquires the function of the materialized *representational screen*. Thereby, the computer screen takes on the role of the two screens operating in our psychic apparatus: the *representational screen* of the illusion of introspection and the *specular screen* of our original exposure to the Gaze. While in the (mythical) non-digital actual reality these two screens well structure the psychic, but operate on different scales (their overlapping in Lacan's drawing is only schematic), in the physically materialized existence of the computer screen they *factually overlap*. The great estrangement of the digital virtual stems exactly from this (impossible) overlapping of the two screens operating in our psychic apparatus, which are now materialized in the same object.

This materialization, however, is only possible because the computer screen is an *object of a new kind*: it is not only physical, but also digital. As such, it en-

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[58]   The general leftist argument about the passivization of the political subject caused by the spectacle as the "visualized and materialized ideology" is in this sense too sloppy. Namely, it does not see that the position of a voyeur, that is, the spectator, is actually an active and not a passive one – so it is not the position as such, but certain other factors that passivize the spectator. Where the spectator of Debord's spectacle is truly passivized, or castrated, is in that *he cannot fully engage in the ambivalent interplay of voyeurism and exhibitionism*, because a) he is pushed into a (regulated) voyeuristic position – he can only watch what has been shown to him – so he cannot really follow his active voyeuristic aim, and b) he is prevented from exhibiting himself, so he cannot actively pursue the passive aim of being watched.

ables the computer to become a prosthesis of a human body (and mind), and also the human body (and mind) to turn into a prosthesis of the computer. As an *actual-virtual object,* a computer screen is at the same time the *bearer* of the intersection of the two realities, which are now inseparable, and of their mutual determination through negation, as well as the *locus* of the materialized overlapping of the two psychic screens. As such, it is simultaneously: 1.) as a materialized representational screen, the actual-virtual intermediate between the individual's eye as the illusory source of his vision and the objects of the world (and, among these objects, also his own mirror image), and 2.) as a materialized specular screen, the actual-virtual intermediate between the subject making himself a picture by his playing with the screen and the gaze of the Other. With this, the computer screen not only enables the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay within the digital virtual reality, but makes possible a complex dialectic between the digital virtual voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay and the non-digital actual one.

The computer screen as an actual-virtual object functions in the realm of vision: without the light and without the gaze the screen is a dead thing. As soon as it lights up, it becomes both a source of light and an illuminated object – it illuminates itself. More than any other object, the screen calls for the Gaze. At the same time, it itself establishes a field within which the Gaze circulates.

The Radical Consequences of the Selfie-Turn

What is a selfie? It is a photographed image in a mirror. Or, to be more precise, it is a photographed image of oneself in a mirror created by oneself. The first front-facing camera on a smartphone was introduced in 2010. "Selfie" was proclaimed a word in 2013. Today, each smartphone has two cameras: one to capture the outside world – the user's field of vision – and one to capture the user himself. What is pivotal here is that with a camera installed above the screen, the screen takes on the role of a mirror.

A computer screen is a mirror with the miraculous ability to freeze the image it reflects. With a click of the camera, I want to catch what I consider to be myself on an imaginary scale – what I want to grasp is the point of my imaginary identification, my ideal ego. This is, of course, an always failed attempt. No matter how much effort I put into the creation of an image that would finally capture

the ideal me (doing my makeup, my hair, dressing up, choosing the right angle, appropriate light, etc.), I necessarily fail. What I desire to see in the mirror never matches what the mirror shows me. So I am driven to give it another try, to take a better shot. Or to endlessly correct an existent one. Selfie-mania is, in this sense, nothing but *obsessive hunting for the ideal ego*.

In contrast to the old spectacle, where an anonymous spectator watched stars on a screen, on the Internet, everyone is turning into a star, that is, into a "spectacular representation of living human beings," according to Debord, which is "the opposite of an individual."[59] The star, says Debord, enters the spectacle "as a model to be identified with," and thereby "renounces all autonomous qualities in order to identify himself with the general law of obedience to the succession of things."[60] But because, in the spectacle of instanternity, both the non-digital actual and the digital virtual reality are real, the gap defining the spectacle is no longer set between an anonymous observer as the *individual* and the star as a reified [*verdinglicht*] *model*, which has become part of the spectacle as the "materialized ideology"[61]. The individual is now on both sides – everyone is at the same time a *star* and a *no one*, a reified model, a digital virtual commodity, on the one hand, and a human being with his own physical determinations and his own mental constructions, on the other.

Today, with the development of technology, we can change our faces as if the face itself were a mask or make-up. The transformation of our faces can be both physical and digital, the latter being easier and cheaper. What is a novel aspect here, however, is not man's tendency to beautify his face to match his ideal ego, but the fact that because, in the spectacle of instanternity, both the non-digital actual and the digital virtual reality are real, the individual's haunting of his ideal ego is now subjected to the reciprocal alienation of the two realities. This can be, so it appears, highly traumatic. In 2017, the American Academy of Facial

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[59] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 29.
[60] *Ibid*.
[61] "Ideological expressions have never been pure fictions; they represent a distorted consciousness of realities, and as such they have been real factors that have in turn produced real distorting effects. This interconnection is intensified with the advent of the spectacle – the materialization of ideology brought about by the concrete success of an autonomized system of economic production – which virtually identifies social reality with an ideology that has remolded all reality in its own image." Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 116.

Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery found that 55% of facial plastic surgeons say patients have requested cosmetic procedures to look better on social media. Today, with the recent escalation of face morphing apps, the trend has arrived at the absurd: people are requesting plastic surgeries on the basis of their digitally corrected photos. The recently identified body-image disorder known as "Snapchat dysmorphia" is characterized by the need to heavily edit one's own digital image, which, at its most severe, causes people to seek out cosmetic procedures in order to replicate the digitally morphed faces they present online. In such a, so to say, "hysterization of the gap," in a literally "plastic" embodiment of its insurmountably, paradoxically as it may seem, the two realities have become truly indivisible.

Because the computer screen is also a means of communication, one's image on the screen-mirror is shared with others. In the digital virtual reality, we are, in an unprecedented way, constantly looking at ourselves when interacting with other people (via video calls, video conferences, streams, and so on). This has become a new form (and a new norm) of digital virtual social interaction. Unlike in the (mythical) actual non-digital reality, where I, when interacting with other people, played with the specular screen in making myself a *picture* for the gaze of the Other, in the digital virtual interaction I at the same time look at my *image* in the mirror. I show myself to the Other, and I at the same time *look at myself showing myself*. The selfie is a prime example – but many mechanisms on the Internet work like this; much of how we make ourselves a picture in the scopic field is monitored by us looking in the mirror, where we are driven to see the ideal image of ourselves.

When watching my mirror image on my computer screen, I am using the computer screen as a materialized representational screen of my psychic apparatus. I am making a "projection" of my imaginary self-perception on the digital screen. When sharing a selfie with my collocutor, I believe he can see me just as I see myself. However, even if the other looks at me through the filter of my selfie image, which I consider to correspond to my ideal ego, the exhibitionistic demand (*I want you to look at me from the place from where I see you*) would still not be fulfilled. The place from where I see the objects, and, among them, also other people and my own image in the mirror, never coincides with the place from where the other, my collocutor, sees me. This is because the true origin of my vision is not in my eye, forming, in my mind (and now, in the digital virtual,

on the computer screen) a representation of the world, but is rather the place of my symbolic inscription, the place where I, as a subject, emerge in the symbolic. It is this symbolic place, wherefrom I structure my imaginary perspective. The illusion of a selfie as the fulfilment of the exhibitionistic demand is therefore nothing but a result of the "retroversion effect" as a paradoxical winding of subjectivity where the imaginary self-experiencing of the 'I' (*moi*) as the origin of its actions is the way the subject "blinds itself to its radical dependence on the big Other, on the symbolic, of which it is the effect."[62]

A computer screen as a means of communication taking up the role of a mirror is not at all an innocent technological improvement. Rather, what it brings along is a fundamental transformation of the traditional function of the mirror. Never before in the history of technological development has it happened that the closed intimate relationship between me and my reflection in the mirror, as a basic paradigm of the mirror image, has been penetrated by another relationship. Exactly this is now made possible by a digitally shared mirror image. In a videocall, another person (or more of them, even a global community) is entering the one-to-one relation between me and my mirror reflection. This interference has a severe impact on both one's imaginary and symbolic identification. Through the eye of my selfie camera, the other sees my image in the mirror not as the outside observer from his own perspective, but from the same angle, with the same light, and so on, as I do. He sees *exactly* what I see: my image in the mirror. Like a vampire, he can observe my mirror image without being visible in the mirror himself. As an odd *inversion of the figure of the double*, the other literally "settles in my eye", intruding into my intimate relationship with my reflection in the mirror, which I, in my introspection, perceive as "myself". Here again, just from an inverted position, the double threatens to eliminate me as his rival, not by taking my place in the world, like in Golyadkin's schizophrenic delusion in Dostoevsky's *The Double*, but by stealing the origin of my vision.

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[62] Slavoj Žižek, "Graf želje" [The Graph of Desire"], *Vestnik Inštituta za marksistične študije*, IX, Vol. 2, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, 1988, p. 49. Available at https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski--vestnik/article/view/3631/3325, accessed 23 November 2022. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: "*Omenjeni 'učinek retroverzije' se opira prav na imaginarno raven, t. j. nosi ga iluzija jaza kot avtonomnega dejavnika, kot nosilca, ki je že od vsega začetka navzoč kot samodejni izvir svojih dejanj : to imaginarno samodoživljanje jaza kot izvira svojih dejanj je način, kako subjekt sprevidi, kako se zaslepi za svojo radikalno odvisnost od velikega Drugega, od simbolnega, čigar učinek v resnici je.*"

The double sees *my* image as the image of *himself* – which is only possible if he, when invading my eye, occupies not only my imaginary perspective from which I form my ideal ego, but also the symbolic place from which I, for real, see myself: the place of my ego ideal.

By sharing my mirror image on the computer screen, however, I do not relate only to my collocutor, but also to the camera's eye. The relation between my mirror image and myself is mediated by a camera. The mirror does not have an eye – it is a reflective screen. The camera, conversely, possesses an eye, the phantasmal origin of vision. The computer screen turns into a mirror only with the mediation of a camera. Leaning on the fantasy of the omni-voyeur as an all-encompassing source of power,[63] I imagine the camera eye is looking at me. I fantasize the big Other is watching me, and that I am under the absolute control of this Gaze (remember the paranoiac covering of webcams with adhesive tape so that some hacker-robbers will not be able to study one's apartment through it?). Unlike in the (mythical) non-digital actual reality, however, the Gaze of the selfie camera does not extend all around, but is, so I imagine, clearly directed through one tiny hole. The digital-virtual omni-voyeur seems to be peeping through a keyhole. So, to maintain the idea of the omni-voyeur in the age of digital technology, I need to presume cameras are everywhere. Albeit this perspective can be paranoid, it is a fact that cameras are everywhere today (there is some real cause of paranoia): not only fixed, like in Orwell's *1984*, but mostly mobile. In the reality of instanternity, the controlled society is turning into a self-controlled and auto-controlled one.

From another point of view, because I am the operator of my device, I can, so I believe, manipulate the Gaze. I can control how the camera captures the world, and also how it captures my image in the mirror. In the digital virtual reality, the original exhibitionistic disposition of the subject is transfigured in such a way that when I show myself to the gaze of the Other (playing with a specular screen, which is now externalized, and making myself a picture), I at the same time try to control this gaze. When making a selfie, or observing my *image* on the computer screen during, say, a Zoom conference, I try to factor the Other's gaze into

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[63] "The spectacle of the world, in this sense, appears to us as all-seeing. This is the phantasy to be found in the Platonic perspective of an absolute being to whom is transferred the quality of being all-seeing." (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 75.)

this photo, that is, how I am being photographed, as a *picture*, in the field of the gaze and the light.

As we have seen before, in a computer screen as the virtual-actual object, the representational and the specular screen as the two functions of a psychic apparatus somewhat weirdly overlap. The computer screen plays the role of the representational screen insofar as I imagine seeing the world on it, that is, images and videos of people, of objects and events, and also of myself. But as soon as I *share* my image with my collocutor or post it on the Internet, the computer screen turns into a specular screen, on which I give myself into the gaze of the Other. However, as the two screens of my psychic apparatus are both materialized in the computer screen, I, in the case of selfies, try to "glue" the materialized representational screen onto the materialized specular screen. I try to "superimpose" my image over my picture. In doing so, I want my collocutor to see the computer screen not as my specular screen on which I reflect the world as a *speculum mundi*, but as my representational screen on which I – in an exhibitionistic demand – expose the illusion of my imaginary self-perception. Using a selfie camera, I interact with others through some sort of "imaginary filter", which functions as a damper of social interaction beyond the geometral parameters of the image. As Dolar points out somewhere, "the image began to serve as that in which desire cannot quite recognize itself as desire and which always betrays it." [64]

The Auto-modelling of Subjectivity and the Domination of the Image

The overlapping of the two psychic screens materialized in the computer screen results in the *auto-modelling of subjectivity* as the principle individual's imaginary inscription in the spectacle of instanternity. Auto-modelling, which has been showing its contours more and more clearly in recent decades, refers to two characteristics of the processes of modelling, that is, of reifying the individual in the digital virtual, i.e. to these processes being *autistic* insofar as they are radically reflexive and self-referential, and to them being *automated* inasmuch as they are not (solely) individually controlled or guided, but are produced

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[64] Mladen Dolar, *Samozavedanje: Heglova Fenomenologija duha II.* [Self-Consciousness: Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit II.], Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 1992, p. 23. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: "*podoba je začela služiti kot tisto, v čemer se želja ravno ne more prepoznati kot želja in kar jo vselej izda.*"

through the fluidity of the technologically inter-mediated relations. Auto-modelling refers to Internet exhibitionism as the *narcissistic* part of the ambivalence of the scopic drive. When someone's mirror image (i.e. a selfie) as a representation of an individual is "glued" onto his playing with the specular screen, the individual's self-reflection acquires a self-referential, autistic form: what he engages with in the space of the Other as a *speculum mundi* are all the (imaginary) reflections of himself. This process is *automated* in a sort of an "infinite mirror": once you roll the digital-virtual machine, algorithms start to reproduce the schema by themselves.

The representational screen overriding the specular screen as the prevalent principle of the digital virtual social interaction begets the *domination of the image* in the spectacle of instanternity. The ascendancy of the image promotes *narcissistic exhibitionism*, which again actuates the reign of the image. The prevailing imaginary environment of the Internet captures the subject in auto-modelling as a narcissistic-exhibitionistic trap, thereby reproducing "pathological narcissism", which (and this is its vicious circle), in the absence of the ego ideal, is easily caught in this trap and even reproduces it. With this self-supporting structural process, the apparition of the subject in the field of the gaze and the light beyond the geometral parameters of the image, that is, on the level of the symbolic, which staples the realm of vision with the realm of language, is to a large extent blocked. The reduction of the field of vision to the reign of image has, of course, already taken place in the old spectacle – the point is that here, unlike in the old spectacle, this reduction is established through the intervention of an individual, the "user" – through his active engagement in following his passive, that is, his exhibitionistic aim. Thereby, it turns into *auto-reduction*.

The Internet voyeur, the stalker, is driven in his obsession with the "this is not it" relation to the object of his desire, which functions as its lever: *what I look at is never what I wish to see.*

The stalker's double thrill – and in the spectacle of instanternity we are all stalkers – resembles the double thrill of the old-fashioned voyeur. On the one hand, he wants to catch the other at the point where he does not show, in order to finally see, in his fantasy, what he wishes to see. This part of the excitement is powered by his relation to the *objet a*. On the other hand, the stalker is driven by the frisson of shame that he feels in a state of suspicion that he himself might be caught

in his ignominious act of stalking. This part of the thrill is related to the big Other. The shame of the stalker, however, is not only about him being ensnared in his physical existence sitting on the bed in his room and stalking others through his computer screen, but also about his stalking being revealed within the digital traits. Passing invisibly between the two realities, the Gaze is all around.

Surfing through all the selfies, where the targeted individual (the object of the voyeur's desire) is trying to convince the Other that he *is* the image of himself, and through all the photos where this individual is posing for someone else's camera, the stalker is looking for photos from parties and other occasions where the other is captured when unaware of being watched and photographed (the more awkward or intimate the situation, the higher the excitement). But what the stalker gets in such a case is again an image, someone else's (that is, the photographer's) representation of the other: in this manner again there is someone, the paparazzi-photographer, who attempts to regulate the Gaze editing his representation of how he saw the other. The Internet stalker tries to penetrate through the narcissist self-referentiality of the Internet exhibitionist, who covers his screen with endless layers of images looped in an infinity-mirror effect. The image-shower makes the stalker apathetic: you have blinded me by showing me how you want to be seen, and in doing so you confront me only too bluntly with the fact that what I am looking at is not what I want to see – you do not stimulate my desire, you are killing it: I don't want to look at you anymore. Only by reaching beyond the auto-modelling of the Internet exhibitionist can the true drive of the Internet voyeur be triggered: only there can he fail to see what he wishes to see and only there can he be driven by the thrill of being caught in his secret act.

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Unlike the Internet exhibitionist, the stalker is, following his active aim, not caught in the imaginary mirror-cage of auto-modelling – or at least, even if he is addicted to this activity (for he is nothing but the exhibitionist's flipside), he tries to break through its inner cracks due to the structure of his desire – which makes him (that is, his position) the "transformative potential" of the spectacle of instanternity.

Conclusion

This analysis of voyeurism and exhibitionism on the Internet, namely, in the spectacle of instanternity as the reality irreversibly permitted and determined by the digital virtual, has brought us to the following conclusions:

1. Although the digital virtual cannot be reduced to its specular aspect (the digital virtual reality does not function only in the field of vision), the field of vision, as long as we operate with computer screens, preconditions the digital virtual reality.

2. This means that voyeurism and exhibitionism as the two mechanisms of the scopic drive, that is, the two ways the subject is constituted in the field of vision – despite the fact that language, written and spoken, is present on the Internet to the same extent as visual content – are the fundamental principles operating in, and structuring, the digital virtual.

3. Subsequently, the changes in the operation of voyeurism and exhibitionism in the digital virtual compared to the (now only mythical) non-digital actual have a significant impact on the constitution of subjectivity in the reality of instanternity, and, with this, also on the prospects of sociality in the future.

4. These changes are related to a) the fact that the digital virtual and the non-digital actual are (or soon will be) inseparable, and to a certain extent also indistinguishable, so that the individual is on both sides, constantly and repetitively traversing the unsurmountable gap between them and riding on the waves of their reciprocal alienation, and b) to the technological improvements that are penetrating certain basic relations underlying the mechanisms of voyeurism and exhibitionism, namely the relation of the subject to the object, to another subject (as the object of desire), and to the Other (which, in the field of vision, operates as the Gaze), as well as the relation of the individual to himself *qua* the object (the narcissistic proposition of turning round upon one's own self), that is, to his own mirror image, and therefore affects the formation of the psychic constellations of the ego, the ideal ego, the ego ideal, and the superego.

5. The screen of a desktop computer or a mobile phone equipped with two cameras brings about the following changes, which fundamentally impact the constitution of subjectivity and intersubjectivity:

a) The computer screen as the actual-virtual object conjoins the two screens (the representational and the specular) operating in our psychic apparatus and defining our functioning in the scopic field. "Materialized" in one single object, which is, as no object before, both physical and digital, the two structurally diverse screens somehow forcibly overlap. This overlapping results in a number of psychic consequences (obsessive selfie-mania or attempted control of the Gaze, hallucinatory fixations to the Gaze as in "Snapchat dysmorphia", or the paranoiac fantasies of being under the control of the Gaze, and so on). Notwithstanding these effects on the psychic constellations, the most important consequence of the overlapping of the two screens materialized in the computer screen is *the representational screen overriding the specular screen*, which results in the *domination of the image* in the spectacle of instanternity.

b) With a selfie camera, or webcam, installed above the screen, a computer screen acquires the function of a mirror. Unprecedently, we now interact with others while looking at ourselves in the mirror. This has become the new norm of digital virtual communication.

c) With this new norm, and with the representational screen overriding the specular screen, communication as such has become (self-)representation.

d) In such a disposition, an individual – necessarily, structurally – gets caught in the *auto-modelling of subjectivity* as a narcissistic, exhibitionistic self-referential cycle, which again reproduces the reign of the image.

e) The computer screen brings about a historical transformation of the function of the mirror: the intrusion of the other – as the double – in an individual's intimate relationship with his mirror image.

6. Although the exhibitionistic-voyeuristic interplay, unlike Debord's old spectacle, is enabled in the spectacle of instanternity, it still results in

the euthanization of the political subject: the spectacle of instanternity, namely, *actively produces the passive position of the exhibitionist, while it puts to sleep the active position of the voyeur* (it makes him apathetic). Because of this, the spectacle of instanternity produces a paradoxical situation: the very interaction with others prevents intersubjective relations.[65]

7. At various levels, the *abolition of the ego ideal* is at work in the digital virtual. The reduction of the scopic field to the realm of the image promotes narcissism, which, as a pathology, emerges exactly due to the unsuccessful symbolic identification. Caught in a trap of auto-modelling, "pathological narcissism" has overflowed into the digital virtual. Simultaneously, the transformation of the function of the mirror brought about by the computer screen also undermines symbolic identification, because the other, as an uncanny double, in an unprecedented way intrudes upon my origin of vision displaced in the symbolic.

8. Instead of the ego ideal, there comes the network. Power relations today are not predominantly hierarchical, but function for the most part as "points of coincidence and accumulation" in a system of multi-dimensional interconnections. This is where the network of the World Wide Web and the network of the established global free market economy are perfectly aligned – in this sense, the Internet truly functions as a "materialized ideology".

9. The "pathological narcissist" is embedded in it. By his essential constitution – marked by a lack of symbolic identification – the "pathological narcissist" is the exact opposite of a political subject.

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[65] This can be referenced to Samo Tomšič's notion of the *antisociality of capitalism*: "By imposing relations of competition as the paradigm of social bond, capitalism in fact performs a foreclosure of the social, thus allowing only a politics of animosity or ressentiment. No surprise, then, that, together with the foreclosure of solidarity, equality was replaced by a quasi-naturalized vision of inequality while freedom became associated first and foremost with the market, thus becoming the unbound, absolute freedom of economic abstractions. Within this framework, the other's freedom no longer functions as condition and constraint of my own freedom, but as a threat." (Samo Tomšič, "No Such Thing as Society? On Competition, Solidarity, and Social Bond", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Critique*, Vol. 33., Nos. 2-3, Duke University Press, Durham, 2022, pp. 62–63.)

10. To exit the spectacle that materializes the ideology of neoliberal market economy, a change in the existent libidinal economy would be necessary – or vice versa – the question is what socio-technological constellation could establish a libidinal economy that could generate a new political subject. Assuming that a return to a pre-digital reality is not possible, the only way forward seems to be to posit a radically different relationship between the Internet, as the technological essence of the age of instanternity, and the World Wide Web, as its "ideological materialization". One that would break through the self-generating mechanism fostered by the inherent relationship between the reign of the image, narcissistic exhibitionism, "pathological narcissism", autism, the injunction to enjoy, and slavish subordination to the network. The Internet, with hypertext as a symbolic structure of a different scale, indeed makes this theoretically possible (remember the utopian dreams of its pioneers?). The practical incentives in this direction are few, but on the rise.

11. At this point, however – before any further analysis – we can conclude with an approximate assumption that the transformative potential inscribed in the spectacle of instanternity is implied in the voyeur, who is, unlike the exhibitionist, able to distance himself from the self-referentiality and self-generation of the spectacle due to the logic of his desire.

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