Digitization of empathy: vital subsumption and digitization of the person

Digitalizzazione dell'empatia: sussunzione vitale e digitalizzazione della persona.

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Abstract. The objective of this article is to highlight the role of new technologies, emphasizing how the high level of technologization allows for a twofold analysis: a) we note how interactions are mediated mostly by a screen; as a result, emotions undergo transformations, ranging from an attenuation of empathy to the fetishism of it. (b) the passive use of these technologies, combined with the lack of critical analysis on the part of most of its users, allows a vital subsumption within an "other-world" (far from the world of life), virtual but superimposed on the real. Hence a distorted use of the "world", manifested in the worst expression of empathy, on platforms that are used as work, Twitch and OnlyFans. Indeed, some users are live every day and viewers have their control with donations. Juxtaposing these two visions might allow for a reinterpretation of what Terranova pointed out, namely that the dazzle of internet freedom, or the internet of life, was followed by the bitter discovery; however, it is no longer the dazzle of internet freedom that is frightening, but the lack of adequate media literacy that allows users the acceptance that the new mission of the internet of life has assumed.

Keywords: digital social work, empathy, Twitch, OnlyFans, social emotions.

Abstract. L'obiettivo di questo articolo è quello di evidenziare il ruolo delle nuove tecnologie, sottolineando come l'alto livello di tecnologizzazione permetta una duplice analisi: da un lato, notiamo come le interazioni siano mediate per lo più da uno schermo; pertanto, le emozioni subiscono trasformazioni, che vanno da un'attenuazione dell'empatia al feticismo della stessa. Dall'altro lato, l'uso passivo di queste tecnologie, affiancato alla mancanza di un'analisi critica da parte della maggior parte dei suoi utenti, permetta una sussunzione vitale all'interno di un "mondo-altro" (lontano dal mondo-della-vita), virtuale ma sovrapposto al reale. Da qui un uso distorto del "mondo", che si manifesta nella sua massima espressione, utilizzando il significato peggiore di empatia, su piattaforme che vengono utilizzate come lavoro, Twitch e OnlyFans. Infatti, alcuni utenti sono in diretta ventiquattro ore al giorno e gli spettatori hanno il controllo della loro vita attraverso donazioni. Accostare queste due visioni potrebbe permettere di reinterpretare ciò che Terranova ha sottolineato in più occasioni, ovvero all'abbaglio della libertà di internet, o internet della vita, è seguita l'amara scoperta;

tuttavia, non è più l'abbaglio della libertà di internet a spaventare, ma la mancanza di un'adeguata alfabetizzazione mediatica che permette agli utenti l'accettazione che la nuova missione dell'internet-della-vita ha assunto.

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of technologies capable of making radical changes in the world affects every aspect of living, so says a 2018 article by Pisanu. In fact, in agreement with the author, it should be emphasized that innovation has important impacts not only in the scientific sphere, or in the application of new technologies, but also on society itself, which is faced with increasing challenges. In this scenario, it is not enough for governments to identify the right way to manage change related to technological advancement and the delicate relationships between innovation, business, and society, with a view to adapting to change; it is necessary for society to learn the appropriate knowledge to be able to use these tools and to be able to fit into this new scenario (Pisanu, 2018). One of the analyses of the situation is contained in the Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook of the OECD, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which focuses precisely on adaptation to technological and social upheavals. What emerges from reading the document is a picture characterized by complexity and uncertainty among stakeholders (OECD, 2021). The report simply focuses on the policy changes needed to respond to the "disruptions", as they are called in the text, taking place in the social, technological, economic and environmental spheres, offering only one of the possible readings. Therefore, in this paper, an attempt will be made to highlight the social role of these new technologies, emphasizing how digital social work is as necessary as it is delicate. So, a process of digitization, defined in accordance with Lopez & Marcuello-Servos as «the set of relationships, structures and elements involved in the assumption of ICTs in any aspect of life» (López & Marcuello-Servós, 2018, p. 801), that is transforming innovation itself, deconstructing what until now was recognized as a good norm, trivially the caution that some used for network access, and restructuring, in addition to the network itself, scientific practices. However, what is superficially analyzed and what few authors have considered in the analyses addressed to date is the practical change in the relationships, socializations, interactions and reading of emotions that underlie the processes of digitization, i.e., all those that take place because of and through the network. The tendency is to adapt old conceptions arising from a physical interpersonal relationship to those that occur, today, mediated by a screen (ibidem). It is clear that it is neither useful nor sufficient to implement such a process, as what is lacking are analyses of the mediums used, the manner and intensity of the emotion felt. Therefore, it leads, on the one hand, to a mitigation of empathy and emotions in general and, on the other hand, to a fetishism of them. Certainly, digitization processes offer new opportunities to involve stakeholders in different stages of the process, and, as is increasingly the case, new job opportunities are generated; but what escapes us is that these new job opportunities, which through distorted uses and behaviors, can create a life subsumption precess that hurts not only work processes, but the individual himself. Such a process occurs when life becomes labor-power because the brain becomes machine, that is, fixed capital and variable capital at the same time (Molteni & Alì, 2017). So, these attitudes could create a passive use of technologies, becoming the tool at the service of people who fail to critically analyze the mechanisms, generating the vital subsumption that transforms the world-of-life, which Husserl uses to indicate not only a pre-scientific knowledge of the world, but the kind of knowledge that underlies all others and to which we preempt by intuition, into an "other-world", virtual that overlaps with the real, which lacks critical analysis, insight and, above all, knowledge (Husserl, 1952).

Taking Fea's words from 2017, in fact, it seems that «the development of technologies that act on the mechanisms of choices and gratifications has the potential to shape our behavior and can foster the unconscious establishment of 'bad habits,' that is, habits that have negative consequences and are likely to escape the control of those subject to them» (Fea, 2017, p. 16). This is because, much of human behavior is based on habits, this has an active value for people, making the mental response fast; however, at the same time we are vulnerable to tools that can condition our mechanisms (Ibid.). In fact, technological tools placed on the market are designed and developed to foster their consumption, the same thing happens with social. So, to foster our consumption they need our needs and, more often than not, create new needs. The risk is to become, within a process of subsumption, to be distracted and addicted consumers, not only in the work one does, but also of the emo-

tions one feels within the same work. To explore these aspects in the best way possible, it will be necessary to briefly describe what is meant by social emotions.

2. SOCIAL EMOTION

Starting from Sicora's words, we could say that emotions, represent a crucial component of every organization and every job. In fact, what is interesting is that «emotions are not a mere appendage of the individual's work experience, but a fundamental dimension in the definition of work environments» (Sicora, 2022, p. 14). Therefore, of paramount importance becomes the ability of everyone to lend luster to this definition, the only path toward determining not only a social but also a legal definition of digital work. So, the process of digitization of life slowly permeates in each person, this entails, in most cases, an insufficient life-digitalization education that tends more toward lack than surplus. In this regard, emotions, assuming empathy as the main emotion, become a tool through which to do harm, generate violence and, most importantly, work failures. This, in turn, generates «a vicious cycle of exclusion and/ or separation or forced homogenization and lobotomization of one's emotions» even before one's work, leaving those who are placed in a condition of subalternity to the other with only two options, homogenization towards those in power, a kind of Marxian possession of the means of production, or having something useful to offer to power, generating in this case the perpetuation of the condition of subalternity (Ibidem, p. 21).

What has been described is useful in highlighting the new dynamics of networked work, trying to exercise a rereading of what Terranova's words were, namely the great blunder that humanity has taken regarding the freedom of the internet model, the internet of things and, today, the internet of life; it has followed, little by little, the phase from the bitter discovery, coming to the understanding that very little freedom exists, between profiling and banning (Bauman & Lyon, 2014). However, it is no longer the dazzle of network freedom that is frightening, it is clear to all that this aspect does not exist and has never existed, rather it is as if the opposite phenomenon has been unleashed, there is fear of total freedom (Terranova, 2022). One of the possible readings that could be made, avoiding the reification of the network on the one hand and total and totalizing generalization on the other, is to refer to the bio-cognitive process of neo-Marxism, or at any rate to start from this concept. In fact, in this case, what could generate a wake-up call is the passivity with which several users

accept this new mission of the internet-of-life; some users experience a kind of habituation towards the proposed content, almost bored by the elements they view, scrolling quickly, in the homepages of social networks, rather than in the reels or content proposed by the various social networks. This sense of addiction leads, in extreme cases, to blasé users, wandering the Web waiting for the novelty that might trigger ten minutes of psychic and emotional well-being. The latter can range from watching a suggested YouTube joke, for example, to an emotional Instagram video, rather than watching particularly interesting live streams on Twitch. An example, of the latter case, involves user Miss Behavin, who in 2020 decided to start a live stream on Twitch during which she stripped off her clothes, thinking it was the only way to quickly attract people and subscribers. Indeed, the rumor quickly made its way around the web, especially on Discord, an instant messaging platform for the videogamers community, attracting hundreds of viewers. It was promptly banned by Twitch for behavior that violated its rules, but it quickly garnered fans on other social profiles, such as Twitter, Instagram, and OnlyFans. This latter process is the synthesis of what has been the transition from a real subsumption, one of the categories with which Marx analyzed the capitalist mode of production, that is, the transposition into the sphere of relations of production, in which the universal determines the phenomenal content of the particular and in which the real itself has returned to its foundation, determining the very mode of being of labor by the capitalist social relation that encompasses it; to a vital subsumption, that is, when life becomes labor-power and the brain becomes a machine, at the same time one is "fixed capital and variable capital", an intensification of labor performance is achieved and, having reached its maximum, vital subsumption capable of extracting relative surplus-value is generated (Marx, 1867). Or as Hochschild masterfully pointed out in her reinterpretation of intimate life, where emotional expressions, care for the other and attitudes of caring, are tested in a culture increasingly marked by "commercial" self-promotion and the instrumental quantification of all human feeling. Or, again, the analysis Illouz proposes referring to particular meeting places that in the early 2000s were depopulating online, namely online marriage agencies, where the meeting takes place online but leads to a non-virtual relationship. The element of bodily sensitivity and imagination is missing, almost commodifying the self and standardizing encounters by making them repetitive (Illouz, 2006). Obviously, the existence of the network and its analysis is not enough to describe the identity transformations taking place; an in-depth anal-

ysis of individuals' capacity for identification is needed. So, the person becomes more and more machine and the machine more and more the object of the capitalist, which in this case is yes acephalous with the network, but it is transmuted in a well-defined and clear process, the prime example being big data (Gambetta, 2018).

In this discourse, what is evidently missing is the lack of emotion, that social emotion that arises when one is in the presence of others, paradoxically, networked relationships allow one to triple the contacts, to be among hundreds of people, yet what is missing is the emotional process that is triggered in a relationship. Work, within this eternal subsumption relationship, generates highly volatile emotions that one does not have the time to experience, empathy, for example, becoming increasingly nuanced, perhaps confusing it and generating a kind of emotional confusion. Actually, several authors, including Bischof-Köhler, Bonino, Lo Coco, and Tani have reflected on improper uses of empathy, generating general attention within Bellingreri's 2013 essay, the latter describing «distinction between 'proper' empathy and 'improper' forms of empathy. The former involves the acquisition of the capacity for emotional sharing and becomes "mature" when the sharing draws on the personal world of the other seen and understood precisely as another» (Bellingreri, 2013, p. 3). However, the second type of empathy, that belonging to the improper forms, might be of greater interest in this context. Therefore, we might think that the latter, understood as those forms in which no real emotional sharing takes place, but only a "getting passionate about the emotional condition of the other", might genre a process of mitigation of emotions, causing what might be called habituation, leading to their limitation and a failure to meet with pleasure. The concept of empathy, however, is not just, altruism, cooperation and ethics, or as Baron-Choen wrote in one of his essays devoted to the origins of cruelty, that empathy makes problems soluble (Baron-Choen, 2011), on the contrary and in agreement with what Lipps first and Donise later pointed out, empathy could be negative, i.e., «the demand from the object is there and it is also a demand for mimetic adherence, but there is some element that prevents positive empathy, i.e., that prevents awakening the pleasure I see in another person's face» (Donise, 2019, pp. 214-215; Lipps, 1896). This attitude, due to issues of streaming offerings and the practical possibility of being able to stream certain content, is most present in two social networks that will be analyzed in the next section, namely Twitch and OnlyFans. Going into the specifics by highlighting the work of two very particular users; in fact, it is possible to note that, both in public chats and among the comments

of their posts, there are comments that are anything but happy and empathetic, this is because the action they see someone perform is disturbing to someone and does not provoke that sympathetic reaction, on the contrary it generates negative empathy or disgust because the content-creator appears happy or satisfied with what he or she has done. So, it is a mimetic process that «radically calls into question us, bringing the other [to us] closer. If there is something in the other's behavior that [we] will not [do] or [would] like to do, it is precisely such unconscious and instinctive rapprochement that provokes [the physical reaction] of revulsion and disgust» (Ibid.). One could almost lump this discourse with what Clarke analyzed, namely, that when we sympathize, we not only express our concern and care for the other, but also accumulate "sympathy credits" for ourselves, these credits, in turn, could represent the dark aspect of sympathy analyzed in the text, namely, using them to gain power over others in everyday encounters (Clarke, 1998).

In this regard, associating the discourse proposed here with the analysis made by Griziotti, it is evident that society, now characterized by cognitive capitalism or neurocapitalism, bases everything on the innate/acquired pair, manipulating it and even going so far as to modify its social relations and interpretation of the social (Griziotti, 2016). We note that within this "game", due to the modification of classical capitalism, the person can be understood as a machine, or worse human capital, and therefore is "forced" to earn time for life that is increasingly equal to time for work. He will never, however, have the ability to live life, unless, as in the two examples given, that life becomes work itself. Today, influencers are doing just that, making life work and work life, generating a whirlwind of elements that can intersect with each other, doubling work time and halving lifetime, blurring them into a single concept. In this regard, it would be useful to extend Perniola's discussion of television, that is, defining the person as one thing, one object (Oggetto Cosale), capable of being manipulated at the will of others, as he did in his famous experiment performed with an old cathode ray tube TV and a magnet resting on it (Perniola, 2004). So, the person becomes a mixture of being-essence-work, and his or her past experiences are thinned out to the point of experiencing the world-other than the world-of-life. We become more and more subject to the new market logics and the person/machine relationship becomes ever closer; this combination makes the person no longer at the center of any scientific discourse, but rather a manipulable object and, consequently, a thing among things (Perniola, Benvenuto & Cimino, 2013). The example is again addressed to those users,

whose lives are in an eternal live, which brings us back to something of Orwellian memory, where the ever-present control, the "live of lives" is ever-increasing and "Big Brother" becomes something effective, where the commodification is not of the body, but of life and the time of life (Orwell, 1949). However, what is interesting is how sociology today can use this knowledge to read the new changing society, not only from an emotional and empathic point of view, but able to understand how, as Ardigo argued, the person can be placed at the center of any discourse. In detail, we would have to analyze to what extent the use of digital tools such as gaming, gamefication and digital education, applied in all areas of social work, is useful. We are certainly not talking about new concepts, but certainly the dynamics and perspectives related to the use of such technologies appear new. It is interesting to propose a different reading from the one just made, but at the same time important, by reporting the description of a positive empathy analyzed by the last Ardigo. So, an empathy that becomes the necessary premise within a communicative interchange, capable of merging the exit from personal self-reference toward an intersubjective objectivity. Therefore, he uses the concept of empathy to show, with Husserl, how one can arrive at intersubjective objectivity. This is the itinerary through which social life is founded (Ardigo, 1997). In addition, he identifies three problems on which consciousness reflects and questions its relationship with the world, which we could translate and repropose today from the relations with the digitization of the world:

1) «The problem of the validity of self-consciousness, that is, the problem of validity in terms of truth in knowing» (Martini, 2010, p. 188). This first point is overturned today; we note at once that the problem of the validity of self-consciousness presents an inherent problem that lies in the meaning of knowing. Knowledge is based, increasingly, by experiential referral processes rather than direct experience, the example being the ambivalence of knowledge about new products. For example, the new digital coins, we find two distinct types of experiential and knowledge dissemination, on the one hand, the person who, despite knowing well the processes underlying network elements, for example, digital coins, is cautiously exposed in considering such tools as a source of wealth; on the other hand, there are hundreds of influencers who in sponsoring these coins, tend to emphasize their ability to attract wealth out of thin air. This generates, in the eyes of the blasé user, a new blunder, believing those who have more followers (usually the informed and cautious user is followed less than those who do the opposite), easy wealth through delicate tools. Therefore, the problem highlighted by Ardigo, is still a problem today, amplified and dangerous to investigate.

2) «The problem of the external world and other minds, which refers back to the problem of opening up to the other than myself (Ibid.; Mora, 1993; Stein, 1985; Simmel, 1983)» (Ibid., p. 189). Here again, as in the previous point, the real problem lies in the capacity for subjective critique toward the medium and, more importantly, the capacity to relate to the other through the medium. What kind of relationship are we talking about? It is plausible to assume that the relationship that is established could be as powerful, as a feeling, as weak as a bond. Thus, it proves difficult to enact an expressive social relationship, so much so that the very ability to empathize with the other is challenged, which becomes apparent even before allowing the other's emotions to override one's own. Thus, the empathic bond is distorted, or rather, it is presented as a projection, mediated and weak, risking an excess of negative empathy rather than positive empathy.

3) «The problem of the society in which one lives, i.e., the problem of reality and nature being placed far from the boundaries of living experience» (Ibid., p. 189). At this point, unlike the previous ones, self-consciousness fully exists, however, being the result of fictitious knowledge and resulting from someone else's experience, never directly experienced, the sociability and relationship plot that arises is characterized by weak ties, not understood as done by Granovetter (1998), i.e., considered important not only for the dissemination of information and the development of cohesion in society, but also for the promotion of individual goals, but understood as Coleman (2005), i.e., as a disadvantage resulting from the closure of social networks. Therefore, in the case of technological digitization, individuals tend toward self-awareness through individualism and personal fulfillment, feeling empathy for themselves and forgetting the presence of the other.

The one advocated by Ardigò, in arguing for the need for a sui generis reality, which tends to self-referentialism in the network, is an open social system, where, this last adjective, is understood as the social system that is able to develop privileged and assumed channels, of strong correspondence, with the internal human environment, formed by subjects-persons (set of corporeality and intentionality) who are in everyday world relations.

It is therefore these subject-persons who compose the internal human environment.

Indeed, in terms of sociology that places the person at the center, empathy assumes an important role, as society finds itself participating in a relational and interactional process permeated in the everyday. However, the processes of digitization exclude the everyday from their experiencing, generating, within a scientistic reductionism of measurement and reduction to a digital universalism, a reductionist type of operation that is not within a humanizing vision of society as Ardigo had it. Thus, the process of technological digitization has led to substantial changes within digital social work, and in this new and unprecedented context it is necessary to ask to what extent social work will be transformed by the possibilities offered by the process of technological digitization. Therefore, by placing the everyday at the center of the technological discourse, avoiding the exclusionary view that some governments are taking, and placing weak ties only as one of the possible options for the success of digital social work and not as the only way forward, it will be possible to bring out the full capabilities and usefulness of digital social work. In addition, it is necessary to distinguish, as done earlier by Putnam (2000) and taken up by Lancee in 2010, between bonding and bridging, i.e., ties between people who are similar in age, for example, and ties those cross various lines of social diversity, focusing on a relationship between the two concepts. This is because the network, as well as the economy in the Netherlands, as argued by Lancee, fosters ties both between heterogeneous individuals and between individuals who are united by cohorts (Lancee, 2010).

Of course, the in-depth discussion in the next paragraph describes two extreme examples of this phenomenon, but the note that leads to their concern is that they are not isolated, in fact there are plenty of them on the two platforms, but they are not the only social to be paid attention to, the same influencers on Instagram, perhaps better known, proceed in a very similar way. The problem is not easy to solve, as the "fault" is inherent and must be observed in the very concept of digital work, or what we have become accustomed to calling digital work. Surely, there would need to be a new consciousness-raising to de-subjectify and re-subjectify, so as to imprint an I and a Self-other, avoiding the current compromise between the We and the world-other that has been generated. Therefore, a description and analysis of the means through which vital subsumption could take place will follow, using two social networking sites that, post-pandemic, have seen a significant increase in their membership: Twitch and OnlyFans.

3. A FIRST READING OF TWITCH AND ONLYFANS

What has been described is thus a kind of preamble to what we experience today on the Net, but especially in that part of the Net that has become the new American dream. The quest for notoriety is becoming more and more pressing, the world is based on views, likes and comments, and the lack of them denotes a social position that relegates the person to anonymity.

To observe these phenomena, qualitative exploratory research has been favored; the choice of the two social networks is dictated by the fact that they are the only ones able to fully restore the sense of the social, but also cultural and infrastructural transformations that digitization is bringing. This research aims to study social interactions in contemporary digital communicative contexts (Kozinets 2010). Therefore, in the first place, the social networks on which to conduct the exploration were defined. The choice fell on Twitch and OnlyFans, as they «favor the birth, dissemination and proliferation of certain content that goes viral», specifically videos and skits (Boccia Artieri et al., 2017, p. 89). The two socials thus present themselves as the ideal platforms to conduct such an analysis, as the way people live within these platforms determines the production of content. Users' choice, on the other hand, is dictated by principles of relevance, activity, interactivity and heterogeneity (Kozinets, 2010; Tirino & Auriemma, 2021). So, two seemingly distant socials in terms of type of service and content offerings, but united by what the "digital age" has created, namely people in search of success who, in exchange for lavish compensation, showcase a digitally constructed self that is increasingly pushed to the extreme to generate unique content. The observation was characterized by a very long period; it began in April 2022, retrieving GSkianto's long live feeds, nearly 600 hours of content; in August, however, Jenna Phillips' more or less short live feeds were retrieved. Comments and interactions that occurred in the chat of the two socials on the two users' channels were then analyzed. Finally, taking up the literature, it was possible to start an analysis of the new job market, which, in extreme cases such as these, comes across as cynical and violent, posing the worst meaning of empathizing with others. In this regard, the characteristics of these two socials are live streams and earning money through subscriptions and donations. On the one hand, we have a platform that bases its success on livestreaming video games; the second, on the other hand, presents itself as a social that offers entertainment services based, for the most part, on explicit content. So, two socials seemingly distant from each other in terms of type of service and content offerings,

but united by what the "digital era" has created, namely people yearning for success, who in addition to receiving various earnings, showcase a digitally constructed self that is increasingly pushed to the extreme to generate unique content. This element, almost rhetorical, has generated what was emphasized in the introductory part of this paper, namely the total detachment from the world-of-life, bringing the vision closer to a world-other that is difficult to replicate, but to be attended to with the utmost care. In fact, Husserl in his analysis of transcendental subjectivism, i.e., to that a-priori of experience, that is, to all that does not derive from experience but is a condition of the constitution of experience itself, aims to emphasize that sensible experience should be set aside, to place the ego at the center (Ibidem). All this is lacking today, preferring a sensible experience, defined as a "dream" by Husserl, but which is transformed into a series of virtual images projected to the individual. So, a kind of return to a pre-Cartesian conception, sanctioning the disappearance of the subjective ego and returning individuals to a torpor in their worldview. Therefore, the world-other that is generated is characterized by objectified visions, virtualizations of visions and virtualized interactions, we could call it "the dream" that is based on a "posterior" of knowledge to the exclusion of a-priori categories that are part of experience.

The virtualization and digitization of the social is not to be considered an error or an omen to be averted, what becomes an error is the overlapping of the two dimensions; the feeling is that there are two levels that should not be exceeded and make the digitization process happen without problems (Pisanu, 2018). The first is characterized by the distinction of two dimensions (real and virtual), both dimensions have their own characteristics, their own ways of interactions, their own analysis, and their own life, as society lives by nuances; on the other hand, we find people, who have different characteristics depending on the place of interaction (again real and virtual), they can be highly social and empathetic in an online relationship, but introverted and not at all prone to empathy in an interpersonal relationship, or vice versa (Donise, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to understand this distinction, especially understanding the dictionaries and symbol system proper to each of the two dimensions. So, these characteristics become the main variable to work on and not the outline toward which to deconstruct in order to restructure the digital. In fact, what is missing in the reinterpretation of these aspects is just that, coming to believe that the overlap of the two worlds is licit starting from the conception that one has of work, in fact generations of influencers, gamers and performers, dedicate their lives for work, as happens in the real level, but generate high profits unlike what happens in the real level (Pink, Ferguson & Kelly, 2022). To better explain the concept, it might come in handy to generate a kind of sociology of Twitch and OnlyFans, describing their main characteristics and bringing practical examples. Social, nowadays and unlike the primitive mission, i.e., to generate virtual squares where people can meet, are characterized by a spasmodic passion toward diversification of content offerings, this leads to an atrocious subsumption of the lives of content-creators. This transforms digital work into a cynical and violent world, which manifests its highest expression in a concept, which until now has meant something else and was dear to Ardigò, namely empathy. The concept of empathy, which we could define as the ability to place oneself in the situation of another person or, more exactly, to immediately understand the emotional processes of the other, becomes something different (Auriemma, Fante, Morese & Palermo, 2021). At a superficial reading, it is not immediately apparent, however, through a careful reading of the corollary of the network, we could understand how much this emotion can take on two totally different meanings, on the one hand it takes on the sense of pity and on the other of cruelty. So, showing "empathy" with partners in a cooperative context, but "counter-empathy" with competitors, for example, instead of smiling when the other person smiles, we simulate grimacing, in the form of emoticons, as if the other person's pleasure disturbs us. When the other shows signs of distress, on the other hand, smiles are manifested, as if we are enjoying their pain. Thus, taking up de Waal, human empathy can be turned into something rather unattractive if the well-being of the other is not in our interest (de Waal, 2009). All this is defined by the ethologist as selfish reactions, which are exactly the opposite of empathic engagement. So, the basis of empathy is transformed from taking pleasure in helping others and from genuinely emotionally oriented toward the other, to destroying the other in its showing off (Ibidem). This attitude is evident through the user GSkianto on Twitch and Jenna Phillips on OnlyFans, two contet-creators noteworthy for the exasperation of what they offer, prime examples of vital subsumption that palpates, once again, the discourses Tiziana Terranova made referring to the internet, which today we could describe as the internet-of-life, that is, that the phase of the dazzle, describing the vision of freedom of the internet and the internet of things, was followed by that of the bitter discovery, generating the exploitation that befalls users and assumes them into itself as part of the mass. At the same time, however, it is possible to agree with Castells in his magnificent

description of the Internet as that place where one can do or not do the same things as the rest of society. Problematizing on control, arguing that when we talk about laws and rules on the Internet, we are talking about something else, namely preventive control. Distinguishing it from TV and newspapers, which have a system of control because proprietary means. Unlike these media, the internet has none of that, it has no owners (Castells, 2009). Therefore, prior control imposed by governments produces diametrically opposite results. Examples of this are the two users described below.

The first example concerns streamer GSkinato (https://www.twitch.tv/gskianto), a streamer who has conquered Twitch with his live streams, to date he has about 736,453 followers. The peculiarity of this user's content is the long live streams, even reaching, at least to date, 54 days in consecutive live streaming, day and night, without ever interrupting it, filming himself even while he sleeps and, through activating banners for donations, receiving gifts that involve being woken up abruptly, forced to scream, rather than being "frozen" while biting food. What has been noted during the long directs are the characteristics with which interactions occur. During the day, while he is awake, users interact with him only via chat, resulting in GSkianto's maximum attention to the screen, often in anger from too many messages he yells and breaks objects. In contrast, while he sleeps, users interact with him via Alexa, which is activated only at the time when donations are made. Right from the start, this nighttime interaction appears violent, as the virtual assistant, at maximum volume, produces sudden noises and sounds of danger designed to abruptly wake the streamer as a reward for the donation made. A kind of thank you for the donation made and incentive to donate more and do worse. To top it off, the requests made by users are among the most disparate and absurd, and most of them are designed to create discomfort to the contet creator. For example, screaming from the bacon in the middle of the night, sleeping sitting in the bathroom, making prank calls. Add to this the hundreds of messages, in live-chat, most of them are negative, hateful, and undermining comments against this person, who is a victim of the transition from "factory" to "digital work". Almost no one expresses "positive" requests or words of "kindness", a small minority feeling compassion for this user tries to end the spectacle by flagging his channel. The reporting, which occurred in remote cases, produces produces a warning to GSkianto by Twitch for violating security terms, generating even more anger at the contet creator. Certainly, this attitude allows him to receive high earnings, but at the same time he becomes the object not only of digital work but also of the public that incentivizes it.

On the other hand, we find an example that is slightly different in manner, but brutally significant and falls under the second aspect of digital-work, emotion fetishism. Jenna Phillips (https://onlyfans.com/yourpup-pygirl), who has thousands and thousands of fans on various socials and thousands of subscribers on Only Fans, is a 22-year-old American woman and webstar of OnlyFans who, in addition to posting nude photos and livestreaming, decided to get paid to be a dog. In practice, in addition to the subscription to her profile that the platform allows, there is the possibility, on the part of users, to make extra donations, and to work, the webstar decided to get real orders in exchange for donations. Some users have offered her 1500 euros or so to shoot personal videos, for example. So, she does live streaming where she barks, eats kibble, or runs on all fours in the park, managing to earn about a hundred thousand dollars a month. In addition, unlike GSkianto, Jenna Phillips receives very few hate messages, the vast majority giving her compliments, requests, and insults, with the purpose of pleasing her sexually. Her reactions, however, are hilarious, she never shows signs of anger or disdain toward those comments, at least in the period surveyed, she never got upset following a message. Finally, which could not be verified, she also lends herself to live privately with users who offer her large sums of money to spend 30 minutes with her in a private show. At a first analysis, we can point out how the relationship, emotional and empathic aspect has been totally transformed, certainly not lacking in its absolute form, but demonstrated in its worst sense, that of "using empathy to hurt the other" (Donise, 2019). Taking up, moreover, Bellingreri's words, we could point out how empathy is «multifaceted and complex, feeding on the bodily presence of the Other and fearing [I would add transforming] the distance of the Net» (Bellingreri, 2013, p. 4). In this case, the fetishism of empathy and emotions in general, lies in that spasmodic search for personal pleasure on the part of the user who gives her orders and, on the other hand, of Jenna who takes pleasure in pleasure, a propaedeutic element to gain.

In this regard, it would be useful to reflect on several aspects, chief among them being education about digitization. In fact, there is no need to react to these phenomena as the Chinese government recently did, announcing a series of changes to the way minors can access and interact with online content, with the National Radio and Television Administration stating that platforms need to intensify controls to prevent underage users from donating to livestreamers, or becoming livestreamers themselves without a check. This comes in the form of two changes to their policies: 1) viewers under

the age of 18 will no longer be able to make donations, a practice whereby those who watch a broadcast can send small amounts of money, usually in exchange for a voice or text acknowledgment of their contribution; 2) anyone watching live streaming content through a minor's account will have all streams blocked after 10 p.m., and content creators will have to tighten peak-hour management for these shows (Zibbo, 2022).

One should center digital social work within a cognitive context, first learning about the medium and then generating a policy that prescinds a knowledge of the instrumentation, ban does not solve the problem, it only generates new ways to circumvent that ban and, thus, the rule. So, what should change is the ban-opticon logic, theorized by Bauman and Lyon (2014), which governs the "digital era" to make way for the "digital education era".

4. CONCLUSIONS

So, sociology will have to understand, or at least attempt to understand, this new perspective, based primarily on understanding the possibility of recognizing us in each other's bodies without the physicality that characterizes societies and the off-line world. As argued by Oatley, emotions serve an adaptive function because they enable us to respond in relevant ways to stimuli in the environment. However, to do so, it will be necessary to develop what he identifies as the emotional component, i.e., to recognize one's own and others' emotions, to be able to define and understand them, and to manage them in their manifestation (Oatley, 2004). Therefore, one of the many processes to pay attention to, could be characterized by the embodiment that is generated in being in the network. A true embodiment in the avatar one creates or, in other cases, of the person one decides to impersonate in certain contests, through which one might even take one's emotional and action contours to extremes. The example, again, is that of the online world through social. What is modified, but not lacking, is the possibility of sharing emotions, the "share" goes through a different intensity, in some cases designed ad hoc, but generating a particular emotional transport. It would be interesting to delve into these aspects through the ability of content creators to share their emotions with their followers and, consequently, to know the degree of embodiment that is generated. So, in agreement with Oatley, this new process of digitization is certainly transforming empathy and emotions in general, confusing them, perhaps, with other types of greater intensity. But more importantly, it is transforming the ways in which they can be shared in social work as well.

To conclude, then, it is necessary to understand that today, work is viewed physically and culturally in a diametrically opposed way to the past. As read in the first paragraph, the process of digitization of life, which has been undertaken, is slowly permeating in each of us. So, what is lacking, in most cases, is life-digitalization education, the only element capable of general that transition that could bring digital social work to be recognized, even before socially, legally. There is, therefore, a lack of proper media literacy. However, empathy, and emotions in general, do not depend only on the presence of the new tools or the underlying logics behind these new tools; therefore, (emotions) do not tip over into their opposite just by virtue of the absence of the telematic interlocutor.

Therefore, just as emotions have been transformed, assuming empathy as the main emotion, they could also become a tool through which to do harm, generate violence, and, most importantly, work failures. Obviously reflected from a perspective in which digitalization is done in a distorted way. This generates, in turn, «a vicious circle of exclusion and/or separation or homologation and forced lobotomization of "one's emotions" even before one's work, leaving those who are placed in a condition of subalternity with respect to the other, only two options, homologation towards those who hold power, a sort of Marxian possession of the means of production, or having something useful to offer to power, generating in this case the perpetuation of the condition of subalternity» (Sicora, p.21).

So, even the possibility of extending the boundaries of the body, by digitizing them, could have consequences on the way subjectivity is perceived in relation to other subjectivities (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). Taking up Dalmaso's words, Merleau-Ponty describes the screen as a device that allows the sighted person to delimit his or her field of vision, to look through with an analytical attitude. So, «the most significant transformation we are still witnessing is produced not simply by the digital revolution, but by the fact that the seemingly flat and as opaque as ever image created by numerical technology literally unleashes a third dimension: a tactile effect that increasingly dominates our relation to the screen, as haptic vision, vision that becomes relief and depth, a screen that projection itself between our "bodies" and through our emotions, I would add» (Dalmaso, 2014, p. 60).

In this scenario, it is not enough for governments to identify the right way to manage change related to technological advancement and the delicate relationships between innovation, business, and society, with a view to adapting to change; it is necessary for society to learn the appropriate knowledge to be able to use these tools

and to be able to fit into this new scenario (Pisanu, 2018). What is clear today is that hard work will have to be done, especially on the cultural emotional compartment. In fact, many content creators, tend to use the technique of emotion shaming, that is, being ashamed of feeling emotions, presenting themselves as irreducible forms of essence, that is, as people who place their essence as the only fundamental element in their lives, exposing themselves within a subjugated self, on the one hand towards power and, on the other hand, to self-referentiality, generating a kind of narcissism of and in the network. Therefore, there is a need for a new awareness, one that does not tend toward self-referentialism, but rather one that pushes toward the rediscovery of the other, which is a useful element in understanding the mechanisms inherent in the network, but especially in understanding the ways to relate in the new network. From a meta-verse perspective, the standard toward which we are moving, it will be useful to understand how it will be possible to "recognize ourselves" in another body, physically and metaphorically speaking, that is no longer characterized by corporeity and physicality, but above all to understand how to recognize the new empathy, as well as the new emotions, that will arise. Therefore, it seems that it is necessary, today, to re-educate we in a network that is no longer the known one and, above all, to educate ourselves in digital social work, far from being a re-proposition of social work, but much closer to the futuristic visions that are often re-proposed in movies and TV series, after all, the metaverse is just around the corner.

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