Sociologia Italiana

AIS Journal of Sociology

n.21

Aprile 2023

AIS
ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA DI SOCIOLOGIA

Egea

numero 21 aprile 2023

Sociologia Italiana
AIS Journal of Sociology

Sommario

Affecting societies, affecting risks (and opportunity)

Letteria G. Fassari

By producing simultaneity, instantaneity and ubiquity, the technical macro-systems in which we are immersed penetrate our life, forcing us to be efficient, fast, mobile and performative. The literature highlights that the prevailing aesthetic in the new communication regime is performance. However, the hypothesis developed in this paper concentrates on performance as an intrinsic effect in technical systems but also a way of breaking out prescriptions by producing improvisations to resist domination. Following Perniola (2014), the new communicative regime, based on the alternation between miracle and trauma, defines a specific communicative framework which contains two messages where one denies the other. In such a potentially schizogenic communicative framework, the performance is the aesthetic response to a context perceived as paradoxical and unmanageable by mobilizing only cognitive reflexivity.

Keywords: affective society, performance, communication regime, qualities, cultural risk

DOI: 10.1485/2281-2652-202321-5

Introduction

While I am writing this essay, the news on the war in Ukraine once again heralds the difficulties in reaching negotiations. Wars and this one in particular, have always been waged with the assistance of propaganda, but what is happening is not just a war of representations, but the representation of war as a weapon. It is a war that hybridizes conventional and communicative weapons.

The sudden eruption of this war into our daily life shows us, with dramatic clarity, the risks (and opportunities) connected to the communication society. Powerfully, the narratives of events conveyed through the media are continually amplified by their representations that are reproduced unremittingly. What we are confronted with is, therefore, an amplified and affected reality. Thus, there is a contiguous relationship, resolved in the *augmented* reality[1] we experience, between the events and their media representations.

Media logic has ambivalent impacts already highlighted by Benjamin (1963) in his reflections on the technical reproducibility of the work of art. He affirms that the variation of the sensitive experience corresponds to the variation in mediated experience, which, in turn, depends on the media available in a given historical period. The medium includes expressive forms, representations, architectural struc-

1. By augmented reality it is intended that the representation of the experience on the various and innumerable devices is an experience in itself.

tures and, more recently, digital media, all of which influence the various qualities of social experience. Long before the advent of the media, Benjamin warned of the fundamental ambivalence that accompanies such mediation. The reproducibility of the work of art is not interpreted as a catastrophe, but as the bringing about of a new kind of listening. Considering each historical era as a new adventure built on new relationships, Benjamin introduces us to a different relationship with reality. The mediation of the technical object introduces a medial logic, with its specific influence.

These considerations give rise to the central question of this essay: what qualities characterize the communication society? It is a question that I intend to problematize by introducing the hypothesis that the communication society is, above all, an *affective* society.

The essay is structured as follows. In the first section, recalling a number of heterogeneous sources, I will illustrate how these, with completely differentiated perspectives (philosophy, anthropology, psychology and communication sciences), present the common idea that the communication society is affective. In the second part, approaching sociology, I will question the type of reflexivity emerging from this specific form of society, identifying the answer in Lash's concept of aesthetic reflexivity (1993) and its further development through the analytical construct of performance, with its own interpretative ambivalences. In the third and last part, my goal is to present a provisional conceptualization of the qualities of the communication society, introducing the *aesthetic/anaesthetic* binomial as a possible interpretative criterion.

1. A miraculous and traumatic mentality

Hartog's (2003) notion of a regime of historicity is useful for understanding the ways societies have historically experienced temporality. How are we in our time? This is the author's question and his answer is the omnipresence of the present. Hartog denounces the oblivion of memory and the denial of utopia and, therefore, of the future. In his view, since '68, the horizon has become increasingly evanescent because the present has expanded out of all proportion. Taking up Boltansky and Chiapello (1999), Hartog describes our time as the time of permanent innovation: in order to feed itself, the grim consumer society makes everything obsolete. With the rise of the media, Hartog writes, an ever-faster growth of live television and social media takes place through the production, consumption and recycling of words and images: entire historical periods in a matter of seconds.

Qualifying Hartog's new regime of historicity as communication-based, Mario Perniola (2014) develops the hypothesis that this regime influences the experience

of our phenomena either as miracles or traumas. Perniola's thesis is the transition from a historical regime based on the great rationalization of individual and collective life, which worked well up to the Second World War, to the communication regime. He interprets this regime by adopting Bataille's phrase: faced with the event, the reaction is *impossible and yet real*!

A clarification is necessary here. Perniola explains that the historical communication regime can be referred to four unpredictable events that certainly surprised the public. These events could not have been imagined; they are the '68 in Paris, the Iranian revolution of 1979, the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001. These events stunned us because they were not outcomes of processes, but instead emerged from something that happened outside of causality in the sense that they do not emerge from a causal chain of events but are sudden, impossible to conceive and yet real, Perniola writes. For this reason, they were perceived more as traumas than as catastrophes. Interestingly, we argue that encountering these events generates a kind of intoxication, something like a miracle, outside ordinary everyday life.

According to Perniola, our society has been slowly permeated by a sort of miraculous mentality, fostered and enhanced by the rise of the media, which, by producing an incredible number of images and words about every single event, causes an amplification that tends to exceed its actual weight. Understanding today's world takes place within this framework. It is essential to make use again of the word *trauma* along with the word *miracle.* Trauma remains in the psyche like a foreign body, Perniola continues, unprocessed and generating helplessness and frustration, which cannot be overcome. In our experience, it is sufficient to note that the media trauma overlaps with the media miracle. The media, he concludes, feed on miracles and trauma, and the facts based on the media seem to escape any rational explanation.

Perniola's provocation lies in reducing to a mere parenthesis the gigantic undertaking of modernity to interpret personal and collective life as rational conduct. According to his thesis, the attitude that characterises our time is the interpretation of reality as a process of continuous alternation of trauma and miracle. He states that the mentality of miracle and trauma, exhausting itself rapidly, requires that the same effect of astonishment and wonder be constantly reproduced, feeding the sense of exceptionality of the event to the point of shock.

In the perspective of the Italian philosopher, communication occupies an intermediate space between the true and the false. As an image and simulacrum, communication logic could be better understood by referring to the categories of art, psychoanalysis and religion rather than politics, economics and polemology. He argues that communication summarizes three types of narrative: it is true because

it deals with a fact, it is false because it adopts techniques of exaggeration, manipulation and mystification, and it is «false» because the fantastic and imaginative aspect plays an essential role.

I certainly do not follow Perniola's pessimism. However, his intuition on the miraculous and traumatic mentality is supportive in understanding the society of communication as an *affective society*[2] (Slaby and von Scheve 2019). The nature of contemporary communication, highlighted by Perniola, warns us of the prevalent diffusion of an aesthetic of feeling or sensitivity. The uninterrupted flow of communication defines a specific society, determined more by sensation than by action. Perniola is very clear in defining sensology as a new power, capable of imposing an impersonal affective universe, governed by an anonymous and reified experience, instead of an individualized and rational process.

2. Affective Turn and affecting images

In the mid-1990s, the convergence of a series of social and cultural phenomena – the attempt to overcome the domination of Foucauldian concepts; the growing attraction exerted by Deleuze's theories; a renewed interest in cultural interpretation – stresses the interpretative centrality of pre-discursive forces, as elements capable of conditioning the body, consciousness and senses[3]. Sounds, songs, lights, images and the presence of natural elements become the object of great attention in interpreting the social world. It is a turning point, called the *Affective turn*, which produces an inverse canon with respect to the Cartesian one, introducing affects as endorsed pre-discursive actors. In Deleuze and Guattari's understanding (1980), affect is conceived as a pre-individual bodily force, capable of influencing the ability of a body to act, increasing or decreasing it (Clough 2008). Deleuze (1978) specialized in the study of Spinoza's philosophical work, in which affects are interpreted as forms of involuntary relationships between people. He considers affect as the spontaneous, almost involuntary action – of love, desire, resentment, etc. – as opposed to mediated action, *i.e.*, guided by an «idea».

In the wake of Deleuze, the affective turn mobilized several authors. Prominent among them is Brian Massumi (2002), who defines affection as forces that flow through the body and condition it. Massumi specifies, however, that affection should not be confused with emotion, which is instead contamination of the

2. The concept of affective society proposed here does not argue for a technology-driven understanding of new communication settings. Instead, it refers to an analytic approach to describe and understand ongoing turbulences and new opportunities, which affect social dynamics amplified by the communication regime. It mainly refers to affect and emotions as essential parts of discourse construction.
3. https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/routencsca/affect/0.

empirical space by affection. Shaviro (2010) also distinguishes affection from emotion, qualifying the former as primary, unconscious, a-subjective or pre-subjective, a-signifying, unqualified and intensive; while emotion is, on the contrary, derivative, conscious, qualified and meaningful, attributable to an already established entity.

The implication of the distinction is relevant: the subject captures the emotion, while the subjects are overwhelmed and crossed by affects. Its relevance lies in the fact that it allows us to understand the importance attributed by the Deleuzian authors to the immanent dynamism of bodily matter and, therefore, its ability to self-organize.

More than twenty years ago, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova (2001), starting from Baudrillard's theories, proposed a narrative of digital images that has become, over time, a relatively common characterization. For the two authors, digital images, in their diversity, have the aim of saturating reality, that is, of creating an involvement so intense as to make it impossible to distinguish between sign and referent. The growing pervasiveness of the digital image modifies the traditional dialectical space of representation, which is redrawn by the intensification of the material qualities of the image itself.

Parisi and Terranova's work constitutes a counter-narrative against digital conceptualisation, mainly defined as flatness and disembodiment. Their suggestions stimulate us to understand the affective power of the digital image, which cannot be limited exclusively to being subjected to it. Rather, digital images, following the evolution of the digitisation of space, produce new forms of embodiment, made possible by bodily immersion and the overwhelming sensation. The affective turn thus determines a rethinking of space in post-linguistic and post-semiotic terms, leading us to consider contemporary experience as a complex network of interaction, involving multiple and diverse aspects. When it comes to the digital, our authors write that the question is not only where and with whom to interact. But also: which part of the body is affected and affects? What type of connections will be created? What do you become when you are immersed in the image?

3. Affected mobilization

Turning to a more properly sociological perspective, I want to present a publication by Alain Touraine (2013) dedicated to the communication society and its actors. Here he takes up a theme that has always permeated his sociology, namely the importance attributed to affective motivations in affirming oneself as a subject. Touraine defines the subject through their tension to affirm the desire for freedom and justice, despite conditioning and contingencies.

Touraine's analysis draws the current society as a society of communication, characterized by the primacy of affective aspects over rational ones. He introduces a more holistic idea of subject, which echoes the studies of neuroscience on the interdependence between rationality, mind and body. Unlike Perniola, his position is not one of criticism but of analysis of change, highlighting the constraints and opportunities it entails.

The French sociologist attributes a profound importance to the studies of the neurologist Antonio Damasio, who is opposed to the Cartesian vision, which isolates rational thought from the rest of the personality. Damasio demonstrates that all aspects of personality, even the most elementary, simultaneously involve three inseparable dimensions: intellectual, emotional and affective. By depriving the messages of that element that Watzlawick would call the relational aspect of communication (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson 1967), they would lose effectiveness due to the absence of the fundamental emotional and affective component. Communication, continues Touraine, is not only a question of reason but also of emotions, feelings and affections. It takes place by transmitting information, but at the same time, through acts such as convincing, explaining, moving, and provoking reactions.

According to these observations, the force capable of changing the world derives from the combined effect of all the functions of the human mind: rationality, significant convictions, and the mobilization of emotions and feelings. The dominant vision of reason is replaced, in Touraine's perspective, by a much more complete conception of the human being due, above all, to the abolition of the hierarchy between men and women, and between the human world and the natural environment.

In conclusion, for Touraine, the idea of communication appeals to the unity of the individual, in contrast to the prevailing trend in all forms of modernity, which from time to time have valued a single, particular aspect. Consequently, in the industrial society, the individual's role takes on decisive importance, together with the methods and forms of its integration into organizations and society. In the contemporary world, subjects do not respond to a situation but *constitute it*.

Touraine warns against the risk that in hypermodern societies focused on communication, the extension of systemic powers may become unstoppable and total. In complex contemporary societies, for example, even the state must guarantee its presence in public opinion through the media, thus determining an absolute pervasiveness of information and communication systems.

So far, I have considered some authors who support the idea that the communication society is affective. Their positions are always different, challenging to compose and often conflicting, but they converge on the consideration that medial logic engages in meaningful ways bodies, affects and senses.

4. Still, who communicates?

In the background of these considerations, the sociological question of subject identification in the communication society is still on the floor. As stated by Rebughini (2014), the concept of the subject is expressed in very different ways: «It can be extended from an ontological idea of mind and rationality – or, on the contrary, from an idea of the body and its passions – to a purely textual, discursive or semiotic position; it can be conceived as the result of subjectivation and interiorization of domination, or that of an emancipating action based on free will; it can be conceptualized as self-referential or as relational, when the subject is the result of the relationships he/she has with other subjects and with the immediate environment» (Rebughini 2014, 2). In the theoretical references reported so far, it is possible to grasp, following her interpretative map, the separation between a grammar of the subject and subjectivation, permeated by existentialist philosophy and embedded in the freedom/domination dialectic, and the postmodern and post-structuralist vision of a subject within a non-ontological frame. Leaving such polarization in the background, I would highlight the interpretative ambivalence concerning the subject, considering it as a research resource for defining an analytical frame that, drawing on the two positions, could make the complexity of contemporary social experience more understandable.

The choice made in this essay is the attempt to anchor the research question in a sociological framework, closer to the tension between subject and social domain. Referring to Touraine, my interest is in detecting the subject's ability to face social trials using imagination, creativity and emotions. At the same time, however, the subject to which I refer also considers Foucault's contribution, who notes the subject's embodiment and production by the systems of domination. Its radical contingency seems, at first glance, to be intrinsic to the historical regime of communication, and the subject defined by forms of marginal and situational emancipation. However, the «analytical construct of performance», which I now intend to use, also allows me to capture the aspects of experimentation, resistance and subversion present in Touraine's definition of the subject.

From these considerations, to answer the question concerning the subject in the society of communication, I will use an analytical concept that holds together body, emotion and reflexivity. As mentioned above, I will make use of the construct of performance, which allows me to escape the subject/subjugation pincer and highlight the complicated process of recomposing contemporary fragmentation starting from the self, mainly as a body. Before introducing the analytical construct of performance as contextual capacities of resistance and creativity, I would like to specify better the sociological concept of «reflexivity», and how I have interpreted it in this essay.

5. Reflexing the flow

The answer to the aforementioned question requires stepping back to reflexivity in late modernity. In the second half of the Nineties, the theory of reflexive modernisation (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994) became the theoretical model known for having responded to the new challenges of capitalist, global and high-tech society. The authors pointed to the regression of structures (class, state, unquestionable science) that had traditionally served the function of linking social actors and structures with the rise of a new agency. If we go to the heart of the matter, says Lash (*ibidem*), it is the economic sphere, and it is the very need to accumulate capital, understood as specialised knowledge, used flexibly according to the market's needs, which leads the social agent to break free from the chains of the structure of Fordism. It is then the processes of knowledge required by new production processes that inevitably require reflexivity.

Reflexivity introduces a self-reflexive agency into the sociological discourse in a process of self-monitoring of social structures, rules, and resources. However, as claimed by Lash, capitalist domination is now no longer linked to capital as a means of production, but to the complex of power and knowledge. Information is part of both the capitalist and the reflexive baggage. Thus, symbols, not only conceptual but mimetic, form the commoditised property of the industries of culture and the aesthetic critique of that complex of power and knowledge. As a consequence of these considerations, Lash introduces *aesthetic reflexivity* as the founding principle of the expressive individualism of today's capitalism. This kind of reflexivity is due to the emergence of new communication and information structures that are greatly expanded today, creating another economy of mimetic symbols such as images, sounds and narratives. Cultural products themselves are increasingly reflexive and mimetic, but at the same time, less mediated (Lash 1990). Cultural changes involve the constant extension of electronic media into every aspect of personal life, with individuals of the late modern age devoting more and more time to media devices. Such changes create a new mode of reflexivity based on mimetic symbols that today make up a large part of how we express ourselves and enjoy the world.

6. Performance as an aesthetic and affective analytical tool

Today, the discourse on reflexive modernization appears even more radicalized. Reflexivity, as Lash had predicted, is profoundly sociotechnical. We are part of a system formed by human and non-human actors. This assemblage (Latour 2007) produces certain qualities such as flow, turbulence, emergences, becoming, co-possibilities, relational auto-poiesis, and the machinic, the inventive, and the

event. This intensification of the hybrid social, as Davis (2015) explains, has to do with an interpretative complexity that cannot be understood by resorting to modeling. My thesis is that such complexity is brought to a synthesis *affectively* as an aesthetic and performative response.

As already stated, producing simultaneity, instantaneity and ubiquity, the technical macro-system in which we are immersed penetrates our lives, forcing us to be efficient, fast, mobile and performative. On the one hand, performance is structured as an intrinsic effect of the technical systems; on the other, it is an affective and aesthetic reflexivity, a sort of acting out in response to social change. The representation of experience, colliding with the device of the simulacrum, produces an act that resembles a rewriting similar to artistic performance. My thesis is that the media performance of millions of users, who move from one medium to another, can be understood as a dizzying critique of the paradoxes of contemporaneity.

The concept of performance has a long tradition in sociology and philosophy. It is enough to cite some of the classics of sociology, such as Durkheim (1912), Goffman (1959), and, more recently, Alexander (2004). Following a map produced by Schein (1999), we also find a complex genealogy of the performance theory: in philosophy and linguistics; in performance and theatre studies; anthropology and in the interface between the anthropology of the ritual and the study of performances). In the 1990s, performance theory was elaborated most extensively in gender and queer studies following the influential work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993).

As a matter of fact, Schein's map considers performance as a personal and connected research that becomes extreme and corporeal. It represents a daily experimentation, an aesthetic response to everyday complexity. Performance definitively disclaims the idea of essence and, as Butler (1997) states, it stages a psychic, mysterious, unsolvable excess that goes beyond the concept of representation. More clarifications on the use of performance come to us by referring to contemporary art. Sometimes as babble, sometimes awkwardly, at other times with interesting results that become viral in a few minutes, the multitude of media users tries to break the barriers that separate art from life. Historically, performance emerges from the Dadaist and Duchampian experience. With Duchamp, we witness the transition from representation to presentation. This trend will then be inscribed in Pop Art and minimalism. Ready-mades are constituted as a profound revision of art. These are works not made by the artist but assembled objects, taken, de-contextualized, re-contextualized and named as works of art by the artists themselves (Di Giacomo 2016).

Ready-made, conceptual art, performance, installation or the most widespread

forms of contemporary art introduce the idea that the work of art is not in the object, but in the story. Without narrative, nothing would have happened. Artistic creation is inscribed in the acting-out and, therefore, in the dematerialization of the work in the formless, its conceptualization in the idea (*ibidem*). An artistic creation that abandons immutable existence and moves into the sphere of the event allows the event to appropriate the means of expression. In the trans-media narration of millions of users, we see monologues, the documentation of individual life as research and personal experience. The social interpreter calls others as witnesses and participants in their performance. It is not about representing life, but about building a connected life.

Media performance picks up on these elements: language is tactile and exploratory; self-representation takes place in the trans-medial, real-virtual narrative: for example, some apps emphasize daily and «special-day» ritualism. As already said, performance is an acting-out: it is liminal because body and mind symmetrically converge in it. It is de-constructive and ambivalent. Like artists, social performers combine communication strategies: pieces of poetry, songs, bodily acting-out, happenings, moments of everyday life, improvisations, the words of others or friends or family members, imaginary scenes or even pieces of literary work. To understand the why of performance and where it emerges from, we need to trace a brief interpretative background.

As stated by Weber, the double movement of rationalization and subjectivation generates modernity. In contemporary modernity, we are witnessing the extremes of these two poles. Radicalized subjectivation leads us to the imperative of singularity and uniqueness, while radicalized rationalization confronts us with a logic, which tends to erode subjectivation by configuring it through algorithms. This double polarization defines a situation of solid ambiguity and paradoxical communication. According to the double bind theory (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson 1967), when individuals are exposed to paradoxical communication, which contains two messages in which one denies the other, they are facing a paralyzing ambivalence, which can potentially generate schizophrenia.

What does ambivalence consist of? In the network experience, each of us feels the endless possibilities in potential. As shown below, it is online processes such as sensoriality, simulation and connectedness that release libidinal energies. In other words, on the one hand, there is the envisioning of freedom; on the other, the inescapable power of the platforms in collecting, accumulating and using individual data and making it profitable. Without going into the specifics of complex processes that cannot be analysed here, one message is that you are free, powerful and limitless; the other, coinciding with the use of that message, conveys dominance, which makes you feel powerless because the system has already predicted

Table 1

	Aesthetic	Anaesthetic
Sensoriality	Aesthetics of Feeling Resonance	Sensology Aesthetics of death
Simulation	Creative play	Unveiled phantoms Literalism
Connectedness	Relational Aesthetics Connected reflexivity	***Mirrorism*** (to be a mirror)
	Imaginary Transformative Action	*Realityism*

and shaped our behaviour. A digitalized space is a space that empowers you but simultaneously takes power away from you. It is precisely such paradoxical constant movement that makes you feel exhausted (Han 2010).

Furthermore, in the framework of the double bind, when contradictory messages are repeated and reiterated, this can lead to a sort of paralysis in which it is rather difficult to act in a transformative way (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson 1967). In the double-bind framework, the person experiences a dilemma which is, in our case, that of miracle and trauma, to use Perniola's words. The trauma of being powerless accompanies the desire to live in a permanent state of surprise.

To sum up, I believe that performance is an aesthetic and affective response to this double bind. It is a non-cognitive response to an affective domination.

What is this new aesthetic composed of? Among many, I have chosen to analyse three essential qualities: sensoriality, simulation and connectedness (See Table 1). For each of them, I let the aesthetic aspects emerge that I have defined as *anaesthetics* as a consequence of the communication society or the possibility that media, according to Ferrara and Rosati (2005)[4], may lead to an increase in identification or, on the contrary, to the end of the individual.

Sensoriality

Unlike Perniola, the aesthetics of feeling can lead to a new, essential and desirable awareness. Let us think of the affective deafness that has characterized our sense of the world as modern. From this point of view, Hartmund Rosa's contri-

4. Ferrara and Rosati bring the plurality of the individual-modernity relationship back to four distinct theses. The first is the thesis of the «increase in individuation»; the second is that of the «plural self»; the third is that of the «end of the individual»; and the fourth is a more specific thesis advanced by Gehlen and then taken up by Luhmann, summarized in the paradox according to which as the modern individual acquires degrees of expressive freedom, he loses them in terms of autonomy of action.

bution, especially with the concept of resonance (2019), recalls the need for a lively affected relationship with the world. The resonance is, therefore, the phenomenal core of the relationship between the subjects and the re-creation of meaning, today more desirable than ever.

At the same time, following Perniola (2011), sensoriality refers to the contemporary aesthetics in which sociality becomes the place of sensation. Media sociability is rooted in immediate identification and participation, sharing privileged moments, memorable sentences, narrations, personal mythologies, shared walks, and nights spent in fellowship. The social is above all sharing of interiority.

However, living by feelings cannot be contradicted because it does not claim to carry any inherent truth. For it, evaluation criteria simply do not matter. The myth of authenticity as a pure sensation leads to the equation: *the more I feel, the more I am alive.* As Lacan (2001) pointed out, *jouissance* is linked to compulsiveness, and for this reason, it is deadly. It is intrinsic to the «capitalist discourse», that pushes subjects to a compulsive consumption to the point in which they are consuming themselves. In the absence of a form that contains and gives shape to «feeling», this aesthetics of life can turn into an aesthetics of death.

Simulation

Simulation opens a question about the role of the imaginary in transforming the social world. Virtuality is a real experience that still has a particularity: it also concerns a relationship with reality. Following a stimulating tradition that attaches great importance to the imaginary (Wunenburger 2003)[5], it is well understood how the imaginary has allowed reality to «function». Virtual reality not only makes reality work, but it can also transform it. By producing and promoting new contents, we can change our social experience and support creativity in doing so. As a matter of fact, bodily practices in virtual environments can facilitate a critical deconstruction of communicative, perceptual, relational and social mechanisms in general. In this sense, virtuality has the liminoid quality of activating processes of change.

At the same time, however, virtuality can unveil the phantom, as highlighted by Žižek (1997). For him, the evolution of digitalisation makes explicit the construction behind perceived reality. By enriching the perception of the world with elec-

5. Wunenburger attempts a definition of the imaginary by describing its functions. His references are multiple: psychoanalysis, literature and cultural anthropology, but also the sociology of the media. The term imaginary is variously defined concerning the changing concept of «image» in the different traditions. Using the contribution of authors such as Bachelard and Durand, whose work looks above all to Jung and Corbin and Ricoeur, Wunenburger attempts to synthesize the main lines of the theory of the imaginary. Downstream his reflections, we find the transformative function of the imaginary that allows us to free ourselves from the immediate without relegating to abstractions in order to mobilize individual and collective resources for transforming social experience. For further readings see also Marzo and Mori 2019.

tronically grafted information, augmented reality reveals the ghost that serves its construction. Here is an obvious example provided by Žižek: if I wear google glasses: *I see a beautiful woman, but I also elaborate on her erotic fantasies*, the author writes. This means that by destroying the mystery, it is Eros who is killed. According to Žižek, the excessively abundant offer of ready-made fantasies fills a space that should remain open for the user's fantasies. In the place where our fantasy would have become reality, there is no more room for fantasy.
The danger is that of *literalism*. Literalism is the opposite of the symbolic. In this case, the image provided has nothing to do with imagination; instead, it is without imagination. It exists when the experience is being interpreted literally by reducing it to a singular meaning. As the analytical psychologist Hillman (1975) argued: literalism prevents mystery by restricting the multiplicity of meanings to a single and static definition. Literalism is thus an egocentric viewpoint, which encloses the ego like a trap. What is missing is that the imaginary does not support transformative action.

Connectedness

Boccia Artieri (2012) writes of connected reflexivity as a reflexive practice exercised on the nature of relationships themselves, inferring the intrinsic reflexivity in having a sense of position in the communicative flow. Awareness of having an audience increases the scope of reflexive processes. The term can also be translated into relational aesthetics: participatory, de-hierarchical and centred on intersubjectivity reflexivity. However, behind the connectedness there is the shadow of mirroring (being a mirror). Following Perniola (2002), Western culture has explored the experience of mirroring in all its aspects but has very rarely focused on the possibility of man's metamorphosis into the mirror. As we have already said, Perniola's position is as extreme as it is generic in its reference to western culture. However, it helps us to bring out the intrinsic cultural risks of a society whose reflexivity is based on an extroverted game of glances. Mirrorism (becoming a mirror) is substantially different from imitation, conformism, and hetero-direction. Rather, it is the feeling of being the place in which the outside is itself mirrored. Mirrorism is the dizzying encounter with another mirror, a dynamic that is abysmal since it is the specular experience of a continuous reference.

7. Implications

In conclusion, my argument centres on the idea that the social is *expanded* by the consequences of its own representation.
When the conditions – economic, social and cultural – are sustainable, and the

subjects can deploy their life projects, performance can be a creative and transformative aesthetic reflexivity supporting transformative changes. If on the contrary, due to the obstacles referable to the same conditions, there is no possibility of implementing any project, then performance turns into *anaesthetic*: the social can be irritated but not transformed. Performance is affected by *literalism,* which results in the withdrawal of the symbolic dimension that urges to the transformation of reality. Here performance is emptied of that ability to aspire (Appadurai 2013) understood as the ability to orient oneself in the present by imagining a more desirable future. In other words, performance gets very close to the various forms of reality-ism. Reality-ism (Fassari 2014) indeed is becoming the prevalent social aesthetic that affects how we live in the social world, consume art, politics or news, experience relationships and so on. In such framework social criticism becomes an abysmal experience, which has no bottom and no end; but which is culturally and politically functional to the populist dystopia.

References

Alexander, J.C. (2004), «Cultural pragmatics: Social performance between ritual and strategy», *Sociological theory*, 22, n. 4, pp. 527-573.

Appadurai, A. (2013), *The future as cultural fact: essays on the global condition*, London, New York, Verso.

Beck, U., Giddens, A., Lash, S. (1994), *Reflexive Modernization*, Cambridge, Polity Press (trad. it. *Modernizzazione riflessiva*, Trieste, Asterios, 1999).

Benjamin, W. (1963), *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp (trad. it. *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*, Torino, Einaudi, 2013).

Boccia Artieri, G. (2012), *Stati di connessione. Pubblici, cittadini e consumatori nella (Social) Network Society*, Milano, Franco Angeli.

Boltanski, L, Chiapello, E. (1999), *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Gallimard (trad. it. *Il nuovo spirito del capitalismo*, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimesis, 2014).

Butler, J. (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex",* New York, Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997), *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*, Redwoood City, CA, Stanford University Press (trad. it. *La vita psichica del potere*, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimesis, 2014).

Clough, P.T. (2008), «The affective turn: Political economy, biomedia and bodies», *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25, n. 1, pp. 1-22.

Conquergood, D. (1991), «Rethinking ethnography: Towards a critical cultural politics», *Communications monographs*, 58, n. 2, pp. 179-194.

Davis H. (2015), «Diplomacy in the Face of Gaia. Bruno Latour in conversation with Heather Davis», in Davis, H., Turpin, E. (eds.), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, London, Open Humanities Press, pp. 43-62.

Deleuze, G. (1978), «On Spinoza's Concept of Affect», <www.webdeleuze.com/php/sommaire/html>.
Deleuze, G., Guattari, F. (1980), *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux*, Paris, Les éditions de minuit (trad. it. *Mille piani. Capitalismo e schizofrenia*, Nocera Inferiore, Orthotes, 2021).
Di Giacomo, G. (2016), *Arte e modernità: una guida filosofica*, Roma, Carocci.
Durkheim, E. (1912), *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris, PUF (trad. it. *Forme elementari della vita religiosa*, Milano, Edizioni di Comunità, 1963).
Fassari, L.G. (2014), *Poplife: Il realytismo tra mimetismo e chance sociale*, Roma, Carocci.
Ferrara, A., Rosati, M. (2005), *Affreschi della modernità. Crocevia della teoria sociale*, Roma, Carocci.
Goffman, E. (1959), *The presentation of self in everyday life*, New York, Doubleday (trad. it. *La vita quotidiana come rappresentazione*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1969).
Han, B.C. (2010), *Müdigkeitsgesellschaft*, Berlin, Matthes & Seitz (trad. it. *La società della stanchezza*, Roma, Nottetempo, 2012).
Hartog, F. (2003), *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil (trad. it. *Regimi di storicità: presentismo e esperienze del tempo*, Palermo, Sellerio, 2007).
Hillman, J. (1975), *Re-visioning Psychology*, New York, Harper & Row (trad. it. *Re-visione della psicologia*, Milano, Adelphi, 1992).
Lacan, J. (2001), *Il seminario. Libro XVII. Il rovescio della psicoanalisi (1969-1970)*, Torino, Einaudi.
Lash, S. (1990), *Of postmodernism*, London, Routledge (trad. it. *Modernismo e Postmodernismo. I mutamenti culturali delle società complesse*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2000).
Lash, S. (1993), «Reflexive modernization: The aesthetic dimension», *Theory, Culture & Society*, 10, n. 1, pp. 1-23.
Latour, B. (2007), *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press (trad. it. *Riassemblare il sociale*, Sesto San Giovanni, Meltemi, 2022).
Marzo, P.L., Mori, L. (a cura di) (2019), *Le vie sociali dell'immaginario: Per una sociologia del profondo*, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimesis.
Massumi, B. (2002), *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, N.C./London, Duke University Press.
Parisi, L., Terranova, T. (2001), «A Matter of Affect: Digital Images and the Cybernetic Re-Wiring of Vision», *Parallax*, 7, n. 4, pp. 122-127.
Perniola, M. (2002), *Del sentire*, Torino, Einaudi.
Perniola, M. (2011), *Estetica contemporanea*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
Perniola, M. (2014), *Miracoli e traumi della comunicazione*, Torino, Einaudi.
Rebughini, P. (2014), «Subject, subjectivity, subjectivation», *Sociopedia.isa*, 11, n. 1, pp. 1-11.
Rosa, H. (2019), *Resonance: a sociology of our relationship to the world*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
Schein, L. (1999), «Performing modernity», *Cultural Anthropology*, 14, n. 3, pp. 361-395.
Shaviro, S. (2010), «Post-Cinematic Affect: On Grace Jones, Boarding Gate and Southland Tales», *Film-Philosophy*, 14, n. 1, pp. 1-102.
Slaby, J., von Scheve, C. (2019), *Affective societies: key concepts*, London, New York, Routledge-Taylor & Francis Group.
Touraine, A. (2013), *La Fin des sociétés,* Paris, Éditions du Seuil (trad. it. *La globalizzazione e la fine del sociale*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2021).

Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J.H., Jackson, D.D. (1967), *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company (trad. it. *Pragmatica della comunicazione umana*, Roma, Astrolabio, 1971).
Wunenburger, J.J. (2003), *L'Imaginaire*, Paris, PUF (trad. it. *L'immaginario*, Genova, Il Nuovo Melangolo, 2008).
Žižek, S. (1997), *The plague of Fantasies*, London-New York, Verso (trad. it. *L'epidemia dell'immaginario*, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimesis, 2018).

SOCIOLOGIA ITALIANA

Progetto grafico degli interni: Alberto Bellanti – Milano
Progetto grafico della copertina: ZAZO – Milano
Impaginazione: Alberto Bellanti – Milano

AMMINISTRAZIONE E DISTRIBUZIONE
EGEA S.p.A.
Via Salasco, 5 – 20136 Milano
TEL. 02 5836.5751 – FAX 02 5836.5753
e-mail: egea.edizioni@unibocconi.it – www.egeaeditore.it

Registrazione Tribunale di Milano n. 418 del 30 ottobre 2012

Direttore responsabile: Alessandro Cavalli

Corrispondenza e manoscritti devono essere inviati a:
rivista@ais-sociologia.it

ISSN 2281-2652
ISBN 978-88-238-6332-3

CONDIZIONI DI ABBONAMENTO (2023 – 3 numeri)

ITALIA	PAESI UE (Italia esclusa)	PAESI EXTRA UE
€ 60,00 (solo digitale, in pdf)	€ 60,00 (solo digitale, in pdf)	€ 60,00 (solo digitale, in pdf)

Il pagamento può effettuarsi direttamente all'Editore:

- con versamento sul c.c.p. 41023201, indicando chiaramente gli estremi dell'abbonamento;
- a ricevimento fattura (riservata a enti e società);
- mediante carta di credito (Visa, Mastercard, CartaSì, Diners), precisando: numero, scadenza, data di nascita (sono escluse le carte di credito elettroniche) sul sito www.egeaeditore.it.

Il pagamento del rinnovo dell'abbonamento deve essere effettuato entro 30 giorni dalla scadenza.
Le comunicazioni in merito a mutamenti di indirizzo vanno inviate all'Editore.
Per ogni effetto l'abbonato elegge domicilio presso EGEA.