



MÍDIA E CULTURA

The Affective Toxicology of Social Media

A Toxicologia Afetiva das Mídias Sociais

La toxicología afectiva de las redes sociales

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Abstract: The toxicity ascribed to social media indicates deeper systemic problems than those usually designated as its toxic ills. Although the widespread afflictions resulting from social media consumption constitute grave social problems in their own right, they allude to a dysfunctionality that precedes and transcends the individual troubles. The ill effects not only predicate toxicity, they indicate social media as both causal factor and self-perpetuating outcome by creating the conditions of reciprocal obligation and the dependency on the "Like!" which together function as the engine behind the compulsion to repeat. Platforms seek to maximize their users' screen-time because all screen-time is unpaid productive net-work that contributes to the platform's capital and to its bottom line. We examine the dynamics of social media toxicity as an affective affliction using Marcel Mauss's ideas of reciprocal obligation from *The Gift* (1925) and Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) as a practical philosophy that sheds light on the underlying machinism of digital social platforms and the creation of value as the space-time of social networks by way of cultivating narcissism. It does not purport to be the "be-all, end-all" explanation of the phenomenon, but seeks to produce an alternative, supplemental — albeit incomplete — image of social media use.

Keywords: toxicity; network; affect.

Resumo: A toxicidade atribuída às mídias sociais indica problemas sistêmicos mais profundos do que aqueles geralmente designados como seus males tóxicos. Embora as aflições resultantes do consumo das mídias sociais constituam graves problemas sociais por si só, elas aludem a uma disfuncionalidade que precede e transcende os problemas individuais. Os efeitos nocivos indicam simultaneamente as mídias sociais como fatores causais e resultados autoperpetuantes, criando as condições de obrigação recíproca e a dependência do "Curtir!" que juntos funcionam como o motor por trás da compulsão de repetir. As plataformas buscam maximizar o tempo de tela é trabalho produtivo não remunerado que contribui para o capital da plataforma e para seus lucros. Examinamos a dinâmica da toxicidade das mídias sociais como uma aflição afetiva usando o conceito de afeto do Spinoza na *Ética* (1677) e as ideias de obrigação recíproca de Marcel Mauss no *Ensaio sobre a dádiva* (1925) como uma filosofia prática que lança luz sobre o maquinismo subjacente das plataformas sociais digitais e a criação de valor como espaço-tempo das redes sociais por meio do cultivo do narcisismo. Não pretende ser a explicação "final" do fenômeno, mas busca produzir uma imagem alternativa, suplementar — embora incompleta — do uso das mídias sociais.

Palavras-chave: toxicidade; rede; afeto.

Resumen: La toxicidad atribuida a las redes sociales indica problemas sistémicos más profundos que los que generalmente se designan como sus males tóxicos. Aunque las aflicciones resultantes del consumo de redes sociales constituyen serios problemas sociales por derecho propio, aluden a una disfuncionalidad que los antecede y los trasciende. Esos efectos nocivos apuntan simultáneamente a las redes sociales como factores causales y resultados que se autoperpetúan, creando las condiciones de obligación recíproca y de dependencia del "iLike!", que funcionan juntos como el motor que impulsa la compulsión a repetir. Se busca maximizar el tiempo de pantalla de los usuarios porque es trabajo pro-



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ductivo no remunerado que contribuye al capital de la plataforma y a sus ganancias. Examinamos la dinámica de la toxicidad como una aflicción afectiva utilizando el concepto de afecto en la *Ética* (1677) de Spinoza y las ideas de Marcel Mauss sobre la obligación recíproca del *Ensayo sobre el don* (1925) como una filosofía práctica que arroja luz sobre el maquinismo subyacente y la creación de valor en términos del espacio-tiempo de las redes sociales a través del cultivo del narcisismo. No pretendemos dar una explicación total del fenómeno, sino que buscamos producir una imagen alternativa, complementaria, aunque incompleta.

Palabras clave: toxicidad; red; afecto.

The Affective Toxicology of Social Media

Despite the service orientation and obvious benefits of networked social media, users now suffer a love/hate relation with what have become essential modes of interpersonal communication and social interaction: users value and appreciate the positives but are disquieted and disheartened by the negatives. Most readers are likely aware of the merits, advantages and rewards of social media use, either from personal use or from the incessant corporate public relation campaigns touting their worth and advisability. Individual users appreciate these internet-based applications as tools that facilitate communication and social interchange and heighten feelings of connectedness. Social media allow users to maintain, preserve and renew relations with family and friends and possibly to forge new ones: they permit users to bolster their self-presentation, to project themselves into the world, to cultivate interests, to stay informed and widen their horizons.

At face value, the inventory of benefits of social media almost precludes any criticism or condemnation. Governments use social media to inform their opinions to public, interact with citizens, foster citizen participation, advance open government initiatives, monitor public opinion and improve their image and reputation. Law enforcement use social media for public relations and community outreach as well as in their investigations to monitor the activities of groups deemed subversive or criminal. The benefits also extend to business and commercial interests who use social media for marketing research, consumer outreach, sales promotions, retail discount

campaigns, relationship development/loyalty programs, and e-Commerce.

Yet, once we cognize the euphemistic implications of the language, we glean the double-faced productiveness of social media networks: at first view, the benefits, merits, advantages and rewards present themselves exclusively as positive attributes, but we soon come to see that the pragmatic consequences couch less desirable repercussions. In terms of individual users, we notice this in the modes of self-presentation, social communication and interaction. Government agencies, public relation firms and large corporate entities — including the platforms themselves — can use social media network communication strategies as micro-targeted mass media at the individual level. Paired with their access to the information and data generated by third-party data aggregators and directly from their client constituents, the access social media platforms offer to their users' attention invests them with untold reach and influence.

Other than the platforms themselves and the business community which has a vested interest in the "success" of social media, not many voices are singing its praises. Increasingly leery of the implicit Big Brother capabilities of networked social, the US Senate, the US Congress, the Canadian Government, and the European Union (among others), have been compelled by citizens and advocacy groups to hold hearings with chief executives of media platforms to justify the manipulation of political discourse and process, the polarization of society, surveillance and privacy breaches, the unbridled monetization of users' attention and the disintegration of the social fabric. The Facebook Papers published in October, 2021 by The Washington Post analyzed a trove of leaked internal documents on the use of abusive tactics by Facebook executives, designers and engineers to heighten engagement by polarizing discourse, fomenting controversy and rage among users to heighten engagement and increase user time on the platforms. The Facebook Papers demonstrated that the detractions were not unplanned, random side-effects of the operation of networked

media, but that they were expressly planned, designed and integrated as operational features of the platforms towards maximizing corporate profit at the expense of users' health and mental sanity and the well-being of society.

Sharing these concerns, we investigate the toxicity of social media platforms from a philosophy of communication perspective, proposing a critical reflection on networked social media. The problem that we identify is that users are unwittingly being manipulated by digital processes and artificial intelligence, popularly referred to "algorithms", which function affectively at a subliminal level. The function of the paper is to point out the pragmatic effect of social media's heavy-handed grip on our subconscious as a dehumanizing power by showing how they undermine our free will as human beings, rob us of subjective agency, and deny users any degree of negotiation as to the mode of relation with the platforms — a relation that is dictated to users and where content is moderated, enforced, monitored and curated by the platforms for their benefit. We consider this type of "my way or the highway" relation where the user capitalizes to the unsymmetrical mutual benefits of the offering as enslavement much in the way that Spinoza developed this concept in *The Ethics* (1999). The enslavement is not described in terms of ownership or in quantity of work, but defined in affective terms, as a commodity exchange of attention, of machinic enslavement, and in terms of temporality. Thus, the affective turn here presented tries to identify the dynamic of affect in a "methodical" manner reliant on Spinoza's theory of the affects.

The toxicity ascribed to social media indicates deeper systemic problems than those usually designated as its toxic ills. Although the widespread afflictions resulting from social media consumption constitute grave social problems in their own right, they allude to a dysfunctionality that precedes and transcends the individual troubles. The toxicity that social media incites presents itself as an inventory of "side-effects", but the

addiction, bullying, depression, negative self-image, attention deficit, anger, social alienation, exploitative hierarchizing, political polarization, etc (SHELDON; RAUSCHNABEL; HONEYCUTT; 2019) ascribed to their use are not the problem. If we use the analogy of tobacco addiction as a technology of addiction, where for example throat cancer is but an ancillary indicator of other causal dynamics at play, we understand social media's functional affordances as causal of the panoply of its toxic ailments. The ill effects not only predicate the existence of toxicity — they indicate social media as instigating producers and self-perpetuating outcome by creating the conditions of reciprocal obligation and the dependency on the "Like!" which together function as the engine behind the compulsion to repeat as toxic addiction. As such, we examine the dynamics of social media toxicity as an affective affliction using Marcel Mauss's ideas of reciprocal obligation from *The Gift* (1925) and Spinoza's *Ethics* (1999) as a practical philosophy that sheds light on the underlying machinism of digital social platforms and the creation of value as the space-time of social networks by way of cultivating narcissism and enslavement.

The Toxic Nature of the Network

The first aspect that opens itself to be problematized is the nature of the network as a graphic depiction of relational structure. We describe a network as an interlinked surface of nodes and links² resembling a net — this is not surprising as the word "net" of network evokes the image of a fishing net as its underlying archetypal figure. We attach positive values to the social network in that at first sight it is a web of inclusion: the nodes or junctions are democratically distributed, and equally weighted, there is no centrality, undue concentration, or preferential attachments within the distribution of nodes. However, a network qua network does not necessarily imply an egalitarian democratic social structure and can be structurally hierarchical to create effective

² "A graph is typically drawn as a nodelink diagram, where nodes of the graph are drawn as points, icons, or texts and edges as a line linking two nodes" (HU, 2018).

apparatuses of control.

Most of us, like to foreground the social aspect of being interlinked, of social cohesion, and mutual support and the feeling of a safety net that holds the social together and makes it resilient. If I ask you "where do you identify within the image of the net?", you would likely answer that you are one of the nodes at the intersection of a variety of contacts. Some of you might identify with the links, as an individual that mediates the relation between various nodes. Or maybe you are the host to a network and play a more important central role and oversee its functional integrity. Others will say that it is the technology — computer, or phone, or tablet — that is networked. Still, some of you might be associated to the fishing industry and understand the net as a surface of capture — and that once an individual becomes embroiled, it becomes very difficult to extricate oneself. But likely not many of you identify themselves with fish — either caught in a net or held captive in a fish farm or religion of fishers of men! One can also see it as an attractive and seductive lure — which is the notion which informs the symbolism of the veil, lingerie and the stocking, and which in fact are a web, a work of webbing, a net-work which simultaneously reveals and hides, distracts and ensnares. Readers of Plato (2009) can likely discern the constitution of the universe as interlinked triangles and the concept of the Chora as presented in the *Timaeus*. The reticulated triangles³ constitute the Solids and the Chora as background, as space, as receptacle, as creator of order, as sieve, as filter, as sustenance, as matrix, as womb, as hospitable, and provides the netting of support which provides the site for the "social cohesion" that creates bodies and produce objects as things which do not pass, as things that have value and can be discerned as having being (MOHR; SATTLER, 2010).

Another way of seeing a network is as *logos* interwoven — a profusion of narrative lines linked together by knots which need to be teased out

in order to reveal the network as a constellation of ideas or beliefs — as a plane of consistency, as a cartography of notions that support, orient and obligate patterns of flow, of association, of contagion, of logic throughout the fabric of reticulation. This confuses the line and the plane, the threads as lines of discourse as constitutive of a fabric as surface of composition. And along with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we see a difference between the woven, the netted and the matted. The woven maintains the integrity and linearity of the individual threads, whereas the reticulation introduces a fixed, relational triangulation of nodes — are these not the same intuitions "that enabled Plato to use the model of weaving as the paradigm for "royal science," in other words, the art of governing people or operating the State apparatus?" (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1987, p. 475).

If we take the term network at face value, we see that the usual understanding of network as a net-like structure of relation, where users assume the role of individual nodes, does not readily apply to social networks. The assumption is that the mode of relation is directly peer-to-peer, user-to-user, without any mediating intervention. However, the relation of user-to-user in a digital social network is never direct: it is a mediated panoptical radial structure, by definition mediated by the platform itself as the central hub which mediates all relations as medium, i.e. environment, culture, habitat and milieu. And if we imagine the social network as 'a working coherently', we have an abstract machine that is operating on a virtual plane which maps out onto the material actuality while discounting its concrete mediation and immediate intervention. The resulting medium is an operative mixt which confuses mental and physical aspects in both human and medium into what Gilbert Simondon calls an associated milieu in *The Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (2019) and whose systemic confusion is akin to the fabric of matted felt.

Conceptually, "milieu" is seen as an environ-

³ As outlandish as these ideas may seem to us today, we need to remind ourselves that 3D computer graphics are based on the topological manipulation of reticulated triangles.

ment⁴ in the widest ecological sense of the term, i.e. as the locus of the dynamic interaction of all the factors and mechanisms that participate in the sustenance of an ecosystem: it is the simultaneous heterogeneous co-arising of all the participating or contributing entities as a co-dependent causality of emergence. Thus, the social medium as milieu is the setting and environment of concretion, of aggregation of users and technologies, which condition each other in order to form something which in turn, simultaneously, allows these very same things to (in)form themselves as mediated entities as a heterogeneous construct.⁵

Labelling a social network a social medium transforms it into a mode of communication and underscores social media's ability to mediate relation in terms of a commons that informs a specific mode of commonality. The social network is not an environment that surrounds the individual user, it becomes an abstract parallel ecology that not only connects one user to another, but is its very fabric of existence. This mode of being "social" can be understood as an ecology where the social media provide not only an environment that environs and sustains its inhabitants, but a *milieu*, a middle, a mediation, a medium, that heterogeneously connects and associates the material habitat and the individuals that thrive on it, through it, with it. So that we can readily see that any dysfunction in the milieu as medium will prove disruptive to the social, cognitive, emotional development of its constituents and result in serious consequences to the social fabric.

Social media go beyond serving as platforms that connect users as a centrally-administered and moderated network. They are parallel universes where individual users are not directly connected to one another directly, but are radially connected to one another by way of the central corporate entity that reflexively modulates, mo-

derates and ultimately mediates all interaction. The individual users are radially connected to a central hub constituted by the corporate entity that serves as gatekeeper, moderator, curator, accelerant, regulator, moral compass, and routing switcher of content — the functions that are usually ascribed to the algorithm. The radial structure serves as a centralized structure of control where all users are subordinated to the hub and all communications that pass through it are under its panoptical supervision. And it is exactly here that we need to locate the toxicity of social networks, in the dysfunctional ecology set up for their users through their totalitarian regulation of interaction within the medium as milieu.

The Toxicity of Social Platforms as Reciprocal Obligation

*"A man in debt is so far a slave."
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)*

The social network as social media is creative of a social common that exists as an ecological economy of reciprocal exchange and not only as a medium that joins, sustains, and surrounds users or functions as a media that communicates. Although all exchange on the platform is mediated, the relational conjunction expressed by the term social media comprises a variety of relational modes: the nature of the interindividual user-to-user relation is different from the user-to-platform relation, which is also of a different nature than the platform-to-user relation — the directionality of the relation is significant: between users the relation is a symmetrical exchange of reciprocal obligations based on the affective economy of "Likes"; the user-to-platform relation is initially predicated on a Gift-economy; and the platform-to-user relation is more of a predator-extractive economy. Immediately, we see the disparity or dissonance in the relational exchanges that takes

⁴ The environment is defined here as the external conditions which surround a living being or as the assemblage of material objects and physical circumstances which surround and influence an organism. It is a dualistic ecological conception.

⁵ We also need to appreciate that the nature and character of the images articulating the interactive exchange are disparate, heterogeneous and asymmetrical: disparate in that the exchange is not predicated according to relata which can be considered equal terms; heterogeneous in that the reactions as pragmatic are not necessarily of the same nature; and asymmetrical in that the reciprocal responses are not of the same order or scale.

place in the vertical relation between users and platform and horizontally between users themselves, each one with its own specific character and necessary machinic enmeshments.

Social platforms are toxic when they develop capacities in their users to act and react that do not lead the user to be all that they can be nor to act in accordance with their best interests. Spinoza would say in the *Ethics* (1677) that these capacities do not lead to "beatitude" or "blessedness" which he defined as "the satisfaction of mind which stems from the intuitive knowledge of God" (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 155)⁶. Whereas adults have (or at least are deemed to have) powers of discernment and discretion and can evaluate for themselves whether or not the capacities to act and react that are being assimilated and developed contribute positively or diminish their powers to act in the world, many users are not conscious of the addictive nature of engagement implicit to these digital technologies and the negative effects consumption can have.

The toxicity usually ascribed to social media cannot be indicated wholesale without differentiating between the various modes of relation. Each mode has its toxicity and specific problems. Thus, one cannot outright state that bullying, depression, negative self-esteem, attention deficit, addiction, anger and rage, polarization, disconnectedness and social alienation, informal hierarchizing, etc. are *the* problem of social media. Although they do constitute grave social problems in themselves, they are not the *causa prima* of the toxicity of social media. They are symptomatic of a social dysfunctionality originating within the culture and society at large and exacerbated by modes of interaction intentionally designed into the functioning of social media (ALTER, 2017). Despite the inordinately large numbers of social media user/consumers being affected negatively by and through their

interaction with social media, the effects are felt and expressed individually. But there are so many individuals affected that the repercussions can only be articulated at the social level, for, as social media, they "socialize" the individual and simultaneously mediate and immediate a certain mode of mass social communication germane to that technology. And in labeling the media a mode of communication, we underscore social media's ability to communicate, not only in terms of exchange of ideas, knowledge, information, power, etc. by stakeholders on the interindividual level, but of mediating the transindividual relation and facilitating affordances that inevitably produce self-sustaining social commons that inform modes of commonality. To speak of the social, we go beyond the spatial extension of aggregation of individuals as a body social to speak in terms of an immanent responsive system of reciprocal obligations and activities which require joint participation and enterprise on both parts as creative of a productive space-time.

*Initially*⁷, the machinery of debt and reciprocal obligation is primed by the users' being welcome to the platform. The platform offers itself and its services, and the user offers its participation and contacts in good faith. So that for the individual user, the user-to-platform relation is a dialogical exchange of reciprocal obligations constituting a non-symmetrical, non-homogeneous, disparate contraction based on gifting, the incurring of debt and its acquittal. Thus, the social platform "gifts"⁸ its panoply of services to consumers which the users enjoy free of charge and thereby incur a debt of gratitude, and in return, the platform provides the means, the media, by which users receive the ego-gratification of peers and are rewarded in "Likes". But what is dissimulated in the platform-to-user relation is that users freely provide their user data and serve as captive audience to advertising while leaving themselves

⁶ IVAIV. Obviously this is not a religious assertion but the Spinozist expression for the perfecting of the intellect through the understanding of adequate ideas and their joint processual operativity as leading us to freedom from the enslavement of the passions. To equate God with a deity would be the same as equating Joyful or Sad affects with being happy or unhappy — not what Spinoza has in mind.

⁷ We say initially here because the feeling of debt or gratitude to the platform will be eventually replaced by the dynamic of generating "affirmation" through "Likes".

⁸ Mark Zuckerberg: 'There will always be a version of Facebook that is free'. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/video/mark-zuckerberg-version-facebook-free-54375605>.

open to ideological manipulation at the same time that they provide the content that makes the social media experience richer.

As Marcel Mauss describes in *The Gift* (1925), we have a deeply ingrained instinct to respond in kind to what we are offered and served up as a "gift". So that by virtue of hosting users on the platform, their letting users dwell on the network and produce the content that creates the experience, of accepting and enjoying the content that users are being offered — consciously or unconsciously — users enter into a social contract of reciprocal obligation as a system of obligated exchange between users/consumers/creators, system providers, and the media itself: "social life is constant give-and-take; gifts are rendered, received and repaid both obligatorily and in one's own interest" (MAUSS, 1967, p. 27).

The payback of the obligation and the acquittal of the debt begins with the free labor users provide to create the content that fleshes out the experience of social media. This content is what drives user engagement and serves as the foundation for the impulse to publish content as the users' currency of exchange for feelings of belonging, of affirmation, sociality, acceptance, and heightened self-esteem that is cashed out in "Likes". Although this exchange can constitute the basis for morbidity, it does not necessarily explode into a full-fledged syndrome; nevertheless, we see this exchange of content for "Likes" in the haphazard moderated return of the pull of feedback (ALTER, 2017) as axiomatic to our explication of the workings of social media in that this mechanism trumps all others to explain the motivation behind social media use.⁹ Taking this interpretation to the limit, one could say that the engine that drives the machine is the exploitation of the unfathomable depths of the vanity of its users — there is no limit to the satisfaction of vanity that social media can potentially so freely provide. This is the mechanism that will eventually override the initial feeling of indebted gratitude to the platforms — a mechanism whose pragmatic

outcome is expressed through the operation of the algorithm.

Based on the peer-to-peer exchange economy of "Likes", a social network generates no coin until it can find a means to cash out "Likes" into money. It requires a different machinic assemblage to convert the social network experience of reciprocal ego-gratification of users into fungible capital of some sort. This conversion of user experience into cash happens through advertising sales. But because a platform's income is dependent on individual user's consumption, platforms design affordances and usage strategies to keep users engaged — and this is where the toxicity is generated: it is in the platform's attempts to maximize engagement using techniques that will create and foster dependency and indispensability that the conditions for addiction are produced, aided and abetted by the analysis of usage statistics culled from user data. One has to wonder if toxic aspects of social media would develop if it were left to its own devices to function as a social network.

Social networks are Trojan horses in that the "gift" they so freely give does not often obviate the reciprocal obligations that the user unwittingly incurs. With the platform, the gift of social connectivity and delivery of "Likes" is combined with an obligation to return the favor as a debt that never stops collecting. And it is the perpetual acquittal of this debt that creates the ever-increasing capital that enrich the social media platforms. Google offers a panoply of free services to users; Meta offers sociality, a feeling of connectedness and the possibility of broadcasting one's life; YouTube allows us to produce and exhibit our videos for free and access millions of hours of audiovisual programming; Twitter permits users to publish the experiential unfolding immediacy of their existence 144 characters at a time; and perhaps more insidious are the parasitic cookies and the data aggregators that promise to offer enhanced user experience, functionality and convenience. Putatively, all these services are given to users "free of charge", seemingly altruistically, without

⁹ This economy provides the fertile ground for the formation of narcissistic personality traits, their fruition into "like" addiction and development into narcissistic personality disorders.

any expectation of return, despite what the Terms of Agreement spell out in black and white (which nobody reads nor understands the implications) as to what acceptance of the gifts entails: nothing other than debt incurred by the unstated contract based on the guilt of reciprocity of gifting.

The Affective Toxicity of Social Networks

*"If you are ruled by mind you are a king; if by body, a slave."
(Cato the Elder)*

Although the user-to-user relation of interactive reciprocity based on "Likes" is also a gift economy, rather than retrace this relational interchange as gifting, we analyze it now as the emergence of an affective machine freely using Spinoza's *Ethics* (1996) to create our argument¹⁰. The seemingly innocent mechanism of a user liking "Likes" as the exaltation of egotistic attributes¹¹ is an affect-driven mechanism based on vanity¹². It is invisible somatic activity which depends on the production of certain neurotransmitters (ALTER, 2017; LANIER, 2018) as the body's response to stimulus as imagistic process¹³. "Likes" produce spikes in the individual user's affective modulation (*affectus*) that is directly interpreted somatically as positive, as Joyful¹⁴, and which eventually results in the habitual response of the "compulsion to repeat" the action that led to the minuscule, barely registered heightening of our mood, of our affective state, by the stimulus of "Likes".

Normally, we would characterize this machinic animation as desire, but we need to take into account Spinoza's distinguishing between appetite and desire: "Between appetite and desire there

is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite. So, *desire* can be defined as *Appetite together with consciousness of the appetite*" (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 76).¹⁵ Clearly, social media are appetite-driven — users are trapped, fettered, bound by the compulsion to satisfy their unconscious, non-rational, affective cravings for "Likes" which is not guided by the striving for God. Thus, users' net-working on social platforms is an enslavement to the passions which in turn becomes a *perpetuum mobile*, a machinelike donkey-and-carrot assemblage, fueled by the never-ending supply of users' vanity (appetite) and the quest for "Likes" (satisfaction).

Spinoza is quite explicit in also distinguishing between a slave and a free man. The difference lies "between a man who is led only by an affect, or by opinion, and one who is led by reason" (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 151).¹⁶ The engine that powers the assemblage is somatically affective; it operates through the body and evades the intellect; it is not a rational process; nor one that engages the intellect; nor the higher faculties which identify us as human and distinguish us from the animals; nor any of the qualities to which we ascribe the presence or working of God within us. The user perceives nothing clearly or distinctly, except those things which follow from his power of acting revealed to him through the affects.

One curiously positive aspect of this affective user-to-user economy is that the newsfeed and the algorithm that animates it are designed to build on our "Likes" and not our dislikes. The social media experience is always defined positively, Joyfully, disregarding or discounting any negative definition of what we may like: the affective

¹⁰ We use Curley's widely available English translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* and freely quote and paraphrase the translated text to build our argument of affective toxicity in social media. References to specific passages in the *Ethics* paraphrased in the text are provided as footnotes in the usual notation for Spinozist scholarship to allow for direct referencing to other translations. Direct citations are referenced as per ABNT guidelines.

¹¹ The conceptual constellation of terms predicated by the prefix "self-", such as self-love, self-admiration, self-absorption, self-centeredness, self-importance, self-regard, self-interest etc.

¹² "The quality of being personally vain; high opinion of oneself; self-conceit and desire for admiration". But also, "A vain, idle, or worthless thing; a thing or action of no value" (OED).

¹³ Imagistic in the Bergsonian sense as described in *Matter and Memory* (1988) as a stimulus, a centre of indetermination and a reaction, even though the dynamic is exemplified here through vision and pictorial stimulus.

¹⁴ Joyful in the Spinozist sense of heightening our body's power to act and react.

¹⁵ IIP9S.

¹⁶ IVP66S.

climate that ensues from determinations based on “Likes” would be a Joyful one. The individual user creates posts that other users “Like” and the “Likes” received compel the original user to repeat the process, for the greater the number of “Likes” a user receives, the greater the motivation to produce new posts, which in turn generates more “Likes”. However, this positive becomes negative by virtue of its being placed at the service of the false economy of “Likes”. If Joy is an affect by which the body’s power of acting is increased or aided, and if the Joyfulness arising from social media consumption is predicated on the fettering of the body to Sad affect,¹⁷ the Joy that social media instills is one which increases or aids in the Joyfulness of the body’s enslavement.¹⁸ In the parlance of slot machine gambling addiction, it is a loss disguised as a win (GRAYDON; STANGE; DIXON, 2018).

We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to Joy.¹⁹ Therefore, we strive absolutely, or want and intend that it should exist.²⁰ For Spinoza, “desire is the very essence of man” (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 124)²¹, a striving by which man strives to persevere in his being, but as we mentioned, the dynamic of social media is informed by appetite for affirmation and ego-gratification. So, if a desire which arises from Joy is aided or increased by the affect of Joy itself, whereas one which arises from Sadness is diminished or restrained by the affect of Sadness, we have appetite driven by the Joy of vanity and “Likes” and we end up with an amplification of the body’s power to act and the perseverance in its being but ultimately powered by Sadness. And because we shall strive to do also whatever we imagine men to look on with Joy,²² we apply ourselves to the production of content that will

result in the expression of that admiration with “Likes”. As such, if an individual is only versed in the ways of the Sad affects and only knows Sad affects to move him to act, what he produces in terms of affect will likely also be imbued with Sadness — thus, the “feed” functions as a negative feedback loop that seeks to amplify the Joyfulness of the Sadness.

The participation in the economy of production of “Likes” and the belief in the truth value of “Likes” leads to an inflated impression of self: “we shall easily exult at being esteemed, or be affected with Joy, and we shall easily believe the good predicated of us” (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 63).²³ And further, “we see that it easily happens that a man thinks more highly of himself and what he loves than is just” (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 83)²⁴ and understand that this overestimation easily makes the man who is overestimated proud.²⁵ Pride “is Joy born of the fact that a man thinks more highly of himself than is just” (Idem).²⁶ And because self-esteem is really the highest thing we can hope for, and because the self-esteem is more and more encouraged and strengthened by praise, and more and more upset by blame, we are guided most by love of esteem.²⁷ The self-esteem born from unreason and the power of acting derived from it only leads to furthering enslavement.

Likewise, Vanity is a Sadness which arises from pride, from man believing the heightened self-esteem despite its being ill-gotten from unreasonable consideration of self.²⁸ Moreover, insofar as a man knows himself from the unreasonable consideration of self, he is oblivious to his deficient and wayward character and its increasingly progressively fettered existence. So vanity, or the Sadness which arises from the false

¹⁷ III P41.

¹⁸ III P40.

¹⁹ III P28.

²⁰ III P28D.

²¹ IV P18D.

²² III P29.

²³ II P49D.

²⁴ III P26S.

²⁵ III P49D.

²⁶ III P26S.

²⁷ III P52D.

²⁸ III P53D.

reflection, or unreasoned consideration of self, is a passion that can only lead to Sadness.²⁹ If the first foundation of virtue is preserving one's being, and doing this from the guidance of unreason and unfounded overvaluation of the self, one is only striving to preserve an unwholesome and unfounded image of self.³⁰

The Machinic Enslavement of the Temporality of Social Networks

*"There are no secrets that time does not reveal."
(Jean Racine)*

Although the social network and the users constitute an operative more-than which functionally maps onto the physical constituent elements and flows that take place through it as social media, the platform is also as an abstract machine that produces what Italian philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato in *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (2014) calls subjectivity and enslavement.³¹ If we elaborate the metaphor of the abstract machine in terms of gears, and express the idea of enslavement in mechanical terms, Lazzarato's relation of master and slave arises not in terms of ownership, but in terms of a subsidiary device whose movements are directly dictated, controlled, and driven by the movements of an external power greater than the user's to which he would be subservient. The mechanism does not function on one single plane, it works synchronously on multiple levels as a meshing of gears and cogs to column wheels, axles and drive shafts where the movement is mechanically transmitted and coordinated horizontally and vertically, onto different "layers" or machinic strata. Everything remains in sync through the forced coordination necessary to keep all the layers running in synchrony in order to create a self-contained operational assemblage as expressive of the transmission of social subjectivity and agency (LAZZARATO,

2014; YOUNG, 2013; GUATTARI, 2010; DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1987).

An image of a wristwatch comes immediately to mind. The wheels and cogs of the internal mechanism transmit and moderate power throughout the system on different levels, always equalizing its dispensation as a distributive associated calculus. There is a central source of motivating power, but its nature is almost irrelevant to the singular one that emerges immanently within the system and is distributed by the connecting wheels, cogs and arbors which link the various levels of the assemblage and provide the movement of synchronous interdependent enslavement which produces a movement of time. Still, the timepiece is *prima facie* a revelatory technology in that it patently points out to us in a most obvious way the passage of time — it makes visual and palpable the transformation of the potential energy in the spring or battery into kinetic energy in the radial movement of the hands as the representational production of time. Wristwatches are not powered by time and they don't amass time, they run on the energy provided by a spring or a battery that through some mechanical or electrical principle motivates the machinic device that translates energy into measured movement — the movement of the hands is what gives value to the transduction of the potential energy of the spring cashed out into a mechanical movement as the production of time expressed by the rotating hands. In this metaphor we have the spring as the "prime mover" whose energy is rationally distributed by a mechanism that informs time as a uniform, constant and measured movement that subjects the entirety of the system to networked enslavement of wheels and cogs as a machinic Joyfulness because it functions in harmony with Godly order. The subjectivity that emerges from the functioning of the wristwatch is time, but perhaps we could also say that the watch's machinic creation of time as indicated by the rotating hands is the productive operative

²⁹ IIIIP56D.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ If the Common can be said to function as a one, as a unit, as an agent body, what kind of subjectivity arises within the Common?

logic of enslavement of all the parts to the whole.

If the horological movement rationalizes the brute force of the spring held captive by translating the potential energy stored in the spring into the serial unfolding of time as expressed by the circular movement of the hands on the dial, we can extend the metaphor of orrery as analogous to the work of God as prime mover of the universe's machinic unfolding and the material universe as expressive of time through the perfection of God's divine plan. Where the interlinked processual workings of the Universe under God's rationality gives *Natura Naturans* as the perfect working of a celestial technology productive of God's bountifulness of *Natura Naturata*, when we transpose God's model of Nature to the temporal work of mundane social media, not only do we see the shortcomings of their functional operativity, their inadequacy, and mendacity, we see that they are also not driven by God's divine rational perfection but by an inadequate Joyful machinism created by Man and animated by the sad affects of vanity, greed and enslavement.

The workings of social media do not constitute one machine, but two machines that work in unison. The social media aspect of the individuals users and their interaction among themselves produces one machine; the platform as a corporate entity that exploits the attention of its consumers through data mining and the manipulation and sale of attention entertains a second that subsists on the first. The first machine would likely do well on its own devices as a money-less economy of "Likes" and the reciprocal intercourse of users; but the second depends on the first machine to produce income in terms of money and is entirely dependent, and therefore machinically enslaved, to it — thus the strategies to always increase numbers — membership, postings, interaction, engagement, etc. Thus, the equation "time is money" is directly validated by the relation of the user and the social media: the productive time of users in front of their screens interacting with each other while consuming advertising and creating data is the resource platforms have been so successful in marketing. In contrast, the

significance of the equation that time is money is lost on users in that they fail to see the value of their time spent on the platform and are satisfied with their compensation in "Likes" in the affective economy of trinkets for gold of social networks.

The quality that makes us unable to scape time is the commonality from which we cannot escape: Time is Time; time in front of the screen is time in front of the screen. And it means differently, depending on which side of the screen one is sitting on. The life-time users spend in front of the screen is the time of consumption of social media; of user's life-time being used-up, consumed through consumerism's consumption. If Deleuze urges us to articulate any intellectual problem in terms of time, we need to find the effect of time which embroils users and makes it common in social media. It is not only because time is the ultimate preoccupation of philosophy but because it is the preoccupation which is common to us all — it is that link to temporality which communicates us above all else, and to which any other common or shared feature must be subsumed.

There is an adage circulated on the internet as a meme, attributed to Marthe Trolly-Curtin, that states "Time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time" which applied to our theme can be made to mean that the user's leisure time will be transformed into task-specific time at the service of platforms. Users spend time on social media, but that time binds them to a machine which 'winds up' users, cranks them up, so that they become more energetic and thereby more productive so they engage more wholeheartedly — the affective power of users to act and react is heightened but hardly what one would expect in terms of Godly Joy.

Specific time universes bind people, spaces, and things together in a manner that enables coordinated action to take place — a point on which sociologists of time would most certainly agree. But more than this, specific time universes organize people and their actions in such a way as to maximize their capacities toward productivity (ADKINS, 2018, p. 2).

But this machinic assemblage driven by vanity

does not only enslave the individual user as an indentured slave to its master. The individual users are machinically enslaved socially as the networked constellation of wheels and cogs, etc. that together produce a clockwork that creates the rational operativity as a production of time in front of the screen as the necessary enslavement of the parts into the functional operativity of the whole as subjective existence, as social media. The irregular working rhythms and hours of the individual net-workers is offset by the workplace being always open and welcoming — hours and tasks fluctuate, but the peal of "Likes" is potentially always there, waiting patiently for anyone looking to spend time making time. "We are concerned simultaneously with time-sense in its technological conditioning, and with time-measurement as a means of labor exploitation" (THOMPSON, 1957, p. 80). Users interacting with social media is the ideal captive workforce of capitalism in its purest form – the emptiness of time as producer of value. The unpaid net-worker that toils freely, day in, day out, that produces socialized time in front of the screen is the singular manifestation of value-creating transformation of time as the social phenomenon of occupation as networked machinic enslavement³² as constitutive of the affective machinic economics of social media where "Social intercourse and labor are intermingled" (THOMPSON, 1957, p. 60).

The Toxic Extraction of Value

"If our brains convince us that we're winning even when we're actually losing, how are we supposed to muster the self-control to stop playing?"
(Adam Alter)

The assumption here is that the network works as a peer-to-peer, one-to-one relational medium much the same way that a social network of peers works in the "real" world. In the human setting, one-to-one relations are conducted as if members are of equal status, ability, or rank so that no one domineers anyone else. But that

ideal conception of sociability is soon replaced by a different order where the ideal defining premiss remains actual, but another pragmatic relational structure installs itself, over-coding the original. This second, superimposed order is more representative of how the social group actually functions, both as to how the individual members interact among themselves and how the group represents itself as a whole. In social networks, by virtue of each user having a singular account per platform, the mechanism of "one person, one vote" appears to be in place so that any user, in theory, has no more power than any other. There are ways to circumvent singular identity safeguards so that a singular user can work multiple identities or accounts on a variety of social networking sites or a single site, or that a motivated coordinated organization can mobilize armies of sham, robotic accounts towards a unique end or goal and multiply the effects of influencing and manipulating large numbers of unsuspecting users by circulating vast numbers of postings containing disinformation, fake news, or outright lies as strategically coordinated political or public relations campaigns (ROMANOV; SEMENOV; MAZHELIS; VEIJALAINEN, 2017; PRICE *et al.*, 2015).

The operative system in the production and circulation of content in social media is not a simple system of economic exchange in that, for the most part, there is no monetary or financial exchange between users and the platforms. Users unreservedly produce content and freely contribute to the capitalist wealth of the platform by contributing their life-force in terms of creative time and energy thereby heightening the platform's experiential value for other users — they willingly provide the raw material for the experiential richness and entertainment value that constitutes the unique selling proposition of these networks and ultimately their bottom-line profits.

In terms of the contractual obligation of reciprocity, the social media's responsibility to the user is to provide the best user experience and most

³² If social media create or produce the conditions for unpaid enslaved labor, children have no place there.

entertainment value possible on the platform so that both parties maximize their benefit. This is their contribution to the exchange and constitutes the basis for the "contraction" that binds the two. The exchange would normally stop there as the intercourse of two parties. But the providers of the system in turn monetize the relation as basis for exchange with a third party. They create a derivative mode of exchange which sidelines the relevance of users' postings — where users participate in social media for postings, for the platform, users' postings simply exist as lures to hold them captive and captivated for delivery of advertising. In traditional media, the media would have to purchase the content in which they would spike advertising, but in social media, the platforms spike the "freely-availed" content feed with advertising. The function of user content is to offer variety and options for the algorithm to tailor feeds according to a user's type and history of "Likes" and provide the stream into which advertising can be inserted.

The relational modes of social media work hand-in-glove to produce automatic subconscious responses to individually-tailored, micro-targeted influence (KAISER, 2019; WYLIE, 2019) whether it be through the targeted content users are served through the computational machinations of the algorithm, through the strategic volition of advertisers of all types, or a coordination of both. But in this case, the micro-targeted advertising model tries to emulate the effectiveness of the peer-to-peer connection by wanting to establish rapport, trustworthiness, familiarity, concern, empathy with individual users to model communicational strategies. Networked social media expose us to insidious manipulation by providing pinpoint targeting of messages designed to trigger an immediate response. This correspondence of stimuli and response is based on mass data culled from users or amassed from aggregators that offer windows to our unconscious decision-making processes based on the

complex reciprocal interchange of conditioned affective responses as an embodied logic that is operative at an infra-conscious level and fetters us, binds us, enslaves us body and soul to an affective economy of bondage and servitude.

The payback of the obligation and the acquittal of the debt begins with the free labor users provide to create the content that fleshes out the experience of social media. This content is what drives user engagement and serves as the foundation for the impulse to publish content as the users' currency of exchange for feelings of belonging, of affirmation, sociality, acceptance, and heightened self-esteem that is cashed out in "Likes". Although this exchange can constitute the basis for morbidity, it does not necessarily explode into a full-fledged syndrome; nevertheless, we see this exchange of content for "Likes" in the haphazard moderated return of the pull of feedback (ALTER, 2017) as axiomatic to our explication of the workings of social media in that this mechanism trumps all others to explain the motivation behind social media use.³³

What value can be ascribed to the freely-gifted unpaid labor of enslaved users of social media? In terms of producing content as raw material from the social media experience, users' hourly wage at everyday workplace rates could serve as benchmark. Thus, a woman who is gainfully employed at \$20 per hour and spends two hours per day on Facebook is contributing \$40 dollars' worth of value day in, day out, or donating 700 hours, or more than 15 weeks of free labor per year, thereby contributing upwards of \$14,000 to Facebook's bottom line and making it an experiential value-laden proposition! One could say that her goodwill contribution of her time, discernment and "Likes" to making Facebook a rich, value-laden experience makes life more pleasant and rewarding for others, but other than paying out in "brownie points"³⁴ as a misguided karmic investment, the only return is ego gratification which can plausibly lead to egotism and

³³ This economy provides the fertile ground for the formation of narcissistic personality traits, their fruition into "like" addiction and development into narcissistic personality disorders.

³⁴ An imaginary social currency, which can be acquired by doing good deeds or earning favor in the eyes of another.

narcissistic issues if the affective system does not work in favor to the woman. But her free contribution doesn't stop there. By interacting with other posts, she is furnishing data about herself, about her preferences, her "Likes", her habits, her affiliations, her character, her desires, etc. in order to produce a picture-perfect virtual avatar of herself. This data is aggregated into a body of data points from various sources which when taken as a whole create a computational model of herself whose pragmatic functionality is likely truer to the woman's essence than the woman herself can ever express. This virtual avatar of the woman as a high-resolution image of what she is can then be used to ascertain the platforms' reactions in order to sharpen its predictive powers, tweak its suggestions and heighten its manipulative power by educating its understanding of us. And apart from training the AI of the algorithm to make it more effective in selecting and offering content both from other users and from advertisers, the net effect is to make us more pliant, receptive, and more susceptible to the wiles and manipulation of those seeking to change how we think, decide, and act in the world. The issue here is not solely the consumption or depletion of the net-worker's life to unwittingly produce wealth for the social media's owners, but in the owner's repudiation of the net-worker's consumption of social media as the site of actual creation of value. This repudiation functions jointly with the negation of the creation of value in content production, the conversion of the users' attention into cash and their dismissive and contemptuous rejection of accusations that they maximize revenue through devious stratagems to kindle addiction under the guises of fostering engagement.

Narcissistic Addiction

*"A hurtful act is the transference to others of the degradation which we bear in ourselves."
(Simone Weil)*

What at first blush appears as a functional dissonance provides the two sides to an imagistic mechanism of control based on the wanting to do

right through an internalized obligation towards reciprocity for the gift of social media and the heightening of the affective enslavement of users to a toxic economy of dependency of "Likes". It is a dynamic of conceptual substitution, of retail bait and switch, where users are sold one bill of goods in order to install a different order — in social networks, the premise sold is heightened sociality and affirmation, and it serves as lure to keep users captivated and captive to consume advertising and mold ideology while furnishing personal data to better manipulate and subjugate them.

Our use of social media allows influencers of all types, whether they are individuals, advertisers, government regulators, political interest groups, media conglomerates, agents of disinformation and propagators of fake news to better manipulate us into reaching choices, conclusions and decisions through embodied mechanisms rather than rational consideration that reflect their wishes and interests. All this is at our expense, and to add insult to injury, the manipulation that is taking place is not operative on the level of conscious rationality. The mechanisms that we are describing here, the culturally inbred guilt to reciprocate a gift and the neurotransmitter micro-doses associated to the neurochemical dependency of "Likes" works at an infra-conscious level unbeknownst to our awareness.

What appears to distinguish our engagement with social media from other modes of engaging and experiencing life is that our mode of engagement with social media all too often falls outside the realm of rationality or intentionality. Like when we drive a car, an (subconscious) automaticity sets in that takes over and does not engage our conscious rationality to determine our actions — only when something unusual or unexpected arises that our rational willful consciousness kicks in and the activity becomes an object of thought (WHITEHEAD, 1978). Spinoza offers a second definition of appetite in somatic terms as an active seeking in the *Ethics* IIIp9s, so that when "striving is related only to the mind, it is called will, but when it is related to the mind

and body together, it is called appetite" (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 76), and if there is appetite there must be a mechanism that nourishes and satiates that hunger: the *feed* of the timelines in social media. And so, we wish to come to terms with appetite as motivating or animating our engagement and identify that appetite that compels us to repeat, to remain engaged with social media.

The semi-conscious automaticity of reaching out for our phone and launching Instagram or Facebook upon waking up in the morning to directly check on the number of "Likes" our postings have received overnight at the expense of everything else is an example of this unconscious, subconscious enslavement to an economy of "Likes" that happens directly through the body without the participation of the rational mind. It is a dependency that expresses itself as an unwilling automaticity that undermines our understanding of the human as a rational, consciously willful agent in control of his actions. If the exploitation of users' vanity is the engine driving the abstract machine of social media, we need to keep in mind that the payoff is at the level of the barely perceptible, of the sub-liminal micro-dose of neurotransmitter release that is operative. Cancer patients routinely become addicted to opiates delivered at micro-dose levels through morphine pumps, likewise, neurotransmitter micro-doses of dopamine associated with the neurochemical economy of "Likes". Awareness of these appetites or automatic somatic responses is what mindfulness tries to develop, yet to become aware of the affective modulation, the actual flow of *affectus*, is at another level of mindfulness altogether and what is properly known as Vipassana meditation within Buddhist practices. And it is the awareness of these appetites and what drives them that mindfulness reveals and permits us to liberate ourselves from the enslavement to the passions.

Overestimation of the self easily makes the man who was overestimated proud, and when the mechanism that drives that overestimation falters, frustration and anger ensues, and narcis-

sism rears its ugly head. The "Likes" that foster self-esteem need to be constantly supplied, and when they are not forthcoming, those who once supplied support and adulation now become the targets of hate. "The striving to do evil to him we hate is called *anger*; and the striving to return an evil done us is called *vengeance*" (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 92)³⁵. The frustration of the machinic assemblage animated by "Likes" as the satisfaction of narcissistic impulses alimeted by vanity can lead to the Seven Deadly Sins of the Narcissist: Shamelessness, Magical Thinking, Arrogance, Envy, Entitlement, Exploitation, Bad Boundaries (HOTCHKISS, 2003). And it is these "sins" as extreme extension of the affective economy based on "Likes" mapped onto the functioning of social media that cause so much malaise in susceptible individuals. Using social media motivates narcissistic predispositions in users to exact vengeance from followers unwilling to acquiesce, submit, or participate in the economy of "Likes". This subconscious economy of "Likes" has an ethics of obligations and expectations which surpass appetite as a passive dynamic, to one based on an aggressive expectation of reciprocity commensurate with one's growing, unwittingly egotistic, inflated self-image. It is here that the toxicity becomes expressed as a willful aggressiveness and a compulsion to hurt those whom users perceive have slighted, diminished or belittled by not responding in due manner to their posts as a direct extension of their inflated self-image. The aggressive reactions to this frustration brought on by the exacting expectations and demands provides the causal dynamic behind the panoply of symptoms imputed to social media.

There also has to be receptive a predisposition of affordances in individual users that facilitate the plug-and-play modularity of social media's toxicity. If social media are widely held to be responsible for the social ills that are attributed to them, it is because society itself is predisposed to fulfil that role and would indicate that there exist social preconditions within the culture that sustain

³⁵ IIP40DS.

the widespread susceptibility to the workings of social media. The ills that social media seem to produce do not indicate that social media are broken, but that they are exceedingly efficient in what they do. This is operative at the level of the affective and as such can be intuitively back-gridded to establish the workings of an unobservable processional logic that leads us to conclude certain pragmatic results. But if the reaction of the user is a pragmatic outcome of the stimulus delivered by the platform to the user, the platform knows "P therefore Q" as an image point in the user. And if the platform amasses thousands of these imagistic data points on one user, as Alexander Nix³⁶ claims, the platform will likely have a full picture of how the user's mind functions and how to modulate the (in)formational content of what it delivers as stimulus so as to improve the effectiveness of direct voter contact and produce the response it is looking for.³⁷ WW Spinoza S?³⁸ Things which are of assistance to the common society of men, or which bring it about that men live harmoniously, are useful; those on the other hand which bring about discord between men and to the state, they are evil, if anything, because they lead us to live by inadequate ideas and irrationality. It is interesting to note Spinoza's prescience in identifying the Common Idea of Affect which is operative in these processes is still operative even if couched under the guises of a digital matrix.

Conclusion

Networked social media platforms produce self-contained, autonomous, self-sufficient milieus which function as ecologies of debt and addiction. Their existence not only predicates the existence of addiction, they are the technology of addiction itself that mediates and immediates its possibility — they are both instigating producer and self-perpetuating outcome by creating the conditions of reciprocal obligation and the

dependency on the "Like!" which function as the engine behind the compulsion to repeat. These mechanisms operate somatically on subliminal registers, barely making an impression on our consciousness or awareness, but the ethical logic that these phenomena generate work on an affective level that sidelines our rationality and taps into abstract machinery that undermines our subjectivity — we only know we are being manipulated and exploited by the description and accounting of our relation with the technology and not by any direct consciousness of its somatic effects. The entanglement of engagement that social networks produce as heterogeneous confusion between platform and user results in the individual user's cognitive transformation that engagement produces is simultaneously productive of time and the production of time itself. The network is both *network* and net-work: it embroils us spatio-temporally by simultaneously constituting both space and time of engagement as the processual medium of a self-contained social common as productive transformation that creates value in exchange of users' life-time — consumption is consumption and creator of value. Thus, platforms seek to maximize their users screen-time because all screen-time is unpaid productive net-work that contributes to the platform's capital and to its bottom line. What at first blush appears as a functional dissonance in the connection between users and platforms, provides the two sides to an imagistic mechanism of control based on the wanting to do right through an internalized obligation towards reciprocity for the gift of social media and the heightening of the affective enslavement of users to a toxic economy of dependency of "Likes". It is a dynamic of conceptual substitution, of retail bait and switch, where we are sold one bill of goods in order to install a different order — in social networks, the premiss we are sold is heightened sociality and affirmation, where in fact the premiss functions

³⁶ Ex-CEO of Cambridge Analytica, "a UK data-mining company that attempts to use "psychographics" to sway voters based on analysis of big data, social media, and pushing propaganda back at the potential voters via "microtargeting". CA evolved to convince people to vote against their own self-interest in support of ultra-conservative causes.

³⁷ Of course, it only needs to be sufficiently efficient to swing the undecided and susceptible persuadable electorate to carry an election — usually by a small percentage of the vote.

³⁸ What would Spinoza say?

as a lure to keep users captivated and captive to consume advertising and mold ideology while furnishing personal data to better manipulate and subjugate the individual user.

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