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Post-Media, Virality, and Desire. Untimely Meditation 2021

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Post-Media, Virality, and Desire

Untimely Meditation

Writing a paper on the notion of *post-media* at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, when unprecedented global lockdown measures are forcing a significant part of working activities and an even wider part of social activities to take through a personal screen, I have to wonder: what is the *timing* of our *meditations* in regard to our current condition? While the notion of *post-media* itself looks perfectly *on time* for describing and interpreting our current condition, Guattari's peculiar meaning of this very notion might now look curiously *out of season*. *Out of season* as Nietzsche's *thoughts* aimed at being?¹ Or, out of seasons like the clothes of the writer who left his apartment in Lyon mid-February 2020 with luggage for a week and got stuck in Northern Italy until mid-May 2020 (so far) while writing these pages? In other words, is Guattari's post-media simply an old and by now unfashionable notion compared to the current understanding of post-media that perfectly reflects our time? Or can its distance from our present be understood in a critical and therefore more fruitful way?

Guattari's Post-media: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm

Before meditating on the COVID-19 pandemic and our current 'post-media condition', I will try to pinpoint what I believe to be some of the most crucial elements of Guattari's notion of post-media, giving shape to a philosophical constellation within his line of thinking.

For Guattari, post-media is an age when the conditions of possibility for "new practices of subjectification" emerges. Following "the hegemony of mass-media powers", which produce processes of alienated and desingularised subjectification, the post-media condition should instead facilitate "a concerted reappropriation of communication and information technologies" (Guattari 2008, p. 133) leading to new forms of singularities. The notion of singularity is crucial to understanding post-media for Guattari.

1 See the different titles of English translations of Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen*. 1873–1876, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici, *Thoughts Out Of Season* (1909); translated by Richard T. Grey, *Unfashionable Observations* (1995).

Deleuze and Guattari already recurred to this notion in the *Anti-Œdipus* (1983)², to name a processual phase of the machinic unconscious. It is important to specify that when they speak of *singularities*, they mean a pre-personal and pre-individual condition, a metastable and molecular formation expressing a unique *difference* instead of an *identity*. A singularity is not a *subject*, nor an individual: it is the metastable result of a process of subjectification or individuation that is not separable from the process itself. We can find a meaningful definition of singularities in Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*, where it is framed in opposition to 'consciousness' or the organic individual: "What is neither individual nor personal are, on the contrary, emissions of singularities insofar as they occur on an unconscious surface" (Deleuze 1990, pp. 102–3).

Singularities are pre-individual performative events from which subjectivities can originate in metastable forms. When Guattari talks about *subjectification*, he is not talking about the formation of stable identities but rather about processual forms of singular – yet potentially collective – performative events, introducing a difference, both original and residual, in the plane of immanence. While the lexical choice of *subjectification* could be ambiguous since it keeps referring to a *subject*, which is the traditional philosophical term for naming a stable and enclosed identity, Guattari makes clear that he is rather referring to *minor identities*, processual subjectification processes, when he claims that "the upcoming post-media revolution should be called upon to take over (with unparalleled efficiency) from minority groups" (Guattari 2008, p. 133). As we've learned from *Kafka. Toward a minor literature* (Deleuze/Guattari 1986), minority groups are not simply politically *minor*, they are rather a model for an alternative – metastable and singular – idea of subjectification. In other words, *minor identity* is not only a political reality but also an ontological element: singularities are sparks for minor identities.

Singularities are events on a field of immanence: despite their being singular, they're inseparable from the environments in which they happen and become and inseparable from the processes that produce them. That is why post-media has to be understood as an ecological question: "An essential programmatic point for social ecology will be to encourage capitalist societies to make the transition from the mass-media era to a *post-media age*, in which the media will be reappropriated by a multitude of subject-groups capable of directing its resingularisation." (Guattari 2000, p. 61)

Post-media is then a theoretical notion that allows us to think of sociality in ecological terms as well as a practical notion that should enable the realisation of a social (sustainable) ecology. What's an ecological thought for Guattari? I would suggest we are dealing with an ambiguous notion that designates both an ethical tool and an epistemological approach. We can find such an ambiguity (meaning duality) in his advocacy for an *ecosophy*:

2 See especially Chapter IV, "Introduction to schizo-analysis", Paragraph 5, "The second positive task", p. 340–382.

Without a change in mentalities, without entering a post-media era, there will be sustainability for the environment. But without changing the material and social environment, there will be no change in mentalities. Here we find ourselves in a circle that leads me to postulate the need to find an 'ecosophy' articulating environmental ecology with social ecology and mental ecology. (Guattari 2000, p. 64)

Ecology is then the hope, the wish and the effort towards a sustainable environment, which is inseparable from a sustainable sociality and psychological activity; that is to say, an ethical, voluntarist practice. But ecology is also an epistemological approach: this mutual and *ecological* articulation of environment, sociality, and 'mind' (to be understood as an extended mind, including unconscious activity), is the *circle* of *ecosophy*. The epistemological approach is accounting for materiality and mind, nature and society, not as different parts of the structure but as interacting on a molecular level, in the same field of immanence. This duality of Guattari's *ecology* is then a second fundamental element to understanding the deeper meaning of his conception of *post-media*.

A third element found in both passages previously quoted is the attention to technology, especially information and communication technologies, in their materiality. Machines, and their components, take part in Guattari's ecology as much as environment (nature) and subjectification (psyche/mind/unconscious): on a molecular level there is no separation between them. On the contrary, technology is often the key to understanding the actual molecular functioning, as we can see in the *Anti-Cedipus*, where nature and unconscious are both explained in machinic terms. Deleuze and Guattari could not be clearer, machines are not metaphors (Deleuze/Guattari 1983, p. 2, p. 30). If industrial machines were the model for the molecular functioning of the unconscious in the *Anti-Cedipus*, information and communication machines would come to replace them. As Guattari wrote in *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, "[T]echnological machines of information and communication operate at the heart of human subjectivity, not only within its memory and intelligence, but within its sensibility, affects and unconscious fantasm" (Guattari 1995, p. 4). Information and communication machines are then the model to describe the molecular processes of the unconscious as well as of the environment. Technology, especially information and communication technology, is essential to define but also to realise the post-media condition, made possible by technological features such as "the miniaturization and customization of equipment, a resingularisation of mediatic means of expression" (Guattari 2008, p. 133), as Guattari wrote, anticipating one of the main trends in current technological devices. This brings us to another essential element of post-media for Guattari's: time.

Post-media is an *age*, a historical condition. But it is not *simply* an age or historical condition: other factors are needed to enter post-media. It is a condition situated in history, although not determined by history itself. However, given its ontological and ecological nature, it is important to highlight the historicity of such a notion. This historicity was explicitly pointed out by Guattari himself, as we could see above. In this regard, it is interesting to observe how the first occurrence of post-media *chez* Guattari can be

found in a paper arguing against the *post-modern condition* (or rather, despite Guattari's intentions, *post-modernisms*). Post-media is conceived, by Guattari, as an alternative to *post-modern* – estimated as a too vague and linguistic-centred notion – for describing post-industrial capitalism and global society. The two main differences with post-modernism, as understood by Guattari (often, I have to say, quite freely in regards at least to Lyotard's meaning of *postmodern*), are:

- post-media does not rely on a linguistic system of reference to an external signifier, that is to say that Guattari's polemic against post-modernism is an updated version of his polemic against structuralism and psychoanalysis³;
- post-media does not simply state the failure of meta-narratives, implicitly accepting capitalistic *status quo*: post-media wishes to transform this very *status quo* by taking the opportunities opened through technological, economical and societal transformations.

That is why we can say that post-media for Guattari is a historical condition that works also *against* its time.

Post-media is then a constellation of multiple elements that we tried to pinpoint in the first part of this paper: singularities (process of subjectification), ecology (in both ethical and epistemological meanings), technology, and temporality (historical but also critical towards its time). Within the frame of Guattari's work, I believe *desire* could be seen as the absent centre of this constellation: desire is at the core of the process of subjectivation, libidinal energy activating “disjunctive synthesis of singularities and chains” (Deleuze/Guattari 1983, p. 338). The micro-politics of desire is not only in sync with ecological praxis but also not in contradiction with large scale ecology struggles (Guattari 2000, p. 51), as information and communication technology operates at the heart of human “sensibility, affects, and unconscious fantasm”; that is to say, in one psycho/schizo analytical word, *desire*. Furthermore, as Erich Hörl points out, “Guattari thought a technico-medial historicity of the unconscious and of desire” (Hörl 2014, p. 5), which places desire in relation to history and temporality.

I therefore suggest approaching the notion of post-media in Guattari from a libidinal point of view, highlighting the importance of desire for all the elements that contribute to shaping the post-media condition itself. Such an approach allows us to extend the duplicity of desire to post-media: the *aesthetic and ethic* duality, characterizing Guattari's later thought more generally.⁴ Aesthetics designates the conditions of possibilities of our libidinal experience, and ethics designates its orientations. If aesthetically speaking we can talk in terms of a “technico-medial historicity of desire”, desire is ethically speaking a choice, a way of being within such a context. Such an ethical dimension is already highlighted by Foucault in the *Preface* to the American edition of *The Anti-Cædipus*: “I

3 This is, for instance, the proposal of Guattari (2008), the first text in which we can find an occurrence of post-media's term in Guattari's work.

4 Such a double dimension is already highlighted in the subtitle of Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis. An ethico-aesthetic paradigm* (1992)

would say that *Anti-Oedipus* (may its authors forgive me) is a book of ethics, the first book of ethics to be written in France in quite a long time (perhaps that explains why its success was not limited to a ‘readership’: being anti-oedipal has become a life style, a way of thinking and living)”(Foucault in: Deleuze/Guattari 1985, p. xiii). Approaching post-media through desire gives us a key to perceive and interpret such a duality operating at the core of post-media itself. If on the one hand, aesthetically speaking, post-media is a technico-medial historical condition, and on the other, ethically speaking “a life style, a way of thinking and living”, a choice that can be possible within (and thanks to) such conditions of possibility, I believe the aesthetics/ethics duality of the notion of post-media is a fundamental aspect to understand its complexity, especially in regards of its relation to our time. In other words, such an aesthetical/ethical duality is fundamental for characterising how Guattari’s notion of post-media could be both *on time* and *unfashionable, untimely, or out of season* in regard to our present pandemic condition.

Untimely meditations on post-media virality

It is too soon to study or even to share meditations on transformations of human and non-human (ecological and medial) conditions produced by a major event such as the coronavirus pandemic. I believe, however, that such an event offers us at least the possibility, as well as the necessary distance, for reflecting on our condition *before* the epidemic. As it is accelerating and catalysing a whole series of processes that were already transforming our societies; it is making them manifest.

Therefore, the hypothesis I will put forward through the untimely meditations composing the second part of this paper is that the COVID-19 pandemic has been both the climax of the post-media condition as we have known it so far, as well as a moment of its self-consciousness.

Thus, the observations I collect and develop here aim at being *untimely* in regard to our present condition: untimely because of such a distance, a temporal but also spatial distance introduced by the lockdown, which could also function as *critical distance*. But untimely also on a historical level: if there is anything we can say it will more probably be about our previous situations rather than about our foreseeable future. The *untimely* relations of such mediations in respect of our times will allow us to better understand the *untimely* relation of Guattari’s *post-media* in respect of current understanding of it.

Meditation #1 –On Post-colonial studies

In a commentary on Žižek’s latest book, *Virus*, and more generally on the current pandemic, Maurizio Ferraris claims that this coronavirus risks becoming a paradigm through which the “whole reality” is interpreted, giving birth to what he names

(ironically but efficiently) *post-colonial studies* (Ferraris 2020). This might be especially true for media studies. In *We'll show you (who we are)*, a reflection on our relations with screens in light of the current pandemic, Mauro Carbone cautiously suggests how it might be presumptuous to affirm that, after this event, “nothing will be the same as before”. However, he puts forward “the hypothesis – and the hope – that at least with respect to our relations to the screens, quite an amount of things will not get back to the way they were” (Carbone 2020).

For sure, coronavirus changed our media paradigm, but mainly by accelerating some processes that were already ongoing. More than our media condition itself, it changed our perception of it, “our relations” with it and our awareness (and unawareness) of it by increasing our acceptance of some practices (for instance online instead of physical presence) as well as our nostalgia for others that seem inevitably meant to fade away (for instance going to cinema, theatres or live music).

Meditation #2: Anthropocene and Radical Mediation

In her paper *Post-Media Virality: When We Are the Medium (of the Virus)*, Angela Maiello (2020) claims that the current COVID-19 pandemic highlights something that certain media scholars have been stating for a long time: mediation is not only about communication, rather it is a process that takes place on an existential level and takes both human and non-human *modes of existence*⁵ into account by overlapping biological and technological dimensions. In such a frame, the transmission of the virus must be thought of as part of a process of mediation, in which we are the medium of the virus both as that which transports it and the environment that hosts it. We could argue then that the COVID-19 pandemic has made manifest what Richard Grusin named “radical mediation”, as a paradigm of relational ontology for which “all activity is mediation, and [...] there is no discontinuity between human and non-human agency, or semiosis” (Grusin 2015, p. 140). *Post-media virality* would then be a particularly explicit manifestation of the *radical mediation* paradigm itself. Furthermore, it is such an ontology that helps us in understanding our era as the Anthropocene, where mutual constitutive relations between technological and natural elements, human and non-human agencies, contribute towards shaping and redefining the environment we inhabit (Grusin 2018).

In the aforementioned paper, Ferraris argues that such a wide and wild spread of the virus, heedless of human levels of civilisation, as well as the consequences of the lockdown on the natural environment (cleaner waters and air, and animals wandering around our towns), reveals the presumption of a concept such as the Anthropocene. I disagree with Ferraris on this as what he is referring to as “the Anthropocene” turns out to be a rather simplistic, anthropocentric and therefore *presumptuous* comprehension of this notion, which does not account for the ecological and mutual relations between

5 Here I'm referring to the title of Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (2017).

human beings and other “beings” (geological, biological, technological, economical) that for Grusin, among others, define the Anthropocene itself. I believe instead those very same facts Ferraris recounts prove the impossibility of separating human beings from the intricately textured mediations constituting the world, the flesh of the world (*la chair du monde*)⁶, in which existence is happening and becoming. They prove, in other words, the necessity of a relational and ecological ontology to study the condition of possibilities of our existences, where ‘our existences’ include the modes of existence of human beings as well as of planet Earth, virus, or Artificial Intelligence.

If the actual challenge of thinking of the Anthropocene, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2018) points out, is to be able to think in a geological time, to think within the temporality of rocks, and not only within the temporality of human history, then what the post-media virality characterising our condition demands is to be thought within the temporality of a virus. More than this, it also has to be thought of within the multiple temporalities of current information and communication technologies whose function has been radically amplified by social distancing and lockdown. However, thinking within their temporalities, as implicitly suggested by Chakrabarty, might not be enough. Taking Guattari’s libidinal approach to ecology, I believe the challenge of such a radical notion of Anthropocene – and of radical mediation more generally – is to think within geological, viral and technological desires. How does Earth desire? How does the virus? And how do the screens of our devices, or algorithms? It is only by the combination of their sensorium, their temporality, and their libidinal activities that we can take into account their modes of existence.

Meditation #1+2: Mediation as Self-consciousness

The emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic is then catalysing in the present a series of processes that began a long time ago. Longtime can identify a wide-ranging spectrum of temporalities: longtime as digital revolution, longtime as post-media, longtime as post-modern, longtime as capitalism, longtime as the Anthropocene. Such a moment in which the habit is partly suspended and partly enhanced (after all, we have all been locked down in our homes), in which we acknowledge what we were doing before because we cannot do it anymore or discover things that were unconscious before and now become manifest, is a moment in which we confront the Other, the “negative”, namely a moment of *self-consciousness*. Self-consciousness: a notion with an unmistakably Hegelian taste (Guattari may forgive me)⁷. Nevertheless, I find the definition of Hegelian *self-consciousness* offered by Judith Butler in *Subjects of Desire* particularly apt for our meditations:

6 See a model of relational ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible* (1969).

7 On the critique that Deleuze and Guattari move against Hegel’s philosophy of history, see Craig Lundy, *The Necessity and Contingency of Universal History. Deleuze and Guattari contra Hegel* (2016).

Self-consciousness is not the momentary act of a discrete consciousness attending an opposing and discrete world, but a cognitive experience taking place in a developing sense of time; it is, in turn, able to grasp the temporal life of the object itself. Consciousness could think determinate being, but could not think the process of determination and indetermination the is Life itself; it could not think change. (Butler 1987, p. 28)

Self-consciousness, for the Hegel of *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, is then a moment in which human consciousness can think within the mode of existences of “objects”, of “the world”: a moment in which human beings can “grasp the temporal life of the object itself”, merging with the World. It is a moment that displays sparks of relational ontology at the core of Hegel’s early thought, an ontology for which the very notion of desire turns out to be essential: “in desiring some feature of the world, self-consciousness effects the unity with the world that consciousness could only effect theoretically” (Butler 1987, p. 33). In fact, for Hegel, “self-consciousness is Desire in general” (Hegel 1807, §167), to be conceived as “sensuous articulation of a sensuous object which is simultaneously a reflexive pursuit of self-consciousness itself” (Butler 1987, p. 33). In other words, self-consciousness is desire as sensuous reflexivity, and therefore a process of mediation between the “subject” and the world, in its materiality, temporality and sensuousness. As Butler explains:

The Hegelian subject cannot know itself instantaneously or immediately, but requires mediation to understand its own structure. The permanent irony of the Hegelian subject consists of this: it requires mediation to know itself, and knows itself only as the very structure of mediation. (Butler 1987, p. 33)

Thanks to Butler’s reading of Hegel, we can understand *self-consciousness* more deeply, as a moment of awareness of mediation, of *radical mediation*, meaning of such a relational ontology.

It is then in such a double – self-reflecting – meaning, that I suggest considering this pandemic event as a moment of *self-consciousness* of the anthropocenic era – on one temporal scale –, as well as a moment of *self-consciousness* of post-media society – on another temporal scale. For this purpose, we could paraphrase what Mauro Carbone observes in regard to screens and our ‘screen experiences’ during the COVID-19 pandemic, and apply it to our post-media condition in general: “we needed the coronavirus pandemic crash-test, about thirty years after use of the Internet began to spread, to massively realize, in our collective experience, certain potentials implied” (Carbone 2020) *in our post-media condition itself*.

Meditation #3: Post-media Hybridity

What are the essential elements of the post-media condition as they are revealed at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic? Maiello writes that “this outbreak is showing

us that [...] our post-media life is constitutively hybrid”, and therefore that reality and its mediation are the same thing. Maiello’s understanding of the notion of post-media seems to rely on more recent conceptions than Guattari’s, and its fundamental element is *hybridity*: the post-media condition comes with the end of medium specificity⁸, in which the digital revolution plays a crucial role (Weibel 2005), especially by defining a new (post)media logic compared to the logic of the old media.⁹ Hybridity is a key element of post-media because this notion is essentially *ecological*, environmental: new media are intimately related to space. By being spatially situated, by transmitting fluxes of information and operating constant mediations through environments, by transforming environments themselves, they tend to constitute what Appadurai names *mediascape* (Appadurai 1996). To emphasise the processual and ecological becoming of *mediascapes*, as well as their power of individuation, to institute a process of subjectification within their environment, Francesco Casetti suggests referring at them as *mediascaping* (Casetti 2017, pp. 40–41). In turn, I suggest reading our *post-media condition*, essentially hybrid, in light of such a process of *mediascaping*, accounting for this indifference between reality and its mediation. It is particularly interesting then to point out how the affirmation of hybridity in the process of *mediascaping* comes with the need to resort to such a process in order to contain human hybridity since this latter is a condition that would lead to a resurgence of the virus.

Meditation #4: We are the medium

It is from such a *radical* perspective, based on relational ontology and this media ecology, that I join Maiello in claiming that *we are the medium* and, in this case, also *the medium of the virus*. We are the medium as far as we are inscribed in a mutual process of mediation: we are the medium along with other living and not living beings, and the activity of our mediation is inseparable from its passivity, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty (2010, see also 1969).

We are a medium of the virus when we spread it with our hands – whose role is fundamental also in our relations with communication technologies –, as well as with our breath – *afflatus*, which more symbolically expresses the *existential* nature of such radical mediation. But we are also the medium when *protecting* ourselves from the virus and its contagion: “cough and sneeze into your elbow”, “wash your hands”. First and foremost: mediation is not only about spreading or making available (and therefore reachable, visible, etc.) but also protecting, sheltering, concealing and making unavailable (unreachable, invisible). We should not forget this fundamental and ambivalent

8 See Rosalind Krauss, *Reinventing the Medium* (1999), *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (2000) and *Under Blue Cup* (2011); Ruggero Eugeni, *La condizione post-mediale* (2015).

9 See Lev Manovich, *Post-Media Aesthetics* (2001) and Mark B. N. Hansen *New Philosophy for New Media* (2004), especially Chapter I, “Between Body and Image: On the ‘Newness’ of New Media Art”, pp. 32–46.

function inherent to *mediascapes* and to the process of radical mediation itself: mediation means making available and unavailable at the same time, weaving together visible and invisible, displaying something while concealing or protecting something else. It is not by chance, that screens are the media dispositive of reference of our times: such fundamental ambiguity is essential to screen functioning, as pointed out by Screen Studies.¹⁰

Furthermore, wearable technologies of all kinds – from relatively simple (such as masks and gloves), to smart digital tracking devices (bracelets, smartphones with specific tracking apps, etc.) – are now becoming more and more explicitly present and essential to our interactions, to our existences in the hybrid (media) environments we inhabit. This coupling between human body and technology is showing how our being a medium is inseparable from the very context of radical mediation, in which there is no separation between human and non-human beings.

Such coupling of the human body with technology also entails a process of individuation or subjectification quite different from the one desired by Guattari. Here, the process of subjectivation is closer to the one described by Foucault as inherent to the notion of *dispositive* and to power relations catalysed by the dispositive itself.¹¹ Producing a subject means producing an individual ‘massified’ identity that you can control, address and tell; a subject that is subjected to the dispositive itself, to its power relations. Such a meaning of subjectification becomes particularly evident in times of a pandemic when the possibility of *individuating* (and inasmuch controlling, addressing, protecting, etc.) infected subjects turns out to be not only manifest but also justified by the ongoing emergency.

Both elements pointed out through the present meditation, 1) the statement that “we are the medium” in a passive-active process of radical mediation and in which mediation is both making available and unavailable, and 2) the fact that the process of subjectivation is issued by power relations within such a process of radical mediation, inevitably lead to the question of (medial) participation. Once again, the COVID-19 pandemic made manifest how participation is always *medial participation* – precisely in a perspective of radical mediation. Furthermore, by forcing us to interact manifestly through media devices, the pandemic made clearer that the issue of participation is always related to conditions of possibilities of mediation: their opportunities and their limitations. If digital technologies are promising us, during lockdown more than ever, that we can participate through them in a series of activities and events (school, work, concerts, diner, drinks with friends, political manifestation), and insofar also *be part of something*, we shouldn’t forget that “[p]romises of participation limit the possibilities of partaking and determine the criteria of inclusion and exclusion; they act as demands

10 See at least Jacopo Bodini, Mauro Carbone, *Voir selon les écrans, penser selon les écrans* (2016); Mauro Carbone, Anna Caterina Dalmasso, Jacopo Bodini, *Vivre par(mi) les écrans* (2016); Dominique Chateau, José Moure (éds.), *Screens. From Materiality to Spectatorship. A Historical and Theoretical Reassessment* (2016); Mauro Carbone, *Philosophy-Screens. From Cinema to the Digital Screens* (2019).

11 See at least Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. The Will to Knowledge* (1976).

and impositions for potential participants” (see Bippus/Ochsner/Otto 2016, p. 271). For instance, if digital technologies have made it possible for students to participate in school classes and activities from home during lockdown, such a form of participation, along with all the all the opportunity it creates, also raises issues concerning its possible limitations: owning a connectable device featuring a front-cam, an adequate number of devices for each family member needing to connect at the same time, and a stable internet connection (just to mention some of the most evident and simple limitations, followed by many others). The COVID-19 pandemic might then function as a moment of self-consciousness of our “medial participation”, putting forward how, also in regard of such aspects, making available is always inseparable from making unavailable, including from excluding. The challenge for the future of Media Studies will be then to always take into account such an ambivalent process at the basis of mediation and medial participation, especially in an era in which digital technologies pretend to guarantee everyone the possibility to participate at the same level in our new social life. The importance of this challenge is rather fundamental because if we are the medium then it is through such a process of mediation and participation that *we*, as subjectivities, emerge.

Untimely Resonations

I took the risk of meditating on an on-going event, such as COVID-19 pandemic because I believe that this peculiar moment entertains an intimate relation with the notion of post-media itself, for all the reasons I have tried to provide in the second part of this paper. This pandemic has been both the climax of the post-media condition as we have known it so far as well as a moment of self-consciousness of it and, more generally, of the radical mediation that presupposes it. Although the current usage of post-media – which I indirectly described by meditating on the present health emergency – are largely considered quite distant from Guattari, I wanted to let Guattari’s thought – explored in the first part of this paper – resonate through all the meditations composing the second part. Resulting resonations, consonant or dissonant, will compose the conclusions of this paper.

Several of the elements composing a post-media constellation within Guattari’s thought resonate harmoniously with our present condition of *post-media virality*. First among them is the ecological approach (epistemologically speaking), which is essentially trying to understand hybridity as a key element of *post-media virality*, as well as other fundamental notions such as the radical mediation and the Anthropocene. From an Anthropocenic perspective, moreover, we can detect traces of the ethical drive animating Guattari’s ecosophy.

Thanks to the ecological approach, the role of technology in post-media virality is also consonant with Guattari’s philosophy: the absence of discontinuity between

human and non-human agency, how our body is a medium inscribed in a process of mediation or the way in which wearable technologies are coupled with our bodies; each of these elements is highly compatible with the essential role of technology in Guattari's ecosophy. In other words, technology in the current post-media condition operates at a molecular level and therefore also at the heart of human sensibility, mind and libidinal activity.

Temporality is another essential dimension of a contemporary understanding of post-media: not only as the undeniable historicity of such a condition, but also as the ability to think within different temporalities inherent to different modes of existence. Such a complete time-architecture is what allows temporality to critically work against its time.

After these harmonious resonations, the most dissonant ones, concerning processes of subjectification, need to be further explored. In recent years we witnessed a large and increasing reappropriation of the means of communication – at least in terms of their materiality – that however did not clearly entail the production of new forms of unalienated singularities or creative processes of subjectification. By now, most people own a personal *means of communication*: a connected smartphone and/or personal computer, that is associated with a channel, a social media account, a blog, a space of expression, a virtual identity. Current pandemic and social distancing measures demanded specifically to resort to using them in order to keep working, learning, socialising. Moreover, they are used to invite people to stay home (#stayhome) and therefore implicitly address and lead them to buy into, donate, and share (fake) information. It seems that post-media virality entails rather Foucauldian forms of subjectification, in which the subject is produced by the *dispositive*, told by someone else, in which individuation means being controlled, tracked down, monitored, identified. Many are the reasons for such dissonance with Guattari's hope – I will briefly mention one: means of communication consist only of hardware, but also software, which turn out to be even more *desingularised* than traditional 'mass-media', working according to a uniforming logic.

Virality and desire as information

Instead of reducing the reason for dissonance to the uniform logic of software, in the remaining part of this paper I will dwell on a more philosophical and theoretical reason. It appears that what resonates harmoniously between Guattari's understanding of post-media and the contemporary understanding is what I have indicated as the *aesthetic* dimension of Guattari's thought, designating post-media conditions of possibility. In other words, Guattari's description of post-media conditions of possibility turned out to be a pretty accurate depiction of the current post-media condition. What differs deeply is instead its ethical orientation. The voluntarist and ethical connotation

of Guattari's post-media – the hope for and engagement with the creation of new forms of subjectification – has mostly disappeared both from contemporary understanding of this notion as well as from contemporary post-media society itself. I believe then that this ethico-aesthetical ambiguity is at the basis of the ambiguous relation that Guattari's notion of post-media entertains with our current condition: aesthetically speaking, Guattari's philosophy is definitely *on time* for describing the fundamental characters of our current experience; ethically speaking, Guattari's thought is incontrovertibly *untimely*, especially because of its critical distance towards the present time. In that sense, I would say that Guattari's post-media understanding turns out to be *out of season*, as Nietzsche's thought aimed at being: that is to say, borrowing Deleuze's words, "always against its time, critique of the present world [...] neither eternal nor historical, but out of our time and untimely" (Deleuze 1962, p. 107).

I proposed to approach the notion of post-media from a libidinal point of view because desire, a notion with a deeper background than post-media in Guattari's thought, is characterised by this very same ethico-aesthetical ambiguity. Therefore, I turn to desire – in the conclusion of this paper – to better understand how to critically twist post-media against our time. In his brilliant paper *Prosthesis of Desire*, Erich Hörl states something fundamental and yet rather ground breaking when it comes to the interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's work: *The Anti-Cedipus* "begins to make sense [...] only when it is considered in this narration of an industrial, temporal shift" (Hörl 2014, p. 2). In other words, Hörl suggests understanding the *anti-cedipal* revolution as the discovery of the historicity of desire. That is why Deleuze and Guattari insist so forcefully on production and the industrial paradigm that "the factory replaces the theatre" (Hörl 2014, p. 2), that production replaces representation. Eventually, both Guattari and Deleuze move away from production and the factory paradigm: Deleuze by embracing the notion of *enchaînement* and by replacing the disciplinary environment of the factory with the fluidity and the ubiquity of control (Deleuze 1995; 1992); Guattari by switching from industrial mass-production to new communication and information technologies, both personalised and massified. From representation to production, from production to mediation.

Rather than the industrial "process of production" typical of mass-media societies, I suggest that the new paradigm of desire, built on the digital technology characterizing our times, should be then the *data-information* paradigm. For Deleuze, indeed, information should be understood as a "set of watchwords", generating a "system of control" (Deleuze 2006). Guattari, in turn, seems to prefigure the process of data mining and the consequent definition of uniforming trends: "technological transformations oblige us to be aware of both universalising and reductionist homogenisations of subjectivity and a heterogenetic tendency, that is to say, of a reinforcement of the heterogeneity and singularisation of its components" (Guattari 1995, p. 5). Here, we can observe the duality of desire and how it works both according to its time (aesthetical dimension), by producing a "reductionist homogenization of subjectivity" and against its time (ethical dimension), by introducing an opposite and "heterogenetic tendency". Deleuze himself

affirms that information as a watchword corresponds to a counter-information, and which could develop into an act of resistance. Desire as *enchainement* is then both the algorithmic chain of information and the resisting creative network.

What is particularly interesting in respect to post-media virality is that the virus itself is information: genetic information that spreads through a process of mediation. Virality, indeed, in media language, is referred to as the wide horizontal spreading of digital content (Sampson 2012; 2019). What post-media virality is telling us, then, through such a libidinal approach, is that one reason the post-media condition did not entail a ‘heterogenetic tendency’ producing singularities, but rather a homogenisation of subjectivity, might be such a viral condition. Desire as information is a watchword that spreads following the logic of contagion. We can protect ourselves from the virus – from the command and the control inherent in desire as information –, and that is why it is important to insist on the opacity of mediation as well as its ‘protective’ function. But protection is not enough for producing singularities. The challenge of critically using Guattari’s notion of post-media against post-media virality is to resist contagion and its homogenisation logic.

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