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# Per un'etica critica dell'accelerazione digitale

*For a critical ethics of digital  
acceleration*

GIUSEPPE DE RUVO  
giuseppederuvo1@gmail.com

AFFILIAZIONE  
Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele (Milano),  
European Centre for Social Ethics

## **SOMMARIO**

Partendo dalla teoria di Rosa sulla modernità come processo di accelerazione, mostreremo come l'accelerazione digitale produca dinamiche di potere che legittimano il dominio delle piattaforme sulla vita delle persone. Sosteniamo che l'accelerazione digitale installi nei soggetti un deficit strutturale di riflessività, ovvero un'attitudine in virtù della quale i soggetti non colgono l'inaccettabilità riflessiva della loro esistenza online. Mostreremo come tale deficit strutturale di riflessività sia prodotto 1) dal fatto che gli algoritmi si comportano come meccanismi di sincronizzazione che non vengono discussi e 2) dal fatto che, per affrontare l'accelerazione, i soggetti assumono una identità situazionale, in virtù della quale la lotta per il riconoscimento, etica e riflessiva, è sostituita da un'extra-morale corsa per la reputazione. In conclusione, l'articolo analizza le strategie della critica etica e della critica immanente e sostiene la necessità di implementare una *critical digital literacy* per rinforzare la riflessività e favorire un atteggiamento critico.

## **PAROLE CHIAVE**

Accelerazione

Algoritmi

Teoria Critica

Riflessività

Reputazione

## **ABSTRACT**

*Drawing on Rosa's theory of 'modernity as a process of acceleration', we will show how digital acceleration produces dynamics of power that legitimise platforms' domination over people's lives. We claim that digital acceleration imbues subjects with a structural reflexivity deficit, i. e. an uncritical attitude by virtue of which users do not grasp the reflexive unacceptability of their online existence. We will show that such a structural reflexivity deficit is produced 1) by the fact that algorithms behave as synchronization tools that are not discussed and 2) by the fact that, in order to face acceleration, subjects assume a 'situational identity', by virtue of which the ethical and reflexive struggle for recognition is replaced with an extra-moral race for reputation. In the end, the article analyses the strategies of ethical and immanent critique and argues that a model of critical digital literacy should be implemented in order to reinforce reflexivity and favour a critical attitude.*

## **KEYWORDS**

Acceleration

Algorithms

Critical Theory

Reflexivity

Reputation

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## 1. MODERNITY AS A PROCESS OF ACCELERATION

Defining modernity is a very complex issue. Studies concerning the concepts of *rationalisation*, *differentiation* and *individualisation* have therefore multiplied in recent decades. The basic idea is that modernity is characterised by processes of rationalisation and secularisation of the social order, within which relations of functional differentiation are established and subjects are individualised as such. This analysis is confirmed not only by objective data, but also by how modern society has represented itself: just think of Balzac's or Kafka's novels about the power of bureaucracies, which embody the spirit of rationalisation and social differentiation, or of the 'discovery' of the human subject's role (individualisation) in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels<sup>1</sup>. In short, one of the characteristics of modernity – conceived not as a static sociological category but as a *form of life* – is that it is not simply endowed with certain characteristics, but is also capable of *reflecting on itself*.

It is from these premises that Hartmut Rosa, an exponent of the new generation of the Frankfurt School, proposes to add a new characteristic to the classical definitions of modernity: in his interpretation, modernity is characterised primarily by the «acceleration of social life and, concretely, by the rapid transformation of the material, social and spiritual world»<sup>2</sup>. According to Rosa, the heart of modernity lies in the «logic of social acceleration»<sup>3</sup>: in the increased speed that characterises communicative, political and existential processes. The experience of acceleration is not only objectively measurable in various spheres of social life<sup>4</sup>, but can also be traced in the «cultural self-observations of modernity»<sup>5</sup>: that is, in the forms of reflexive expression in which modernity represents itself<sup>6</sup>. According to Rosa, the acceleration that characterises modernity takes three interrelated forms. Firstly, there is an evident acceleration in the development of «*end-oriented* processes in transport, communication and production, which can be called technological *acceleration*»<sup>7</sup>. In modernity, technological innovations have become more frequent and are capable of completely changing subjects' representations of the world, insofar as they compress space-time and favour the movement of people and communication between them, giving rise to a process that culminates in globalisation<sup>8</sup>.

Secondly, in modernity we are witnessing an acceleration of social change. This means that «the rhythms of change themselves are changing»<sup>9</sup>. Changes that, in the past, required several generations are now seen as *intragenerational*<sup>10</sup>. There is therefore a social and political «contraction of the present», characterised by «an increasingly rapid decline in the reliability of experiences and expectations»<sup>11</sup>. Cultural standards and models of political legitimation tend to change rapidly; as a result, according to Rosa, the very logic of social change is extremely difficult to govern<sup>12</sup>.

Finally, the logic of acceleration also generates an increase in the pace of life. This may seem paradoxical: technological acceleration should relieve human subjects of many tasks, leaving them with more free time. In reality, Rosa notes, the acceleration of social changes and the myriad activities and experiences that new technologies make available to subjects exceed the reduction in complexity that they generate. There is therefore an «increase in the number of individual actions or experiences [that occur] per unit of time»<sup>13</sup>. In such a context, the growth rates of possible experiences «exceed the rates of acceleration, and this is why time is becoming increasingly scarce [...] *despite* the remarkable pace of technological acceleration»<sup>14</sup>. The consequence is that, as the number of possible experiences increases, «the time required in order to make rational and informed choices, and to coordinate and synchronise actions, steadily increases»<sup>15</sup>. However, we lack the time we need because the pace of life is structurally accelerated. The consequence is that subjects increasingly rely on tools providing collective synchronisation, and on «some external instance»<sup>16</sup>, to ensure that they do not remain desynchronised and therefore isolated from the rest of the world.

In this sense, we are witnessing a contraction of the present, not so much at the socio-political level, but at the 'existential' level. This, Rosa states, transforms «the forms of human subjectivity, and also our being-in-the-world»<sup>17</sup>. Subjects' existence is characterised by a fading experience of the present and regulated by «the *silent normative force* of temporal laws»<sup>18</sup>. This is why Rosa speaks of a *totalitarianism of acceleration*, in which «the progression of social acceleration [...] can be [...] defined as all-pervasive and all-inclusive: it exerts its pressure by inducing a

permanent fear of losing the battle and of no longer being able to keep pace»<sup>19</sup>. According to Rosa, such totalitarianism does not spring from propaganda or violence<sup>20</sup>, but from *silent* temporal mechanisms that make the subject «regulated, dominated and oppressed by a temporal regime that is mostly invisible, depoliticised, undisputed»<sup>21</sup>. In short, subjects accept the temporal organisation that is characterised by acceleration without reflecting on it, on its genesis or on the power and alienation to which it gives effect: «these dictates are hardly recognised or perceived as a social construction»<sup>22</sup>.

The temporal regime also achieves this because subjects assume a *situational identity*, by virtue of which, instead of deciding on their life projects autonomously, they prefer to adapt and «follow the flow»<sup>23</sup>. Due to social acceleration, the increase in possible experiences and the fact that their «awareness of contingency is unavoidably heightened»<sup>24</sup>, human beings assume attitudes that favour reducing complexity; following the flow and adapting to it seems to them to be a useful mechanism for synchronisation. The price to pay, however, is the renunciation of any reflective attitude that is capable of grasping how, in reality, such an existence is profoundly alienated, governed by heteronomous laws and ultimately modelled on the needs of the capitalist system of production, which demands performance, competition and an ability to multiply the number of productive actions<sup>25</sup>.

In this sense, Rosa's theory of modernity as acceleration is a *critical* theory. Its aim is not only to analyse the vicissitudes of modernisation, but also to criticise them *immanently*<sup>26</sup>. In fact, Rosa's critical theory does not exclusively aim to 'denounce' the pathologies that social acceleration generates. Rather, its aim is to show how acceleration, though a structural feature of modernity, violates «the promise of autonomy and reflexivity that lies at the heart of modernity itself»<sup>27</sup>. The temporal norms of acceleration must therefore be criticised because, as Rosa writes, «if the project of modernity and the Enlightenment culminate in the idea [...] of individual and collective autonomy, social philosophy must certainly pay attention to this phenomenon of automation [of acceleration], which so far has gone unnoticed»<sup>28</sup>.

Having clarified Rosa's perspective, this article aims to show how these dynamics are further reinforced in our

digital existence, while still inextricably linked to capitalist accumulation. We will therefore attempt to show how synchronisation mechanisms operate (§2) and situational identities are reshaped (§3) in a digital context. In the conclusion (§4), we will attempt to develop what can be called a *critical ethics of digital acceleration*.

## **2. DIGITAL ACCELERATION: ALGORITHMS AS SYNCHRONISATION TOOLS**

It is beyond doubt that, in the onlife experience, the number of possible experiences per unit of time has increased and continues to increase. The volume of data created, consumed, copied and captured on the Internet has increased from 2 zettabytes in 2010 to 147 in 2024<sup>29</sup>. At the same time, the number of emails sent every day rose from approximately 300 billion (2020) to 380 billion (2024)<sup>30</sup>. From 2011 to 2022, the number of WhatsApp notifications increased from a few million per day to 125 billion<sup>31</sup>. Time spent on social media is also increasing, as are the number of users and the amount of content posted on the various platforms<sup>32</sup>. It is estimated that users now deal with around 10,000 digital advertisements per day, a figure that has been growing steadily since 2010<sup>33</sup>.

In short, if – following Rosa – we define the acceleration of the pace of life as the increase in possible experiences per unit of time, then it is quite evident that *onlife* existence, to use Luciano Floridi's fortunate neologism, is characterised by a certain acceleration. As Rosa writes, quoting Kenneth Gergen's work, acceleration transforms 'everyday life into a sea that floods us with requests'<sup>34</sup>, and it is easy to adapt this metaphor to the digital world, within which requests for friendship, sponsorship, email and so on are becoming increasingly frequent. All these issues, moreover, must be understood in relation to the peculiar ontological structure of the Internet, which is configured 'as an infinite and constantly moving object'<sup>35</sup>, absolutely impossible to represent or treat as a mere repository of information. On the contrary, the Internet is ontologically constituted by data's *reciprocal action*: the entry of each new bit into the system implies its reorganisation at ever higher levels of complexity, according to a feedback process that cannot be *slowed down*<sup>36</sup>.

It is precisely for these reasons that the web must be constantly *cut*.

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For users to have a satisfying digital experience – one that does not consist of a mere (and very rapid) succession of unconnected information – it is necessary to find a way to synchronise their experiences, especially in social media. This operation is carried out by the various algorithms that govern our digital experience, without which the Internet as we know it could not exist. From this point of view, algorithms are first and foremost the fundamental tools of digital synchronisation, useful for ordering the acceleration that characterises online existence. For this reason, as David Beer has recently noted, the narrative of big digital companies is based on their algorithms' ability to organise the user experience quickly. Indeed, in the words of Big Tech itself, algorithms allow subjects 'to be *in the moment* and to react without delay or hesitation'<sup>37</sup>. By guaranteeing synchronisation and by being able to compress the Internet's plethora of information computationally, algorithms are thus supposed to be able to synchronise and simplify users' online lives.

Yet the problem of acceleration remains far from being solved. Algorithms are indeed an extremely useful innovation, but – as Rosa has already noted – technological innovations are not always able to reduce the acceleration of everyday life: the fact that we see a synchronisation of experiences does not imply a decrease in acceleration. It is somewhat *organised*, but not stopped. The question to be thematised, and potentially criticised, therefore becomes not only that of acceleration as such, but also that of how it is organised: if the increasing pace of life risks impeding reflexivity and reducing autonomy, does the algorithmic organisation of digital acceleration mitigate or radicalise such social pathologies?

To answer this question, one must focus on the temporal dimension of algorithmic practices. In fact, while they serve to reduce the complexity of subjects' lives *in the present*<sup>38</sup>, this is not achieved through a 'decompression' of the present, but through practices that anticipate the future. The point is not to encourage reflective or resonant practices<sup>39</sup> by slowing down the digital experience, but to offer synchronised and, above all, rapid algorithmic suggestions and predictions that, in any case, leave subjects no time to reflect on them: «the analytic industry is tapping into a wider rationality, in which speed and agility are seen to be crucial»<sup>40</sup>. Due to the exponential increase in

the number of possible experiences per unit of time, subjects lack time for reflection, and on social media platforms they encounter predetermined and anticipated futures. These are not decided autonomously, but calculated algorithmically. To an increasing extent, especially among the youngest users<sup>41</sup>, they are unreflectively accepted as useful mechanisms for synchronisation and simplification.

Big Tech, then, presents its algorithms as neutral<sup>42</sup>, and therefore «the lack of time for reflection is presented as holding no risk»<sup>43</sup>. By insisting on the neutrality and omnipotence of their algorithms' predictions, platforms legitimise their domination over the future of human beings. According to this narrative, there is no need for subjects to reflect autonomously on their courses of action, because 1) the speed and quantity of information would lead them to make mistakes anyway, and 2) there are *algorithms that do it for them*, with a degree of certainty, neutrality and impartiality that no human will ever achieve<sup>44</sup>. Consequently, now that we live in an era in which 'we have little space for critical reflection outside of the flow of information to which we are exposed'<sup>45</sup>, it is better to replace human rationality, which is epistemically fallacious, with algorithmic rationality, which is «a rationality that promotes quick and accessible know how that enables all-seeing predicting and smart decision making»<sup>46</sup>. Above all, it is configured «as a potential solution to the need to keep up»<sup>47</sup> with the accelerating pace of life online.

The problem is that, as the literature has amply shown by now, these instruments are neither neutral nor objective. On the contrary, they tend to reproduce the stereotypes and discrimination that are already present in society, thus radicalising political and social problems that should be radically and reflectively addressed<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, as several scholars have pointed out, algorithmic predictions, far from being able to totalise subjects' experiences in order to guide them towards their most authentic and personal desires, tend to push them towards whatever actions platforms judge to be 'optimal', that is those which allow the platforms to maximise their profits through data collection (e.g. by encouraging users to continue engaging with an app<sup>49</sup>) or by increasing advertisements' conversion rate, leading to greater investment in digital advertising<sup>50</sup>.

From this point of view, then, algorithms are not neutral synchronising

agents that, by skimming the surface of the Internet's complexities, enable the decompression of the present by helping users to adopt reflective attitudes. On the contrary, thanks to their capacity to order and organise subjects' online experience they behave as a seemingly objective external influence that continually solicits users, leading them to follow algorithmic suggestions unreflectively. Algorithms are presented as the only tools through which it is possible to follow the rapid flow of digital existence: «The [Big Data] analytics industry cultivates and nurtures the risk of being left behind if you choose to take the slow route and not adopt the speediness of these analytics»<sup>51</sup>.

The goal is above all economic: this rapid and continuous algorithmic solicitation, together with narratives that emphasise the objectivity of algorithms, means that subjects, already exposed to the accelerating pace of digital life, do not act reflectively when connected, preferring to go with the flow of algorithmic suggestions, and thus legitimising the practices of surveillance, profiling and *digital nudging* necessary for the maintenance of the political economy of surveillance capitalism. As Shoshana Zuboff has noted, this system necessitates passive subjects – ones unable to reflect critically on algorithmic operations and thus to challenge them – since any «unpredictable behaviour is the equivalent of lost revenue»<sup>52</sup>.

### **3. SITUATIONAL DIGITAL IDENTITIES, RECOGNITION/REPUTATION AND THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF REFLEXIVE CRITICISM**

The importance of algorithms as synchronisation tools is not the only consequence of the acceleration of the pace of life that is taking place online. On the contrary, following Rosa's work, it is possible to show how social acceleration impedes reflection even by reshaping the structure of subjectivity that previously developed in modernity. In an accelerated context, «the modern, "classical" sense of identity, which was based on an individual "life project" and on self-determination [...], tends to be replaced by new forms of "situational identity" and flexibility, which accept the precariousness of all definitions of the self and of identity parameters, and no longer attempts to follow a life project, but tends instead to ride the wave»<sup>53</sup>.

What emerges is a transition from a reflexive and active identity – one which asks itself, in a Kantian fash-

ion, *what ought I do?*<sup>54</sup> – to a subjectivity which, faced with increasingly many possible experiences, renounces asking this question and prefers to go with the flow of novelties, on the basis of which it defines itself *a posteriori*. As Gergen writes: «it is the difference between swimming to reach a certain point in the ocean – taming the waves to achieve a goal – and surrendering in harmony to the unpredictable movements of the waves»<sup>55</sup>.

The subject, therefore, does not act reflectively by setting long-term goals and aims. Indeed, social acceleration makes such a project immediately «anachronistic and doomed to failure»<sup>56</sup>: in an accelerated context, characterised by the contraction of the present, the subject is deprived of the time one needs to reflect critically on one's situation and thus on one's future. Social change occurs at such an accelerating rate that any long-term project is in vain, since the conditions that today make it possible and desirable could fail at any moment. Consequently, in a context marked by increasing uncertainty and the «contraction of time units that are definable as the present»<sup>57</sup>, it is normal that «forms of identity based on flexibility and on a readiness to change are systematically favoured»<sup>58</sup>.

In the digital world, this process is unprecedentedly radical. Indeed, given the ubiquitous presence of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), subjects themselves are beginning «to conceptualize the whole reality [...] in ICT-friendly terms»<sup>59</sup>, even from a temporal point of view. In the face of increasing numbers of external stimuli and the social pressure of what we can call «digital gazes»<sup>60</sup>, digital existence is characterised by subjects' growing tendency to *constantly update* their digital identities in such a way as to synchronise themselves 1) with the speed of the information flow and 2) with the expectations of the digital echo chambers into which they find themselves thrown. From this point of view, the assumption of situational identities in the digital world does not imply, as Rosa seems to suggest, *adaptation* to the pace of acceleration. Rather, in a context characterised by the omnipresence of «reputation metric systems»<sup>61</sup> (likes, retweets, shares and so on), assuming situational identities allows subjects to feel that they are actually appreciated and esteemed, immediately and individually: «To them, it seems most natural to wonder about their person-

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al identities online, treat them as a serious work-in-progress, and to toil daily to shape and update them»<sup>62</sup>.

This is particularly important from a critical and normative point of view, because it means that the struggle for recognition does not have increasing social freedom as its goal<sup>63</sup>, but – as Rosa had already noted – turns into a merely performative exhibition<sup>64</sup>. Being recognised no longer means acquiring a social *right*. In an accelerated context, and especially a digital one, recognition becomes something that «must be reconquered every day. [...] It is no longer accumulated, but is always in danger of being completely devalued by the constant flow of events and the shifting of social landscapes. One's position is important [as a means] to increase one's chances of maintaining or gaining social esteem, but it is not certain that one will retain it forever»<sup>65</sup>. In short, the struggle for recognition is disengaged from its normative and reflective dimension. It takes the form of a continuous struggle to maintain one's reputation, which is not maintained by acting reflectively in accordance with a state of affairs that is deemed desirable, but by adapting – in an uncritical and extra-moral manner – to the order of meanings that is 'trendy' (albeit for a very short period) in a digital context. And this, as Rosa notes, is «one of the tragedies of the modern individual: feeling imprisoned in a hamster wheel, while his hunger for life and the world is never satisfied, but instead is increasingly frustrated»<sup>66</sup>.

The ethical–political problem that emerges, then, is not only that of heteronomy or the pressure exerted by *filter bubbles* and *echo chambers*. Rather, the question concerns the conditions for any possibility of criticism. The use of algorithmic tools as heteronomous synchronisation mechanisms, which aim at platforms' profit and not at users' wellbeing, and the continuous assumption of situational identities, dictated by the demand for content and the pressure of the digital gaze, together place subjects in a state in which they do not grasp the *reflective unacceptability*<sup>67</sup> of digital platforms' practices of power, surveillance and manipulation. In fact, the mechanisms platforms have put in place to organise digital acceleration obstruct social learning, generating a structural reflexivity deficit that does not allow ordinary agents to criticise the present state of affairs. This also happens because, as we have seen, the normative need for recognition and social freedom is

somehow replaced by a spasmodic search for approval and reputation, which leads subjects not to think about how to transcend the present state of affairs, but about how to adapt to it without questioning the practices of power that characterise it<sup>68</sup>.

For these reasons, in the conclusion we will outline a critical ethics of digital acceleration, whose primary goal should be to lead subjects to grasp the reflexive unacceptability of such power practices.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: FOR A CRITICAL ETHICS OF DIGITAL ACCELERATION RELATIONS**

Thinking about a critical theory of digital acceleration is extremely difficult because, as we have seen, the power of such acceleration lies in how it makes the emergence of practices of reflexivity extremely complex for ordinary agents. Social criticism therefore risks presupposing an asymmetry between subjects, subjected to overwhelming power, and critics, who are able to unveil the practices of power that oppress the subjects. Without entering into this meta-theoretical debate<sup>69</sup>, it is possible to show how, in reality, ordinary agents are able to assume, and actually have assumed, critical attitudes towards digital acceleration. For instance, as Judy Wajcman has shown<sup>70</sup>, the feeling of being *pressed for time* is widely recognised – and with negative connotations. Similarly, users' trust in Big Tech's practices is very low throughout the West and, not surprisingly, calls for more regulation are the order of the day<sup>71</sup>.

These reflective attitudes are usually awakened by what we can call 'ethical' forms of criticism, i.e. forms that emphasise the impossibility of a good life under a regime of power that generates oppressive forms of life. For instance, after the Snowden revelations or the Cambridge Analytica case, many have become aware of digital capitalism's practices of surveillance or of its manipulative nature, emphasising how digital capitalism behaves as an oppressive institutionalized social order. The strategy of ethical critique, notably of structural ethical critique, has an enormous advantage, clearly identified by Rahel Jaeggi and Nancy Fraser: «the ethical perspective is certainly thought-provoking and informative»<sup>72</sup> because it clearly shows how «capitalism's institutional structure pre-defines some fundamental contours of our form of life, and it does so in a

way that deprives us of our collective capacity to design the modes of living we want»<sup>73</sup>. Structural ethical critique prompts reflection by denouncing the *reflexive unacceptability* of the current state of affairs; it is an extremely useful tool for enacting social learning and consciousness-raising processes. However, this form of criticism tells us nothing about how to *change* the current constellation of power. This is especially true in an accelerated context, in which each technological innovation requires a different and specific ethical critique, and this takes time to emerge and to be reflectively deployed by ordinary agents.

Such an ethical critique must therefore be flanked by a different critique, capable of organising and contextualising the reflexive unacceptability that the former generates. Such a critique can be defined as immanent, and consists in showing how the current practices of power not only are morally unacceptable but, on the basis of their own normative premises, generate forms of life that are *uninhabitable* and are based on *practical contradictions*. This should generate a «tension within a formation that will drive it beyond itself»<sup>74</sup>. From this point of view, immanent critique is characterised as a form of critique that derives its criteria from within the practices being criticised, without presupposing any external criteria or circumstances that, after all, may or may not emerge. According to Rahel Jaeggi, when these practical contradictions are grasped reflectively, an immanent process of social learning is activated. The aim is to bring out the new from the old – to release those emancipatory and normative forces which the structure of a life force does not promote but obstructs once it has become sclerotized and oppressive<sup>75</sup>.

According to this scheme, an accelerated digital existence is not only *bad* (a moral critique) but is also in contradiction with itself from a practical point of view: it is in fact impossible to want one thing and its opposite at the same time. To be brief, we can say that, in such a context, we have a practical contradiction between the idea of reflexive autonomy – as embedded into modernity as well as digital practices – and the algorithmic organization of online reality<sup>76</sup>. This practical contradiction, if grasped reflectively (and ethical criticism serves precisely this purpose), should generate a conflict immanent to the digital form of life. This form of life should be considered *uninhabit-*

*able*, by ordinary subjects *first and foremost*, insofar as its normative claims – freedom, reflexivity, a reduction of complexity – «cannot be realized without contradiction»<sup>77</sup>.

However, even if immanent critique seems to offer a much more structured framework than ethical critique, in a context such as the one we have described it encounters structural limitations too. Indeed, given the speed of the digital world and the relative slowness of the public's deliberative capacity, it is not clear how it is possible to organise and politically represent any collective learning process, which requires a long process of public and discursive deliberation<sup>78</sup>. This depends, to a large extent, on the fact that subjects' reflexivity can certainly be reactivated by an ethical critique; but this in no way implies that it takes the form of immanent critique. In short: it is easier for rebellious, catastrophist and short-term practices of contestation to emerge than *radically reformist* practices<sup>79</sup>, i.e. those capable of denying and contesting, in a determinate manner and on the basis of an immanent-transformative perspective, what actually obstructs the processes of learning and the practical appropriation of new technologies.

It is obviously not possible to resolve this dilemma in this paper. What does seem evident, however, is that more and more young people are entering the digital world without being aware of the power dynamics that run through it, of the technical limitations of IT infrastructure, and of the interests of Big Tech. The Internet, even now, is considered a sort of *locus amoenus* where it is possible to exercise freedom and creativity, all while achieving – thanks to algorithms – sensible reductions in complexity.

As things stand, what is lacking is a process of *digital literacy* that goes beyond the attention, fundamental though it is, which is already paid to the use and practical applications of new technologies<sup>80</sup>. In order to give rise to situated and immanent practices of contestation, it would therefore be necessary to implement what we might provisionally call *critical digital literacy*: an educational process that makes young people aware of the contradictions, power dynamics and risks that digital capitalism and the acceleration of digital existence pose to values such as autonomy and reflexivity<sup>81</sup>.

As people become aware of the reflexive unacceptability of power prac-

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tices, such an awareness, stimulated by a true critical *Bildung*<sup>82</sup>, should replace the contingency and the external nature of moral criticism, which fails to identify – except in a vague and sentimentalistic manner – the practical and immanent contradictions inherent in digital capitalism. The aim is to create subjectivities that, aware of the nature of the digital world (and not only from a pragmatic point of view), can reflectively grasp these contradictions, not limiting themselves to denouncing them (ethical criticism), but generating reflectively and communicatively mediated practices of political organisation that can actually generate consensus. Such a consensus should not be oriented towards limiting the use of new technologies, but rather towards separating what is good about them from what is pathological, determinedly negating the practices of digital power without resorting to catastrophising. After all, «the challenge for critical theory is to extricate such potentialities from the logics of domination within which they are situated, and which, to a great extent, they currently serve to perpetuate»<sup>83</sup>.

#### NOTE

1. A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, London: Polity Press, 1991
2. H. Rosa, *Acceleration and Alienation*, Torino: Einaudi 2019, p. 6. From now on, AA. My translation.
3. *Ivi*, p. VIII.
4. Id., *Social Acceleration. A new theory of modernity*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 63–67. From now on, SA.
5. Id., AA. pp. 6-7.
6. Rosa mainly focuses on the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, Marinetti and Proust. See Id., SA, cit., pp. 31-55.
7. Id., AA, cit., p. 9.
8. *Ivi*, 10.
9. *Ivi*, p. 11.
10. Id., SA, pp. 110-111.
11. Id., AA, cit., p. 13.
12. See Id., SA, cit., pp. 251–276.
13. Id., AA, cit., pp. 15-16.
14. *Ivi*, p. 21.
15. Id., SA, cit., p. 125.
16. Id., AA, cit., p. 86.
17. *Ivi*, p. 45.
18. *Ivi*, p. 44.
19. *Ivi*, p. 71.
20. H. Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism* (New York: Penguin, 2019).
21. H. Rosa, AA, cit., p. VIII.
22. *Ivi*, p. 71.
23. *Ivi*, pp. 47-48.
24. Id., SA, p. 232.
25. Id., AA, cit.
26. We will return to this concept in §4.
27. *Ivi*, p. 88.
28. *Ivi*, p. 46.
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