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FROM PERVASIVE TECHNOLOGIES TO TECHNOLOGY OF THE SELF. A COUNTER-SUBJECTIVATION ARGUMENT FOR A SHIFT IN THE CRITICAL THEORY OF CYBERSPACE*

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DE LAS TECNOLOGÍAS OMNIPRESENTES A LA TECNOLOGÍA DEL YO. UN ARGUMENTO DE CONTRASUBJETIVACIÓN PARA UN CAMBIO EN LA TEORÍA CRÍTICA DEL CIBERESPACIO

Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to the discourse on the intersection of power dynamics and subjectivation processes as explored in critical theory, particularly in response to the digital transformation brought about by information and communications technologies and

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cyberspace. It argues that, despite some important attempts being made in literature to conceptualize a Foucauldian analytics of power regarding the impact of the digital dominion on subjectivity production, there is a lack of understanding of the technology of the self. The premise of the argument is that of info-dominion and subjectivity production, found in mechanisms such as profiling, dematerialization, and machinery determinism, that are extensively reliant on a subject as the inscription surface of digital reality. This paper will contribute to the subjectivity-making debate in the digital shift, recasting some conceptualities from French philosopher Michel Foucault that are relatively undeveloped in the critical studies of cyberspace, arguing for a thesis of counter-subjectivation.

Keywords

subjectivity; power; technology of the self; cyberspace; digital autonomy

Resumen

Este artículo pretende contribuir al discurso sobre la intersección de las dinámicas de poder y la subjetivación en la teoría crítica en respuesta a la transformación digital que las TIC y el ciberespacio han traído consigo. Se argumenta cómo, a pesar de algunos intentos en la literatura para conceptualizar una analítica foucaultiana del poder respecto al impacto del dominio digital en la producción de subjetividad, falta comprender la tecnología del yo. La premisa del argumento es la del infodominio y la producción de subjetividad que se encuentran en mecanismos como la creación de perfiles, la desmaterialización y el determinismo de la maquinaria, y que dependen del sujeto como superficie de inscripción de la realidad digital. Se aporta al debate sobre la subjetivación en el cambio digital al reestructurar conceptualidades de Michel Foucault que están poco desarrolladas en los estudios críticos del ciberespacio mediante la defensa de una tesis de contrasubjetivación.

Palabras clave

subjetividad; poder; tecnologías del yo; ciberespacio; autonomía digital

Premises and State of the Art

The Foucauldian analytics of power has undoubtedly been a watershed moment in contemporary political philosophy and theory. While it is true that Foucault's entire work—from the early archaeological phase to the later genealogy and ontology of the present[1]—has generated a substantial body of hermeneutic-philological and political-philosophical studies, his understanding of productive power experienced an exponential proliferation of interest. This expansion has inevitably influenced political philosophy and sociological-ethical studies of cyberspace (Henry, 2024; Leiner et al., 2009), namely information and communications technology (ICT) and techno-digital advancements in the infosphere (Floridi, 2014), which undergo an intense examination under Foucault's theories of power, governmentality, and subjectivity. The impact is so profound that the French philosopher François Cusset (2008), for instance, dedicates an entire chapter titled *Theoretical Machination* to exploring the connections among cyborg identities, algorithms, information technologies, and even science fiction literature, all through the lens of Foucauldian post-structuralist insights. Furthermore, with a touch of irony, he recalls how "a science journalist for the New York Times compared Foucault to Elastic Man from the Fantastic Four" (p. 254). Indeed, flexible and productive notions of subjectivity, along with non-sovereign and non-legally codified forms of dominion, represent significant conceptual innovations that are highly relevant in the political studies of the digital turn, cyberspace, and algorithmic pervasiveness.

This paper aims to contribute to the discussion by arguing that, despite the critical and cutting-edge conceptualization of the new digital era within the framework of Foucauldian productive power and subjectivity production, there is a gap in understanding the "technology of the self" dimension (Foucault, 1988). This aspect, which can be seen as a form of counter-subjectivation in response to a regime of pervasive cyber-dominance, warrants exploration through a re-reading of Foucault's latest works. These writings, in fact, point towards a conception of subjectivity production that is decoupled from power relations entrenched in an immaterial panoptic web or from the heterogeneous governmental dimension. Instead, the present paper suggests that they retrieve a form of autonomy which, in turn, can be traced in the givenness of experiences and the

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[1] Given the significant proliferation of Foucauldian studies today, there is a growing consensus among European scholars to approach Foucault's thought as encompassing different phases and ruptures. This paper espouses the perspective that spans from a structuralist—albeit uniquely positioned—and archaeological work up until the late 1960s, to the more genealogy and the ontology of the present that he developed from the 1970s onward, and a third phase devoted to a refined and advanced version of subjectivation processes and technology of the self where power serves the scope to explore a more ethics/aesthetic dimension of autonomy. See Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), Kremer-Marietti (1985), Rabinow (1984), or the most recent Iofrida and Melegari (2017) and Revel (2010).

collective formation of digital subjectivities, such as those of the Free Software movements (Broca, 2018) and hacker ethics.

From Cyber-Panopticon to Digital Subjectivity Production

To support the central argument of this paper, this section aims to analyze the most important applications of the Foucauldian philosophical-political framework in contemporary studies on cyberspace and ICT. The current state of knowledge of political and critical theory regarding information dominion and the production of digital subjectivity—whether psychic, embodied, cognitive, or otherwise—is to be understood through the critical reflection of mechanisms like profiling, dematerialization, cyber surveillance, and machine determinism. Against this backdrop, it is possible to identify at least two prominent interpretations and successful applications of Foucault's power analytics: the synaptic (later biopolitical) power and subjectivation process of the immaterial cyber individual as the inscription surface of digital reality.

A first successful application regards the microphysical descent of power into the individual body and, consequently, the species-body (Foucault, 1976, 2003)[2] that reveals pervasive dynamics that are difficult to trace back to a single, original source such as a king or sovereign/codified power. According to the philosopher, power acts as a very tangled mosaic and an extremely complex whole, subtle in its distribution, mechanisms, mutual checks, and adaptations (Foucault, 1977, p. 137; 1998).[3] This concept aligns well with the issue of algorithmic determination. Algorithms underpin the functioning of digital relationships and cyberspace, broadly understood as the digital space created by the rise and spread of the Internet. From an onto-epistemological perspective, their structural use produces a form of determination based on probabilistic and predictive computational functions, driven by teleological goals of optimization. Algorithms operate effectively through mechanisms that involve the circulation, accessibility, and massive data collection[4] provided by users and digital citizens. They also facilitate the storage, selection, and cross-referencing of digital information across various data types (or media, such as images), which is fundamental, for instance, to machine learning, a subset of artificial intelligence (AI). Placing the algorithmic

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[2] The reference here is both to *La volonté du savoir and to Il faut defender la société.*
[3] Quote translated by the author.
[4] As Ippolita (2017, p. 9) describes very well: "Algorithms are not limited to simple abstraction, although they are logical procedures. In most cases […] they operate from the world and with effects on the world. These operations also occur before and after the various logical steps that constitute them. We can distinguish three sets of steps articulated on three different levels: that of the input data (input), that of the algorithm proper (processing), and that of the output data (output)."

workings of cyberspace within the framework of Foucauldian power analytics, algorithms produce/are produced within that knowledge-power dualism, in which the injunction to tell the truth (data entry) and the selective asymmetry of the truth that can/should emerge (e.g., the results of a search engine) creates asymmetries of power and a mode of circulation of the same power that is pervasive, continuously productive, and not easily discernible.

The coordinated action of these mechanisms in cyberspace—clear in contexts such as social media, online shopping, or search engine optimization—thrives on what has been broadly defined as algorithmic power" (Bucher, 2018). This concept perfectly fits with the Foucauldian metaphor of the reticular workings of power. While contributions from philosophy of technology and AI ethics have extensively highlighted the structural presence of bias and non-neutrality in both computer systems (Friedmann & Nissenbaum, 1996) and AI's algorithmic predictive mechanisms (Stinson, 2022), critical-political literature has identified the subtle exercise of pervasive, synaptic, microphysical (bio)power as the ontological-political matrix of algorithmic governance or governmentality (Floridi, 2014; Hayles, 1999, 2005; Ippolita, 2017; Luce, 2024; Rouvroy & Berns, 2014; Schmidgen et al 2023: Tucci, 2024).[5] For instance, this occurs with the concept of "synaptic power" (Foucault, 1980), which has long since abandoned the king's throne and the right of the sword, becoming immanent within the social body and embedding itself in the productive web of relations, discourses, and practices of everyday life. Cyberspace, therefore, acts as a reconfiguration of actors and powers that are no longer reliant on a single central authority or a monolithic governmental setting. Instead, the productive, microphysical nature of algorithmic power, existing in the infinitesimal distribution of data circulation and profiling, is central to arguments about the digital surveillance panopticon (Chapman et al., 2014; Manokha, 2018) and the hegemonic information dominion of GAFAM.[6] Biometrics, data storage, facial recognition, GPS tracking (Martire et al., 2022), reCAPTCHA,[7] or even the Internet of Things, represent

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[5] The body of literature that applies the Foucauldian power analytics framework is extensive and diverse. It encompasses a wide range of approaches and intellectual traditions—from philosophical-political to sociological, ecofeminist, critical technology studies, and beyond—and spans a considerable temporal range. The references provided in this text and the bibliographic corpus of this paper are intended as illustrative examples rather than an exhaustive representation of this field.

[6] The GAFAM acronym refers to the five largest Western IT multinationals: Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft. See Ippolita (2018) and Smyrnaios (2017).

[7] Completely Automated Public Turing Test to Tell Computers and Humans Apart is a human/bot discernment system owned by Google. This system, offered free of charge to website administrators, enables them to prevent bots (software robots) from pretending to be human, thus making brute force cyberattacks more difficult. However, the reCAPTCHA is also exemplary of one of the many systems through which cyber soft power and value extraction is exercised by GAFAM's systems. Indeed, the answers provided by human users allow Google's systems to be improved.

the immaterial manifestation of the productive-reproductive ubiquity of power. Specifically, a bio-info-digital power is always tied to the rational life (bios) of digital subjectivity, its choices, preferences, life forms, and habits. Furthermore, the predictive structural power of algorithms, imbued with bias, has a strong influence on the decision-making process that affects subjects. Predictability is an algorithmic feature employed at large by private companies or governments for different uses (statistics, profiling, electoral campaigns, marketing, and so on) to the point that inherent political properties not only have been attributed to predictive AI, but also deemed illiberal and against the democratic rule of law (Tafani, 2024).

If on the one hand, algorithmic power is a mimesis of the panoptic power of control through data storage and use, of the pervasive and microphysical power through profiling and prediction, and of biopower as circulating on and enhanced by the choices, desires, and habits of those who input information, on the other hand (and simultaneously), there is a second level of fertile application of Foucauldian power theory: that of subjectivity production. Indeed, Foucault's groundbreaking intuition, which redefines the functioning of power by placing it in synergy with elements such as diffuse productivity, strategy, and governmentality, extends beyond his well-known analytics of power to gradually incorporate the theme of subjectivity. The productive circularity of power, initially explored through reflections on "anatomo-politics" and later biopolitics—where the body is seen as the "inscription surface of events" (Foucault, 1977, p. 37)—evolves to the second crucial aspect of Foucauldian power analytics in ICT, spanning from the cyber surveillance discussions to what could be named here as the digital/algorithmic subjectivation process.

This shift is in line with Foucauldian broad interpretation of power (Butler, 1997; Revel, 2014), which does not separate the power question from the interest of the subject. The philosopher's reflections consider them as functioning both diachronically and synchronically, expressing themselves through disciplinary and later biopolitical or governmental dynamics and the government of the living (Foucault, 2016). Subjectivity is the pivotal focus, a theme that runs through all of Foucault's work, at least that of the "genealogist." In his known and debated paper, *The Subject and Power* (1982), having in mind the entire framework of his reflections, the philosopher declares: "It is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research" (p. 209), referring to subjectivity production as an immanent resultant of the objectivizing—or rather subjectivizing—mechanisms of power relations. While the question of how power works is the leading question of the philosopher's political reflections, it always represents the heuristic tool for a deeper search of subjectivity production (1982, p. 210). This all

comes to what, in current philosophical-political literature, has opened the debate on subjectivation that merges the subjection to power (which is always productive) and the subjectivity formation process (Bazzicalupo, 2013; Deleuze, 1988; Lazzarato, 2014; Macherey & Celestine, 1995; O'Sullivan, 2012).

This relational and productive figure of a "power that does not apply to individuals, rather it transits through them" (Foucault, 1976, p. 184) brings the issue of subjectivation and the production of digital subjectivity (Buongiorno & Irrgang, 2020) to the forefront of ICT/cyberspace critical studies. Notably, in contemporary critical literature, digital subjectivity is not merely an info-dominated individual devoid of agency. Rather, it represents a cutting-edge form of power-subject relations, where the subject actively contributes by providing personal information, conducting data searches, locating resources, and so on (Krasmann, 2017). Therefore, the web functions as a community-managed reality with shared responsibilities of co-constitution of power, though it suffers from an inequitable distribution of it in terms of economic value, access, and information usage. Some very illustrative examples of digital subjectivation emerge, for example, in the body of literature regarding platform capitalism (Armano et al., 2020), which crisscrosses and expands the cognitive capitalism debate (Fumagalli, 2007; Lazzarato, 1997). The result is that users' subjectivities become both productive for and subjected to the digital platform.[8]

For instance, a study of the PageRank algorithm argues how Google, the most important and widespread search engine, operates precisely in this direction: "It produces and accumulates value through its PageRank algorithm that manages knowledge and converts it into its own value system" (Pasquinelli, 2009, p. 157). In fact, Google does not "produce" any content *ex nihilo*. It is the cognitive rent, i.e., the intellectual capital freely circulating on the Internet, that constitutes its profit. Contents are captured, indexed, and used for advertising purposes by exploiting the common intellect at zero cost. This mechanism of subjectivation then derives from the production of the subject, which is evident in examples such as profiling or gamification. Looking at this example, gamification is a set of practices applied to the most diverse domains to increase the performance levels of the users of a system according to explicit (scores and other) and implicit (the behavior to be implemented) parameters (Ippolita, 2016). It is a "tool" of persuasive system design (used for instance to design technological/digital interface), and for this reason, it is also referred to as *exploitationware* (Bogost, 2013). Gamification finds different applications depending on the function to which

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[8] A clear-cut example of this is the gig economy.

it is applied: from advertising to marketing and branding. A similar phenomenon, representing the perfect merge of diffuse circulation of algorithmic power and consequent production of subjectivity, is that of crowdsourcing, i.e., the externalization of mass contributions (information, data) resulting in an increase in relative surplus value. As a result, it is not merely a matter of algorithmic pervasiveness and the power of technological domination and control that define a passive digital subject entangled in power webs. Rather, it is an actively engaged subjectivity, both subjectivized in algorithmic productive power and productive itself for the creation of data, datasets, and information. We view this digital subject as a meta-level of subjectivity production, entangled within the network of technological domains, yet capable of action and initiating certain feedback responses. A classical hypostatization of the digital subject, therefore, gives way to a more dynamic process of subjectivity production. The more open and active this dimension becomes, the more complex and outdated it is to interpret power as a force that merely shapes a passive, blank slate. It is no coincidence that the philosopher Luciano Floridi (2014), in his studies on Revolution 4.0, coined the term "onlife" to describe an understanding of the infosphere—a community where immaterial subjectivities possess agency and the capacity to be influenced, paralleling the corporeal experiences of life outside cyberspace. The production of subjectivities is thus deeply intertwined with the infosphere, rather than merely existing alongside it. The process of subjectivation occurs within this immaterial reality and has tangible, embodied effects. As Floridi (2014) states, referring to the onlife dimension of social networks:

> When you change the social conditions in which you live, modify the network of relationships and information flows you engage with, and reshape the constraints and affordances that govern your self-presentation to the world and to yourself, your social self can be radically updated, which in turn influences your self-concept and ultimately shapes your personal identity. (p. 59)

The question that arises, therefore, is whether the analytical framework of ICTs, which places subjectivity at its core, can also be extended to encompass the final Foucauldian phase focused on technologies of the self and autonomy. Specifically, can the discourse on the productive power of ICTs and cyberspace—and the diverse, emergent subjectivities within them—be reinterpreted through the lens of autonomous self-production, thereby opening the possibility of counter-subjectivation?

Technology of the Self: An Argument for Autonomy

The "technology of the self" topic was explored by Foucault in one of his last seminars, where he announced the idea of a systematic writing on the issue. Although this work will never be printed due to the author's death, one can read a continuity of thought that, from the question of knowledge/power of telling the truth to the power relations, reaches the contours of the "self" (Foucault, 1988, p. 15). This "self," however, is far removed from its reflexive and mimetic declination or from the inner and latent consciousness of the "I."[9] It is rather, already and always, the subjective experiential datum, and the processes that accompany experience: in short, the ethical construction of subjectivity, that is to say, of its production. Two interpretations of this conception of subjectivity are particularly relevant to the argument presented here. The first, articulated by the French philosopher Judith Revel, underscores the ethical-political dimension alongside the continuous interplay between the exercise of power and subjectivity. According to Revel (2014), "the self is not an object but the effect of a gesture of subjectivation and the gesture itself that enables its production.". The second interpretation is offered by philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2016), who describes "a subject not positioned behind, above, or below its own life, but one that constitutes and transforms itself within an indissoluble relationship immanent to its life" (p. 240). These interpretations point towards a production of the self that, while distinct from the exogenous subjectification inherent in the analytics of power, remains intrinsically linked to the productive and immanent nature of power. Thus, the self and its "technologies" fall within the intersection of acts, choices, agency, and power, intertwining ethics and politics—a form of subjectivation that Foucault thought of as a sort of power and freedom agonism between the production of subjectivity through objectification (*assujettissement*) and what can be addressed as autonomous subjectivation. It is a question of whether "constituting oneself as subject" can, or could be, an exercise of self-construction. As stated, this paper intends to reappraise precisely this dimension of the "autonomous" gap in the production of the self or in the subjectivation processes inherent to the technologies of the self,[10] looking at its possible link with digital subjectivity and the power relations of cyberspace.

At this stage of the discussion, moreover, in order to avoid a dispersive analysis that would require a work in itself, the paper will explore this theme through a reading of Foucault's last programmatic writings within a specific focus on the *aphrodisia* (namely

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9 See the translator's note to the Italian edition in Foucault (1992, p. VII).

10 This aspect has been deepened in different ways by current literature; for instance, Elden (2016), Revel (2014), Righetti (2012), Sloterdijk (2013), and Veyne (2010). The paper moves from current literature to apply the argument to the formation of cyberspace subjectivity.

pleasures) and care of the self. The texts correspond to Volumes 2 and 3 of the *History of Sexuality* (*The Use of Pleasures* and *The Care of the Self*, 1984), which were written and published among other reflections on the technologies of the self and the production of subjectivity.[11] The choice, as well as being guided by reasons of space, is also due to some aspect emerging in this Foucauldian analysis. They display a precise reading of the processes of subjectivation as matrices of a relation of the subject to itself, to free it from the hypostatization attributed by the tradition of modern thought. This aspect is particularly emphasized in cyberspace and info-dominion critiques. Therefore, the Greek *aphrodisia* concepts and ethical habits condensed in the notion of "care of the self," as analyzed by Foucault, are a fitting example of the technology of the self to tackle the notion of digital production of counter-subjectivity.

The elaborations of the two volumes of the *History of Sexuality* examined here are set in a specific historical context and take their first steps from Classical Antiquity. They refer to the philosophical-literary production from the 4th century B.C. onwards, and then to the 1st century A.D., with the last volume, in which the transition to the imperial age is examined, emphasizing changes and reformulations of certain cultural and political practices concerning pleasures. The body, as well as in Volume 1, plays a pivotal role. However, in these later elaborations, it shifts from being the inscription surface of power networks to a source of agency which arises, precisely, in the exercise of the technologies of the self, particularly in relation to pleasures and the care of the self. Through a historical reconstruction of the cultural practices, ethical and political conduct, and rituals of ancient Greece (and elements of Latin culture), the technologies through which the subject constitutes itself in and through corporeality are outlined, alongside a hermeneutics of the self. These technologies are immediately characterized by the semantic origins of the term, understood as an art or a ritualized form of industriousness. Technologies of the self:

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1988, p. 19)

Foucault's inquiry seeks to address the question: Why are sexuality, pleasures, and related activities subjected to moral scrutiny? This exploration leaves open the broader

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[11] We recall here *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2014) and *The Courage of the Truth* (2011), both Collège de France Courses from 1981 to 1984.

narrative concerning how human beings problematize and investigate "what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live" (Foucault, 1985, p. 11). Rather than focusing on the study of moral systems or the ethical frameworks of specific civilizations, Foucault's research starts with the subjects themselves, particularly in relation to their everyday customs or *ethos*, through which the self engages in its own constitution and constructs itself as a moral subject. Consequently, despite Foucault's deep engagement with classical texts, rituals, and the ethos that emerges from them, his work does not advocate adherence to specific norms or codified rules. Instead, the practical construction of the self is predicated on the individual's capacity to "act upon himself, monitor, test, improve, and transform himself" (Foucault, 1985, p. 28), thereby *producing* themselves,[12] with the body serving as the primary field of action.

In the reconstruction of the term "pleasures," the subject-body becomes the protagonist, tasked with constituting itself in a specific conduct through a process of self-work, ultimately leading Foucault to explore the ethics of the Greeks.[13] And this is where *aphrodisia* comes into play. The meaning of this Greek word contains at once the acts of pleasure, forms of desire, experiences, and in a certain sense, ethical substance. It certainly encompasses sexual pleasures, but also a whole experiential expansion of them, which leads the author to find an ethics of sexual behavior. The polysemic richness of the term itself means that its meanings include passions, instincts, and practices on the use of pleasures and everything that refers to a way of conducting oneself, of being conscious actors of desires. *Aphrodisia* are acted out, experienced. They not only invest in the body but are produced by the simultaneous action and reaction of the body, which responds to pleasures with a dynamism that is peculiar to it. The body is not attributed a constitutive passivity. In this regard, a constant that binds both volumes is in fact a *heautocratic* (*eautùs*, self; Foucault, 1988, p. 70) feature of subjectivity; a form that refers to the self, to the subject's ability, for example, to balance desires, to direct them towards a virtuous moderation.

It is important to highlight the positive conception of the body presented here: its harmony, which must be preserved, stands in stark ontological contrast to the notion of the flesh as a corruptible, negative essence. On the contrary, the body is viewed as an instrument, as "material" that the subject can shape towards the ethical-aesthetic determination of existence, a process in which one can self-produce. The emphasis on

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[12] The use of the neuter plural pronoun they/them in this paper is an author's choice that encompasses all subjectivities and actualizes the generic use, albeit contained in the texts, of the masculine universal.
[13] Namely, one that does not reflect in individual moral practices, where the personal—customs, habits, rituals—also reflects in the public dimension, and that is not the sole privilege of the private sphere.

maintaining the body's harmony and balance is accompanied by a series of recommendations that advocate for meticulous care, a form of dedication that allows the body to be cultivated within a balanced vitality. Embodied corporeality represents the ethical habit achievable through a continuous modification of the self and self-control, rather than a condemnation that anchors the individual in an ontological space of guilt or relegates them to sin. The interest on this aspect is crucial in this paper to highlight how on the symbolic, practical, and political levels, the body (and therefore the subject) is not entirely shaped by instruments of power or knowledge (as it seems to be for algorithmic power and the seamless production of an immaterial digital subject), but retains its own pure "givenness," in some respects, as a form of resistant matter.

In the argument hereby supported, Foucault's work in these texts focuses precisely on the exercise of the subject using the body, drawing on models (such as the Socratic or Pythagorean) and specific literary sources (philosophical and historical, including Xenophon or Thucydides) that recommend a particular regimen for the body and the subject engaging in pleasures. What is at stake for a counter-subjectivation interpretation is that this regimen, however, does not prescribe rules based on binary alternatives of prohibition or obligation. Instead, it offers general guidelines in a process of self-subjectivation. Notably, alongside the concept of *aphrodisia* (pleasures), three other concepts are introduced: *kresis* (modes and uses of pleasures), *enkrateia* (self-mastery), and *sophrosyne* (temperance and self-governance) (Foucault, 1988, pp. 37–90). These terms delineate the known concept of "aesthetics of existence," the link with our argument, which seeks to emphasize the technologies of the self as a form of autonomous construction. According to this aesthetic life, the subjectivity positions itself in relation to truth, not through an ascetic path of desire purification, but through a set of technologies of the self, essentially, through self-governance or *autonomy*. The aesthetics of existence, a direct thread in the relationship with truth, is constructed precisely through the way one conducts their life, through "being in a certain way," by engaging in specific practices with the exercise of pleasure and bodies and adhering to certain principles, all while respecting boundaries that reproduce an ontological order aligned with truth.

Self-dedication and the practice of pleasures in a precise aesthetic lifestyle, with particular emphasis on the body, are notably reflected in a chapter dedicated to *dietetics* as an art of living. *Dietetics*, thus conceived, represents a form of knowledge and moderate management of one's body, where the subjectivity assumes the role of a tightrope walker who, before experiencing the sensation of balance, first encounters the concept of limit. The discipline of a physical regime, far from being an imposed control, is a body of advice for good practices of the body—actions that perform the indispensable

role of self-care, which is composed of management and self-control, outside the governmental framework. The *aphrodisia* or *dietetics* (together with other self-formation practical habits) therefore form part of technologies of the self that are to be interpreted as a whole epistemic, aesthetic, ethical and practical-political toolbox (maintaining the Aristotelian definition of ethics that is cross-cutting to all the philosopher's latest writings) that emerge as a contingency on the productive and immanent relations that exist among truth, power and subject.

In particular, there is a specific concept that emerges by holding together the production of subjectivities and practices of the self, which is examined by the author in antiquity: that of autonomous bodies. Those contained in the treatises are all indications of custom, rules of ethos, and precautions to be taken for the autonomous construction of an ethical-aesthetic conduct of existence.[14] As Stefano Righetti points out (2012, p. 182), the condition whereby the subject does not have to face the yoke of a subjectivizing power is also and above all determined by the fact that this apparatus of "good advice of custom" is authentically different from the forms of knowledge conceived as legitimized by power itself in the previous years of the philosopher's thought. The autonomy that is crucial in these reflections is precisely that which establishes a practice of self, the "giving oneself a limit," to give oneself a norm outside the nomological patchwork of knowledge/power/law.

The production of autonomous body-subjects is declared not only through dietetics, but also in other passages that are central in adopting this reading key, such as that of care of the self, meaning with this expression, the generalization of practical-aesthetical life extended to the application of a body of self-technologies that do not result—or not only—from the play of power alone, but from the use of that power in an autonomous production of the subject. Against the pervasiveness of power, the common goal of these practices of the self, allowing for the differences they present, can be characterized by the entirely general principle of conversion to self *heautou epimeleisthai*: to attend/care for oneself (Foucault, 1986, p. 44).

While the expression bears a Platonic influence, its meanings diverge significantly from traditional interpretations for the author. Primarily, it should be understood as a shift in focus, rather than the cessation of all other activities in favor of exclusive self-devotion; secondly, it is a form of relation to the self and the power that runs

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[14] This element, which is also found in self-care, a concept of self-production addressed in Volume 3, is to be understood here as exquisitely political. It is the result of isomorphism, a concept typical of Greco-Latin culture: Every action produced on or by the body is placed in a specific nexus with the logos, with the subject's rational substratum, and thus with its capacity for agency in the collective context.

through it, that frees itself from the subjectivizing yoke to exercise it in virtuous auton-omous production. The expression resonates as *epistrophe eis auton - conversion* on the self. In Foucault's (1986) words:

> the *conversio ad se* is also a path by which, escaping all the dependences and en-slavement, one ultimately rejoins oneself, like a harbor sheltered from the tempests […] And the experience of self that forms itself in this possession is not simply that of a force overcome, or a rule exercised over a power that is on the point of rebelling; it is the experience of a pleasure that one takes in oneself. The individual who has finally succeeded in gaining access to himself is, for himself, an object of pleasure. (p. 65)

Self-care encompasses a range of transformative practices aimed at reshaping subjec-tivity. It serves as a compendium of techniques through which individuals can actively engage in self-intervention, treating themselves as the subject of technical modifica-tion. This process enables ethical and cognitive self-enhancement, forming the foun-dation of participatory democracies by fostering autonomy. The act of self-governance, characterized by the establishment of personal norms, involves a deliberate process of self-limitation and intervention. This form of self-regulation, however, transcends mere individualization, existing within a dynamic space of exchange that is inherently polit-ical and replete with otherness. The self, therefore, represents a complex entity that re-sists complete manipulation. It is a site of inherent givenness, corporeality, and residual elements, upon which individuals can enact practical-aesthetic modifications.

But it is on the body exercise, to which the *Self and Others* section is devoted (Fou-cault, 1986, pp. 69–97), that the subjectivity can still develop an autonomous extension of self in the environment in which one lives. All this folding in on oneself of the subject, therefore, cannot be read only in terms of a concentrated closure to the individual. As stated, the philosopher's attention is focused not just on any subject, but on any his-torical temporality. It is the Greek-Roman antiquity subjectivity that is determined by the entire cultural, social, and political context in which autonomy as a practice plays a crucial role. Autonomy directs subjectivity in its relationship with the body, with the exercise of the limit, with everyday rituals, but it can also be political autonomy, the ca-pacity from those elements of production, of creation with the other of a shared political space, the *polis*. For the Greek *ethos* at the origin of the capacity for choice and politics, there was chaos and disordered nothingness: It is the autonomous subject who finds a fertile path for its self-construction, ordering chaos and shaping the space of political

participation.[15] Therein lies that autonomy. The concept of "self-norm," or auto-nomos production, therefore, exists within a space that is not entirely private; it is inherently personal, concerning the ethical subjectivation of the individual, yet it also has to withstand the scrutiny and acceptance of society. It is related to a political substance by means of which subjectivity self-production determines and produces its own environment. In this space, subjectivities become citizens, giving themselves laws that are therefore not imposed by third parties or high authority: It is a case for a participatory, never passive activity. Through the technologies of the self, the philosopher ultimately deepens that subjectivity whose radical choice of self-formation is forged with and from the subject's capacity for critique—its ethical-aesthetic choice. Thus, the participatory set of citizens forms a *demos* and modifies the rules of the environment, a process of critical or counter-subjectivation in which subjectivities live according to their choice, simultaneously affirming equal sharing, enjoyment, and participation in power. Certainly, the production of subjectivity, whose aspects Foucault explores in The History of Sexuality, is circumscribed, but what is interesting for the purposes of this paper discussion is that power and agency can coexist in a technology of the self, in which the subject moves openly in a political space of the collective, of society. This same interpretative dynamic can be applied to actual case studies and phenomena in that dense and pervasive network that, in political theory, makes up cyberspace. These digital counter-subjectivities, in fact, can be exonerated from the merely pervasive and governmental reading of digital and algorithmic power. In the following conclusion, some case studies supporting this argument will be presented.

Conclusion: Free Software and Hacklabs, a Pathway for Cyberspace Autonomy

To conclude this paper, one last question must be asked. If one interprets Foucault's Analytics of Power in the light of this shift that guarantees a way out of microphysical power and governmentality, and thus reorganizes autonomous spaces of subjectivation, is it also possible to think about the production of a digital counter-subjectivity?

This paper seeks to reinterpret and reapply Foucault's analytics of power within the context of cyberspace, with the goal of restoring the political dimension of resistance to algorithmic governmentality. By tracing the production of autonomous subjectivity in Foucault's later works, particularly within the digital space, the paper argues that cyberspace is not solely governed by algorithmic power. Instead, it offers a fluid space for

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[15] An interesting analysis in relation to this concept of autonomy developed in Foucault's text can be found in Castoriadis (1975).

subject production, characterized by intuition and interaction. For instance, the early development of the Internet embraced the principle of open-architecture networking, where users and providers co-created interfaces in a system of interdependence. This model exemplifies a "technology of the self" within digital subjectivity, extending to a higher level of ethical and political self-construction. Following this path, two key examples—explored in the first section of this paper—represent efforts to resist algorithmic domination and governmental subject production in cyberspace: the free software movement and autonomous hacklab experiments.

The free software movement serves as a quintessential space for counter-subjectivation, utilizing self-technologies autonomously. It seeks to establish elements of free access, construction, and use of cyberspace through non-proprietary software (Broca, 2018). Although diverse in scope, free software allows users to freely access, modify, copy, and distribute software. These freedoms hinge on both technical and legal possibilities. Technically, users require access to the source code—the instructions written in a programming language that dictate software execution. Access to this code is crucial for implementing new functionalities or simply understanding software operation. Legally, freedom of use is ensured through licenses like the General Public License (GPL). According to Broca (2018, p. 35), three core values underpin free software: autonomy in work, technical creativity, and the free circulation of information. The ethics underlying free software therefore fully espouses that form of the subjectivity/power production binomial that starts from the exercise of the autonomy of the digital self, which, once it has achieved a form of ethics of the self, outside a pervasive exogenous control mechanism, is able to contribute to the collective horizon.

One significant example of counter-subjectivation can be found in the hacklab experiments of the Calafou community:[16] a horizontal collective community that practices the ethics of hacking and self-education, grounded in shared, bottom-up experimentation. The community strives to design an open, accessible cyberspace not dominated by profit or value extraction from its users. The construction of spaces (i.e., websites) emerges as a poietic activity that integrates shared ethos and limitations. As outlined in Calafou's *Soberanía Tecnológica dossier*,[17] the hacklab experience combines three core functions: providing a social workspace for non-hegemonic technology enthusiasts to learn and experiment; supporting and participating in social movements; and offering open access to information and communication technologies for public use. These ex-

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[16] https://calafou.org/
[17] Find the Open Access document in different languages at https://archive.calafou.org/es/node/229.html.

periments represent genuine spaces of counter-subjectivation, where the production of subjectivity operates on a meta-level. The technologies of the self contribute to the redistribution of power in an autonomous, non-pervasive manner. Consequently, processes of counter-subjectivation emerge, redrawing the teleology of surveillance and value extraction within ICTs, as documented in contemporary literature. Fields of experimentation are non-profiled search engines, digital public libraries, anti-censorship, decentralization of the GAFAM hegemony, social networks, open source, and free circulation of information. The aim of these experiments is also to investigate the potential of collective intelligence enabled by ICTs to support collaborative solutions, collect open and accessible data, think up new models of production, social economy, and participatory democracy, and develop decentralized solutions for governing our personal data. Hacklabs, as well as the free software movement, are political and ethical projects: both experiments of counter-subjectivation and reorganization of the power (cyber) space. They aim to re-appropriate technology as part of a broader context of politically autonomous movements and to transform and self-manage all aspects of life. Hence, here we interpret the production of subjectivity in the autonomy gap of the technologies of the self, trying to extend the current bibliographic contributions, as a form of subjectivity outside the control of a production completely devoted to synaptic and pervasive algorithm power. Reappraising the Foucauldian contribution of technology of the self could therefore lead to an example of digital autonomy and democracy, which, instead of starting from power pervasiveness, is exercised through what can be addressed at this point as a (cyber) aesthetics of existence.

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