

## Or is it just an illusion ?

Juxtaposing these false perceptions with what I've discussed before about the false image of community created and communicated through social media platforms, we can find some connecting threads. If, for example, we take the falsity of touch, what we think we know as texture it's not the real matter, as it is unfeasible to touch it. Likewise, what we think we know and experience as a community, is not what it really is. What we actually experience and feel, while we're still attached with the idea of community, is the phantom limb sensation, and because of the inherited need of belongingness, we act like it's there. **But community is a phantom sensation.** The question worth posing here is what are **the parameters of choosing when and how we allow ourselves to be deceived ?**

The dominant narrative of the existing literature on social media critique and analysis tends to lean towards an inevitable doomsday. The influence of the social media seems to have a negative impact, reinforcing feelings of loneliness, sadness and lack of communication. However, many of these observations are exhausted in a heroic rhetoric. Resisting the **pessimistic approach and the nihilism of the dominant literature** around the influence of social media, my aim is neither to play the blame game with social media platforms, nor to speculate on the future of humanity within the realm of social media. Instead, I'm interested in **fundamental design qualities and capabilities in these processes**, and how we can understand them in order to be able to twist them.

As Wendy Chun asks in the preface of *Updating to Remain the Same* : "Has the internet destroyed the world or made it a better place? Does it foster democracy or total surveillance ? Community or isolation?" Even though all these questions are relevant, they will continue to be asked unless we change our perspective and realise that the Internet is not just one thing. There is a gap between our perception of communication technologies and their

habitual operations.<sup>66</sup> This perception is what I would like to challenge here.

The design of community in social media is more accessible to approach and understand, and thus it is easier to criticise and blame. Of course, the multiple layers of control and surveillance must be subjected to criticism, and a discourse should be opened about the social responsibility of platforms, how these control systems are employing certain ideals and inherent human needs in order to turn them into a commodity and entice people. What would it mean for social media platforms to take on some responsibility for their role in organising, curating, and profiting from the activity of their users?

In an attempt to pave the way for the overt critique of contemporary systems of control, Byunh Chul Han argues that digital communication is in fact responsible for the disintegration of community and public space, and is slowly eroding any possibility for real political action and meaningful political discourse.<sup>67</sup> Even though, as I've presented so far, social media platforms reinforce layers of control, and moderate and exploit communities – the same communities they want to attract– for their benefit, I would argue that the **problem of disintegration of community goes far beyond that.**

In reality, it is hard to imagine an ideal platform where ideal communities, can be fostered without any external influential factor. There is a certain impossibility lying in the promise of inclusivity, as it will inevitably fail to reach the expectations.

The fantasy of a truly "open" platform is powerful, resonating with deep, utopian notions of community and

democracy—but it is just that, a fantasy. There is no platform that does not impose rules, to some degree. Not to do so would simply be untenable.<sup>68</sup>

This impossibility is well resonated in Roberto Esposito's thought. For him, community is what we need and what is, at the same time, impossible to implement. We lack what community means for us. We share the lack of community. He concludes that community is simultaneously what we need and what is absent from our horizon.

The impossible community is thus the impossibility of thinking of the proper essence of community as something that results from its historical and genealogical constitution.

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<sup>66</sup> Chun, W., 2016. *Habituating New Media : Updating To Remain The Same*, The MIT Press, p. x

<sup>67</sup> Han, B., 2017. *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, The MIT Press

<sup>68</sup> Gillespie, T., 2018. *Custodians Of The Internet*. Yale University Press. p.5

Moreover, Maurice Blanchot has a similar position on the absence of community, claiming that it's not equal to the failure of community, "it belongs to it as its extreme moment, its ordeal, which exposes it to its necessary disappearance".<sup>69</sup> The community thus has the following unique position: "It takes upon itself the impossibility of its own immanence [...]. The community accepts and in a sense indicates [...] the impossibility of community".<sup>70</sup>

**The illusion of community falls in a bigger narrative of social constructions, that is not limited to the realm of social media platforms.**

As it has already been mentioned above, capitalism found an opportunity in the 1990's to take advantage of the new given resources, and the same capitalistic system is demonstrated today in the online platforms. Likewise, what we actually experience in social media, is a **manifestation of the already existing social norms**, and so, what we observe is a reproduction of the same problematics, paradoxes and impossibilities.

The problem is the promise of social media to offer the solution to these philosophical and social questions that have been around for years, and deal with the impossibility of forming a community based on noble qualities of collectivity and inclusion. Thus, our attachment to technologies, to the illusions offered with it, are evoked from the very need to believe that there's an answer to all this philosophical questions.

I believe that the work of poststructuralists on the concept of community is quite essential to help us reformulate our notion of community. In particular the deconstruction of the concept was the point of departure for a discussion between Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot and was then continued by Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, which has already been mentioned above.

Even though the deconstructionist line of reasoning does not quite coincide with the writers I have mentioned in previous chapters such as Anderson, I think that those ideas were better used in formulating the prerequisites of a community in depth, but the work of poststructuralist might

help think beyond that, focusing on the potential of the community.

Initially, Blanchot wrote *The Unavowable Community* in 1994, in order to underline that community is unavowable, and Nancy expanded on his work with the *The Inoperative Community* with a conception of community that is marked by a shift in thinking of the idea of community as a concept that we always already occupy, of being in, to one that sees it as a concept that does not have a guarantee of meaning, identity, belonging; a concept that does not have an essence – that of a unified collectivity.

Nancy extends his thoughts on freedom, community, and the sense of the world, by introducing the sense of "being-with" as a mutual exposure to one another that preserves the freedom of the "I", and thus a community that is not subject to an exterior or pre-existent definition.<sup>71</sup>

What is produced in such a reconstitution, in the constitution of a "community without community"<sup>72</sup> is a network of relations, a multitude which is concerned not with what race, class, gender, sexuality, and/or culture community is premised upon. Rather it is a community which is concerned with the relations that are formed across these categories (being with) and which at the same time recognises that this community-without-identity is also "without either representation or possible description"; it is "an absolutely unrepresentable community".<sup>73</sup> Such an idea of community works against the very idea of community, whose very foundation is that of collectivising, of constituting a "being in"<sup>74</sup> and of producing foundational modes of representing that community.

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<sup>69</sup> Blanchot, M., 1988. *The Unavowable Community*. Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, p.23.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp.24-25

<sup>71</sup> Like Nancy, Agamben also proposes the idea of community that is based on the notion of belonging without identity. The "coming community" is a community of singularities, fragments: it is "of a being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging ... nor by the simple absence of conditions ... but by belonging itself" (see Agamben, G., 1993. *The Coming Community*. U of Minnesota Press, p.85.)

<sup>72</sup> Nancy, J., 1991. *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, p.71.

<sup>73</sup> Agamben, G., 1993. *The Coming Community*. U of Minnesota Press, pp.24-25.

<sup>74</sup> Nancy, J., 1991. *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, p.71