

# TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF 2.0: THE PRACTICES OF (POLITICAL) SUBJECTIFICATION

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**ABSTRACT:** The article opens up with a discussion about two scientific attitudes towards the interrelation between politics and social networks: practical and discursive. Starting with an endeavor to problematize the very possibility of politics on social networks, the second, discursive attitude, is investigated. First, argued is the fact that there are two breaks between political action and social networks: the absence of continuity between politics and media, and the agency-structure break. In either case, the intermediary link is discourse, which produces certain subjectivity of a political agent. Next, Foucauldian theory of discourse and subject is applied in order to examine the discursive resources that are used by the user to construct itself as the subject of politics. Finally, two symptomatic examples of medialized political actions on social networks, namely “share if care” and changing the color of the profile photo, are analyzed in attempt to prove that “media” (rather than “political”) component prevails, which reinforces a critical view on political actions on social networks.

**KEYWORDS:** Social networks, Political subject, Technologies of the self, Foucault, *Exagoreusis*.

## MEDIALIZED POLITICAL ACTION / POLITICIZED MEDIA ACTION

One of the most important changes in the domains of social networks and politics is that these two fields begin to intertwine and immensely affect each other. However, in order to avoid a reproduction of certain truisms, what is being discussed here is not a question of *practical interaction* of the two domains: how media could become a catalyst for a political change or how politics could benefit from a use of social networking platforms. What is of particular interest (and what is usually neglected) is not the interrelation between social networks and politics as two distinct practices but their discursive nexus. Such a reconfiguration of these two objects allows to juxtapose media environment and political actions and to evaluate them from a different standpoint. Whereas it may initially seem that there is no theoretical need to contrast the discourse (as in most basic sense, how things are (re)presented) and the practice (how things are done), they have to be placed in different conceptual and perceptual schemes. Two recent studies on social media and politics, corresponding to two views on politics and social networks respectively as (1) practices and (2) discourses, could serve as an illustration of this at first sight elusive difference.

The study “Social media use and participation: a meta-analysis of current research” conducted by Shelley Boulliane in 2015 addresses a rising doubt whether social media affect individuals’ engagement in social and political activities. Boulliane suggests that a range of events (The Arab Spring is evidently the most telling example) “fueled interest in how social media might affect citizen’s participation in civic and political life” (Boulliane, 2015: 524). The analytical tool the author chose, a meta-analysis, established necessary equilibrium between multiple theories emphasizing different aspects of the interdependency of social media activities and civic life, which allowed to examine which aspects are the most empirically grounded and to which extent social media could be transformative. The findings of the research illuminate a certain paradox: even though more than 80% of the coefficients suggest a positive relation, it is still highly problematic to claim causality. What appears to be the most dissonant with an opinion that social media have a positive impact on politics is, according to Boulliane, the fact that “social media users ... have relatively weak political habits and relatively undeveloped political identities” (Boulliane, 2015: 534). It might be concluded that optimism regarding a political potential of social media is obviously exaggerated, which is clearly demonstrated by the analysis of the *practical* interaction of social media and political life.

The second study, conducted by Pew Research Center (2012), presents the opposite pattern of results: according to findings, social media users are engaged in political activities with social media. However, the core difference lies not in the results of two studies that apparently contradict each other but in what is *understood* by a political action, which may explain why two studies, addressing the same question, arrived at different conclusions. The raised question “What is a political action?” marks a shift from the practical to the discursive level: from concrete actions to what is perceived as a proper (in this case, political) action. It is important to note that all the examples from the second study, such as promotion of material related to political or social issues, encouraging people to vote on social media, comments on political and social issues following politicians, etc. (Brady et al., 2012), could hardly be called political actions, despite being presented as such. These actions could be described not as *medialized political practice* (in other words, certain political actions that take place on social media – the actions that were examined in Boulliane’s study) but rather as *politicized media practice* (these actions are, first and foremost, actions that are taken and affect the media landscape, and could be regarded as political, but should they?).

Whereas the first type, medialized political practice, is, using McLuhan’s wording, *an extension* of politics (in other words, there is a certain continuity between offline and online engagement), the second, politicized media practice, is *a distortion* of politics. This collocation signifies the neglect of the fact that there is a rupture, a break, separating media and political practices. In this paradigm, a (medialized) action is necessarily understood as a political practice. The break between medialized actions, the majority of which have no real impact on political life (such as following politicians on social networks), and truly political actions, which aim at reallocating power, is “shaded”: the *transformative* formula, A into B (it would imply a continuity, as it was indeed in the first case) becomes *limitative*, A is a part of B. In the latter case, the discursive maxim, aiming to establish identity, is formulated: politics *is* media, which means that no transgression happens and any presumably political action taken on social media is indeed political. Due to its unobviousness, this break seems a reasonable starting point; therefore, the question that is going to be examined is not a question of pragmatics or how this break can be eliminated but a question of discourse: why actions that have almost no transformative power are granted the status of political?

Different authors provide valuable insights on this question, yet they all link the discursive aspect of mediatization of politics with a number of various

limitations. For example, Strömbäck and Esser, who examined the problems related to medialization of politics, claim that “media logic trumps political logic” (Esser, Strömbäck, 2009: 220) which entails that medialized political reality is treated by slacktivists and other media users as if it were real. Another viewpoint proposed by Couldry is based on the deconstruction of such symptomatic of “e-revolutionists” notions as “digital democracy” or “cyber revolution”: these notions barely represent a shift towards alternative political spaces and instruments; in fact, they are rather an epitome of the tenacious myth of “us”. Couldry observes that this myth makes people believe that social media platforms empower them to bring about real political changes, whereas in most cases, such gatherings represent the political and economic elites’ interests (Couldry, 2014: 623). Christian Fuchs, another media theorist, elaborates on the previous idea and argues that commercial social media platforms do not foster but, on the contrary, hinder political participation due to inevitable inequality that is also present on such platforms. He concludes: “Not technologies but people ... make rebellions and revolutions,” (Fuchs, 2014: 61), which means that alternative politics is only possible on *alternative* social media. All three examples clearly demonstrate that the formula “A is a part of B” is also true backward: positions of A and B can be changed so that the formula becomes *media is politics*. In other words, these critical remarks subvert an optimistic view that users are an agency of medialized politics and, despite looking at the problem from different standpoints, expose that medialization of politics has a spectrum of limitations, namely technological (including the meaning of *techne*, the manner something is done), ideological and political-economic.

This transition from allegedly autonomous subjects towards the subjects that are dependent on technological capabilities, ideological frames and political-economic conditions is marked with a second break. The first break, the absence of continuity between social media and politics (and its discursive transformations, hybridically conceptualized as medialized politics or as the ambivalent formula *politics is media/media is politics*), is inevitably accompanied by the second break, the conflict between the agency and the structure, or, in short, subject and power. With a view to avoiding the disequilibrium between the agency’s potential and the limitations imposed on it by power, this conflict requires a balanced approach. Taking into consideration the previous remarks and trying to critically re-evaluate medialized political actions, a Foucauldian approach appears as suitable for such a task. Even though it may initially seem as not a grounded enough decision, because Michel Foucault never addressed the problematic of social media, not only is such a theoretical anachronism peculiar but also helpful for at least two reasons. First, the structure-agency

conflict in the Foucault's theory is addressed with an intermediary link of the discourse which is precisely the object of the present analysis: the intertwined discourses of social networks and politics, and the subjectivity that stems from them. Second, a Foucauldian theory of discourse, at the heart of which is the subject's position in the discourse, states that both the discourse in the first place and subsequently the subject are invested with power. Thence, discourses render the subject the locus of power, yet disavowing their own effects: in case of social networks qua *political spaces*, both mentioned breaks could be conceptualized as power-discourse and subject-discourse relations.

In attempt to mediate these two breaks (whose intermediary element is obviously "discourse"), there is a need to reformulate that the breaks that arise from the intersection of technological, ideological and political-economic facets of social media are part of discursive formations: in other words, a repertoire of possible statements which are produced by social actors in a certain domain (Foucault, 1972: 35). However, as the discussed examples clearly demonstrate and as Foucault explains, every discursive formation has certain rules that act as discursive filters or limitations. In sum, every statement, a unit of a discursive formation is (a) created in a certain manner; (b) marks what can and cannot be said; (c) creates new spaces (applying to the object of social networks, politics is perceived through media); (d) makes material practices (Kendall, Wickham, 1999: 42). Therefore, the analytical standpoint is not based on the idea that discourses are subjugated to practices but rather that discourses serve as an "invisible support" for practices, naturalizing them and minimizing a chance of possible resistance, which would result in the reconfiguration of both material and discursive political order.

Due to the subject's experience of power being medialized by discourses, the subject rarely comprehends that concrete material practices that it performs usually support both material and discursive foundations of power. A paradox stemming from it is: even though the subject's potential is limited by power, it is indeed the subject that performs the reproduction of power. Applying this thesis to social networks, the premise of the medialized politics is that certain subject's actions taken on social networks are political as they are a sign of political engagement; yet, as it has been suggested, the subject is not a fully autonomous agent but an intermediary link that minimizes the tension between the discourse (or what is "told" to be done) and the practice (what is expected to be done). As the examples above demonstrate, the very process of subjectification, the fixation of a subject's relation to the discursive formations, is closely linked with the technological, ideological and political-economic limitations of

social networks. Thence, the subject of social networks should be treated not as the agent of free (political) will but as the subject whose (presumably) political practices are governed and limited by the discursive universum in which it acts.

Ultimately, applied to social networks, a Foucauldian method allows to identify the invisible anchor points of the hierarchized “discourse – subject – practice” configuration and demonstrates their relation to power that establishes itself through preserving *status quo* or the rules of the discursive formations that support material, (pseudo)political practices. Yet no “strict” method is applied in this paper, mainly because such a method was never developed by Foucault himself, and was only afterward “crystallized” by his followers (Dreyfus, Rabinow, 1982: 253). What is called a Foucauldian method in this paper and what seems to be the most relevant to the subject and the object of social networks is a critical angle from which it can be seen how “the production of discourse is ... controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (Foucault, 1981: 52). In short, the method that exposes the subject’s subjugation to the materiality of power through discursive instruments found on social networks.

## THE OBJECT OF POWER / THE POWER OF SUBJECT

According to Deleuze, technologization (codification, transformation *into data*) of the individual has rendered it “dividual” (Deleuze, 1992: 6). Social networks revealed best that the individual, the subject is not a holistic entity but a task to be done: identity should be constructed, added, subtracted; identity should be performed and managed (Pearson, 2009). It means that on social networks, the subject is both active and interactive: the performance and management of identity presuppose a series of actions and a set of tools that would allow the subject to create the sense of “self”. What is more, the subject of social networks, the dividual, alters its performance depending on the contexts, audiences, and situations (Gilpin, 2011: 233). Yet, what has been missed is a fact that an individual’s transformation into “dividual” is only possible provided that the subject relates to itself as to an object. Valuable remarks on how objectification precedes subjectification could be found in Foucault’s work “The Subject and Power”, where he distinguishes between three modes of objectification, which will be discussed briefly in relation to social networks.

The first, scientific objectification (how the subject is conceptualized in different disciplines varying from biology to linguistics), is only marginally related

to social networks and media, and is thence omitted. The second mode of objectification is what Foucault calls “dividing practices”: “the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others” (Foucault, 1982: 777-778). Both strategies of division are found in social networks. Whereas, the *dividual* in social networks is perceived holistically, as individual, in fact, the latter is a mere combination of different medialized aspects of the subject itself: photographs stand for the subject’s appearance, posts – for his/her thoughts and behavior, friends or followers – for his/her social circles, and suchlike. This complex alter ego corresponds to the imaginary realm, in which, even though the subject’s actions on social networks should be perceived *as if* they were real actions, the conjunction is mostly skipped; ergo, what is witnessed is a new type of division, a necessary technology of the self, enabling the user to (re/de)construct his/her virtual image.

This shift towards the more flexible process of constructing oneself correlates with the second strategy of division, the division from others. At the most basic level, the subject decides what is broadcasted and what is concealed. The subject implements it via privacy settings, which means that one can differentiate content, intensify or, alternatively, minimize it, spread it through different channels and to different audiences. In sum, inherent to the virtual space techniques of splitting the subject into composing elements are fortified by the subject’s own attempts to manage the distance between him/herself and others.

Finally, the third mode is “the way a human being turns himself into a subject” (Ibid.: 778). Despite the fact that on social networks the process of self-subjectification, constructing oneself as a subject, is managed mostly by the subject itself, power is still exercised over “free to construct themselves” subjects, though in a strategically and tactically different manner. As Foucault highlights, a new paradigm of power does not need to borrow the instruments from a repressive *ancien régime*; in fact, the “subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence and ideology ...; it may be calculated, organized, technically thought out” (Foucault, 1995: 26).

The essential point of Foucault’s analysis of the subject is the argument that for its emergence as the subject, the individual uses the tools provided by power. As demonstrated, these tools are visibility, production/management of the self and a certain truth, a corollary of the interplay between discourse and subject. Each tool stands for a specific, subject-oriented tactic, each emphasizes one technosemiotic aspects and conceals others, and each, as it will be argued, is a necessary part of a larger strategy.

## THE INVISIBLE POWER / THE POWER OF VISIBILITY

Stating that he had never examined power, “transcendental power, hidden divinity” (Foucault, 1978: 105), Foucault meant that he had never studied solely power: the object of his study had always been subjectivities produced by power as well power that can produce subjectivity. Power, therefore, is a tension between the arbitrary structural forces and subjective resistance, between macro and micro dimensions. On social networks, these two interrelated and complementary dimensions of power are the macro-level panoptic observation and the micro-level self-discipline.

Initially, the notion of the panopticon (in short, a metaphor of omnipresent surveillance) may look rather obsolete, since, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests, in a contemporary ‘liquid’ world, human beings are “integrated through seduction rather than policing, advertising rather than indoctrinating, need-creation rather than normative regulation” (Bauman, 1998: 23). However true it may be, it would be a fallacy to understand the panoptic model purely as the normative mechanism applied for police control; an even greater fallacy would be a readiness to “demolish” it, disavow as a concept that seems to be irrelevant anymore. It is important to emphasize that the primary function of the panopticon, according to Foucault, is not to suppress but, rather differently, “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1995: 201). From this viewpoint, there is no tension between the panopticon as the model, in which power is reproduced automatically, and the postmodern seduction described by Bauman; surprisingly or not, there is a synthesis of these two power techniques, made possible precisely by social networks. David Lyon, referring to an inherent to a new technosocial reality disbalance of visibility, calls it “softwares of seduction” (Lyon, 2010: 334). This perfectly coined term does encompass both premises, namely the structure of the *network* qua a distinguishing feature of social media and visibility qua the only possibility for seduction, functioning bilaterally (seduce/be seduced). Despite the fact that *the center* of power is not single and fixed on social networks, it is power what *centers* and structures social networks: put differently, the inherent to social networks power structures do not control but stimulate. Thence, the general strategy of medialized power is to invest itself in users’ proneness to online visibility.

Hence, ironically, the Descartes’ formula “I think, therefore I am” could be reworded in a manner that is emblematic of social networks “I am seen, therefore I am.” As it has been already suggested, the aim of the panopticon is not

surveillance as such but rather the *reproduction* of power via surveillance that takes the form of visibility. So as that this condition would be implemented, the subject needs to internalize power, to recognize power as its own desires and aspirations, which results in the emergence of a new technique, a political technology of the body, invested with “a common history of power relations and object relations” (Foucault, 1995: 24). It is evident, therefore, that the political body (no matter physical or virtual) is necessarily historical in a sense that it is a locus of ever-changing power paradigms, constantly reconfigured “subject-object” relations. It follows that new imperatives (to produce, not to repress) need a new political technology: especially taking into consideration a liquid, unstable and fragmented character of social networks.

Being visible online is just a macro prerequisite, not sufficient enough for subjectification; there is a need for the subject’s recognition of itself as a subject. The tension between the body/(in)dividual and coherent subject is released, as Foucault argues, via discipline that assures “the constant subjection of its [the body’s] forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility” (Foucault, 1995: 137). The *virtual political* body makes itself docile and utility through the administration of its visibility, namely, *what, how, where, when*, by whom to be seen. Examining from this viewpoint, the body is tantamount to a visual interpretative sign, the symbol, which, however, seeks to gain control over its effects, to manage a wide range of affective experiences (Edelman, 1988: 9), including its self-spectaclization.

## TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF / THE SELF IN TECHNOLOGIES

The self-spectaclization of the subject, exposure of the self as the subject, takes place in networks, whose actors, despite being in the same space and performing the same activities, are rather diverse. A prominent media theorist Walter Ong argued that electronic (new) media lack the element of antagonism and are characterized by the closure, which is a recursive feature of print media. On the contrary, in the center of oral media (such as radio and television), there is “the intense interplay between speaker and audience” (Ong, 1999: 70). But are not there even greater antagonism and the interplay between the subject and its audience on social networks? Does not the subject need audience to socially construct itself, to have someone to witness its immaterial labor of self-production (Coté, Pybus, 2007: 89)? The orality of/on social networks takes the form of *exagoreusis*, a technology of the self, which eases the tension between heterogeneous elements and necessitates the production of subjectivity.

First, the idea of technologies of the self appeared as the techniques that are used to construct oneself as a subject (Foucault, 1985: 11). Subsequently, in one of his interviews, Foucault distinguished four types of these technologies: productive, semiotic, objective and transformative (Foucault, 1988: 18). Surprising as it may seem, one of the technologies that formed at the beginning of Christianity, namely, *exagoreusis*, is a genealogical predecessor of the techniques that one utilizes in order to become a subject in social networks. *Exagoreusis*, or confession, “an analytical and continuous verbalization of thoughts carried on in the relation of complete obedience to someone else” (Foucault, 1988: 48), is indeed a manifestation of orality, a technique that involves a production of utterances that transform the subject and make it an object to the other. Foucault explains that not only is this technology based on constant meticulous self-examination (which was required from monks as his thoughts had to be permanently turned towards God) but also includes self-renunciation, as there was always the Other who was in control of subject’s desires and thoughts.

These two technologies, brought under the term *exagoreusis*, self-examination and self-renunciation are the techniques the subject of social networks utilizes to appear as such. The first technology has already been described as the management of visibility (how the subject manages its virtual body and distributes its effects). The examination of the second will aid to answer the crucial questions of what and by which means is renounced.

## THE GAME OF TRUTHS / THE TRUTH OF GAME

The political subject of social media is indeed an empathetic worker, the subject that cares; empathy, as Netchitailova promptly noted, not only allows oneself to feel emotions towards others but also to experience them towards oneself (Netchitailova, 2014: 11). The sociality of social networks is empathetic, and, amusingly, there are even certain instructions and regulations how to perform one’s empathetic work properly. For example, Kaplan and Haenlein highlight five points about being social on social media: be active, be interesting, be humble, be unprofessional, be honest (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010: 66-67). So far appearing as a purely *spectacle-oriented*, subject acquires an emotional dimension, the dimension of care: primarily the care of the self as of the subject others may care about. According to Foucault, the care of the self is an ethical maxim, allowing a subject to enter “the game of truths” (Foucault, 1997: 285), to establish a *truth* independent from the imperatives of power, a subject’s own truth.

However, the formulation of “own truth” seems rather dubious. The very notion of truth is political in a sense that it is never given as a rule; instead, it has to be invented, negotiated and established. Warde insists on a distinction, crucial for the understanding of the practice of the care of the self, a distinction between choice and selection: whereas the first presupposes a certain degree of responsibility for it, the latter is anomic and egoistic (Warde, 1994, p.897). Because of the veridiction of social networks, of the immanent to them discursive rules marking the boundaries of possible and impossible, the political games taking place on social networks are characterized by selections rather than choices. The subject’s truth, its opportunities to be truly political by taking responsibility for its own subjectivity are determined and therefore limited by the frontiers of the system. From this viewpoint, the political subject of social media appears, as Karatzogianni demonstrates, as ‘an infant’ who lives in networks yet behaves “in hierarchical modes restrained by borders, by states, and by socially constructed irrelevancies” (Karatzogianni, 2015: 2). In sum, the subject of social media, no matter whether s/he uses social media for personal or political purposes, is *a priori* protected and restrained.

To illustrate this thesis, two examples of selection-oriented practices, such as “share if care” and adding a filter on one’s profile photo, are briefly analyzed. It is argued that actions, taken at a micro-level, fall into line with requirements established at a macro-level, and by which reinforce them. Also, these quasi-political actions clearly demonstrate how the care of the subject (of oneself or of the others) is transformed into the care of the existing order of limitative discourse.

### **SHARE IF CARE / WHO CARES?**

Upon initial inspection, the phenomenon of “share if care” (alternatively, sharing is caring, please repost) may seem as a promise of micropolitics as a functional alternative to a dominant course of political actions that at times fails not only to tackle a range of problems but even to identify them as such. From rather commonplace and simple operations, for example, “spread the word that X is not a credible candidate” to endeavors to address serious socio-political problems, such as a lack of tolerance towards certain social groups, or inspire people to protest a government’s decision, “share if care” acts as a powerful catalyst gathering people on social networks together. They do act. But do these actions bring a practical political change?

A group of researchers focused on the peculiar issue why people share (either their own or others') posts on social networks and why they regret having done it afterward. There was a wide diapason of reasons: they found it 'cool' or funny, they felt frustrated, they had good intentions or they simply did not think about the consequences or were in an emotional state or under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Acquisti et al., 2011). And yet, there is an important component missing: the explanation whether people really cared. No matter if they cared sincerely or merely simulated care, the rules of the discourse of social networks create such a situation, in which *exagoreusis* takes place and any willing subject can become political, while not being actually involved in politics. Even if a change happens, it is brought by people who have enough determination and social capital (evidently, outside social networks) to act, whereas in most cases users are content with merely *appearing* to care.

Thence, "share if care" is comparable with what Žižek called an empty gesture, "the opportunity to choose the impossible" (Žižek, 1997: 36), which, however, makes both sides benefit. The subject accepts the invitation to participate in the political spectacle, to contribute to the illusion that sharing has the potential to affect the political order, thus, s/he performs this operation. The system offers the subject the opportunity s/he willingly embraces. Though the actual pendulum of power remains unaffected.

### THE SYSTEM OF SOLIDARITY / THE SOLIDARITY WITH THE SYSTEM

The inevitable outcome of the system of solidarity (the production of empty gestures that do not lead to the re-establishment of political balance) is the solidarity *with the system*. The character of any political action taken on social networks is *visible* as its key feature is to be seen (perceived as a political action unreflectively) and seduce by appealing visually (make other users want to take such political actions). Consequently, a question arises: is it possible to be truly political in a system that grants users with only a limited set of actions, fosters semblance and favors superficiality over genuine engagement?

The medialization of political actions misrepresents the value and function of these actions change. Jean Baudrillard stated that a mediatised idea becomes a counterfeit that abolishes the idea it used to stand for: most worryingly, the counterfeit becomes the new real (Baudrillard, 1988: 169). A demonstrative example of this statement is a recent tendency to express one's solidarity by changing the color of the profile photo on Facebook (e.g. to support LGBT people's rights or to mourn for the victims of terrorist attacks in Paris). These actions

are claimed to be an act of solidarity and altruism. Nevertheless, as Passy insists that “political altruism is directed at a political goal of social change or the re-definition of power relations” (Passy, 2001: 6). Evidently, neither happens.

Returning to the dichotomy of *choice vs. selection*, politics relies on choice, as neither politics nor choice are possible without a certain degree of risk. On the contrary, selection presupposes a range of options (or empty symbolic gestures), which entails the acceptance of the provided rules, thus, the disavowal of choice as well as the elimination of risk. On social media platforms, it has become surprisingly easy to express care while not being careful and be political while not making choices and seeking changes. Apparently, politics seems to be reduced to a repertoire of beautiful but empty political gestures: genuine perilous activism is substituted by lightweight ‘clicktivism’.

### **CONCLUSION: POLITICS? MEDIA? SUBJECT?**

The aim of the analysis was neither to undermine the political potential of social networks nor to reproduce an academic truism that they are an arena where the interplay between different sources of power takes place. Rather, in order to illustrate how social networks become a venue where the subject confronts power, an attempt to grasp certain limitations was made.

There is no discourse like the discourse of social media that allows the subject to be so flexible and seemingly independent in self-construction. However, the subject’s technology of the (virtual) self is closely interrelated with power and takes the form of *exagoreusis*, including self-examination and self-renunciation. The first results in the subject’s management of its visibility and distribution of the effects of such visibility. It proves that the character of social media is panoptic, implying an unavoidable state in which the subject is always seen by others (and vice versa). The second, self-renunciation, could be explained by the dichotomy of choice vs. selection: the (political) subject of social networks deals not with choices but rather selections, which means that it remains within the dominant discourse and reproduces it. Thus, the borderline between a real political action and its virtual substitute disappears. The subject appears as political without taking any requiring risk political actions.

Evidently, the approach and the results of this paper fall under the category of “suspicion” towards the emancipatory potential of social networks. Many critical remarks have already been said (and only a tiny fraction of them has been analyzed in this paper). And yet, what distinguishes this paper from a plethora

of similar ones is a close examination of interconnections among a “subject-discourse-power” triad, which would have been impossible without Foucault’s insightful theoretical framework. The latter allowed to examine the techniques imposed on the subject so that s/he behave in accordance with the interior regulations of the web of power relations in/of social networks. Viewed from this angle, the function of this work is not to complement a large number of critical studies focusing on the limits of social networks but rather to conceptualize the object of these studies anew and explicate what they tend to focus on: both macro-limitations and the micro-effects of these limitations on the subject. This change of analytical focus, from the political of social networks to the subjectivity such networks produce, fills the void of the studies both glorifying the political potential of social networks and undermining it. Understanding the political subject of social networks as necessarily a subject with discursive prostheses may cast light on the structural reasons why certain scholars highlight the positive aspects of social media platforms and others are reluctant to even admit the possibility of virtual politics. In both instances, a missing component is political subjectivity, the subject’s own attitude to its (political or not) actions. Ultimately, the gaps, ruptures, brakes that have been investigated inspire to ask radical questions: Can we imagine social media platforms without political limitations or even being anti-political? If yes, how can they transform the political landscape? What is the role of the subject? How to resist subjectification?

To conclude, the last sentences of Foucault’s book “The Archaeology of Knowledge” appear as an extremely thought-provoking and fruitful thesis, provided that it is understood as a reference to the field of social networks. He writes: “Discourse is not life: its time is not your time ... you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don’t imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he” (Foucault, 1972: 211). It could be concluded that the political subject of social media is being killed; but an even more intriguing perspective is to ask ourselves a question: was it ever alive?

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## SAVĖS TECHNOLOGIJOS 2.0: POLITINĖS SUBJEKTIFIKACIJOS PRAKTIKOS

### SANTRAUKA

Straipsnis pradedamas diskusija apie dvi susiformavusias mokslines prieigas prie politikos ir socialinių tinklų santykio: praktinę ir diskursyvinę. Siekiant supprobleminti politikos socialinių tinklų platformose galimybę, analizuojama diskursyvinė prieiga. Teigiama, kad tarp politinio veiksmo ir socialinių tinklų esti du lūžiai: netęstinumas tarp politikos ir medijų bei lūžis tarp agento (angl. *agency*) ir struktūros. Abiem atvejais šie lūžiai yra eliminuojami diskurso, produkuojančio tam tikrą politinį subjektą. Mėginant ištirti diskursyvinius resursus, kuriuos vartotojas naudoja tam, kad galėtų įsteigti save kaip politinį subjektą, pasitelkiama Michelio Foucault diskurso teorija. Analizuojami du simptomiški medializuoto politinio veiksmo pavyzdžiai: *dalinkis, jei rūpi* (angl. *share if care*) ir profilio nuotraukos spalvos keitimas. Atlikta analizė įrodo, kad šie veiksmai yra labiau medijiniai nei politiniai, kas patvirtina kritinį požiūrį į politinius veiksmus socialiniuose tinkluose.

**RAKTINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** socialiniai tinklai, politinis subjektas, savęs technologijos, Foucault, *exagoreusis*.