**On the digital colonization of human experience.** By Franco “Bifo” Berardi

The Spanish colonization of Mesoamerica was essentially a process of symbolic and cultural submission.

The “superiority”  of the colonizers lay on the operational effectiveness of their technical production. The colonization destroyed the cultural environment in which indigenous communities had been living for centuries: the alphabetic technology, the power of the written word overwhelmed, jeopardized and finally superseded the indigenous cultures. The conquistadors re-coded the cultural universe of nowadays Mexico and Central America.

Before the arrival of the Spanish invaders Malinche (Malinalli in Nahuatl language, Marina for the Spaniards), the daughter  of a noble Aztec family, was given away as  a slave to passing traders after her father died and her mother remarried. By the time Cortés arrived, she had learned the Mayan dialects spoken in the Yucatan while still understanding Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. As a youth she was given as tribute again, this time to the invaders.

She became the lover of Cortés and accompanied him as interpreter. She translated the words exchanged by Cortés and Moctezuma, king of the Aztec population of Tenochtitlan, and she translated the conqueror’s words when he met crowds of indigenous persons. She translated for Nahuatl-speaking people the words of Christian conquerors and of Christian priests. The Christian message melted with pre-colonisation mythologies, and the modern Mexican culture emerged. She and Cortés had a child, Martín, the first Mexican. She betrayed her own people by linking with the invaders. By the moral point of view, however, she owed nothing to her own people who had sold her into slavery, and treated her as a servant. She betrayed the conquerors, too, though they did not realize it as such.

Malinche is the ultimate symbol of the end of a world, and also the symbol of the formation of a new semiotic and symbolic space. Only when you are able to see the collapse as the end of a world, can a new world be imagined. Only when you are free from hope (which is the worst enemy of intelligence) can you start seeing a new horizon of possibility. This is the lesson that Malinche is teaching us.

DEMOCRACY

On 31 October 2011, George Papandreou announced his government’s intentions to hold a referendum for the acceptance of the terms of a Eurozone bailout deal. He wanted the Greek people to decide if the diktat of the financial class that was strangling Greek society would be accepted or rejected. Overnight, the elected Prime Minister of Greece was obliged to resign. In the very place where it was invented and named twenty-five centuries ago, democracy was finally cancelled. It will never again come to life. Financial abstraction has swallowed the destiny of billions of people. European workers’ salaries have been halved in the last ten years and unemployment and precariousness are on the rise. Meanwhile, profits skyrocket.

WAR

The Eurasian continent is heading toward a proliferation of fragmentary conflict. At the same time, the infinite war launched by Cheney and Bush has paved the way to the establishment of the Caliphate. In Japan, the Prime Minister travels the world looking for allies against China. In India, a racist mass murderer (neoliberal of course) has been elected Prime Minister. In Europe, a Euro-Russian war is in the making at the Ukrainian border. In Ferguson, Missouri, another racialized killing reveals the American police state and the poverty industrial complex — two million homeless in the US and counting. In Gaza, Israel bombards the world’s largest open air prison and blames the victims, most of them children, for dying while the world looks on. In Northern Africa, Western powers prepare for the next season of Gaddafi blowback. In Liberia, Ebola fans the flames of civil and regional war, one bleeding eyeball at a time. In Mexico, a momentary silence shrouds the bloodiest drug war humanity has ever known, with cartels ranking among the wealthiest corporations.

While capitalism will continue to thrive thanks to massive slavery and eco-catastrophe, the next 20 years will be marked by the clash between financial abstraction and biofascism. A social, cognitive breakdown is estranging the masses from the body, so the decerebrated body is taking the form of aggression. Those who have been lost in the competition react under the banners of aggressive identification. We can even see fascism revived by the vengeful spirit of the dispossessed.

BIO-FINANCIAL POWER

Nation states are over, stripped by the global machine  of finance, computation and all-pervading behavioral Big Data algorithms. Global corporations are replacing nation states as holders of power. We now embrace the first stages of the automation of mind, language and emotions ... the architecture of bio-financial power. Power, in fact, is no longer political or military. It is based more and more on the penetration of techno-linguistic automatisms into the sphere of language. Soon, life will be based on the automation of cognitive activity. Who cares if the US military machine is running on empty because of Bush’s self-defeating strategy — it’s a remnant of geopolitical thinking now dead.

THE CIRCLE

Mediocre as it is, Dave Eggers’s novel  The Circle is a metaphor for the relation between technology, communication, emotion and power. "The Circle" is the name of the most powerful corporation  in the world, a sort of conglomerate of Google, Facebook, Paypal and YouTube. Three men lead the company: Stockton  is a financial shark, Bayley is a utopian and Ty Gospodinov is the project’s hidden mastermind.

The main character of the book is Mae, a young woman hired by The Circle during “the Completion,” the final phase in the implementation of TrueYou, a program intended to enforce the recording of every instant of life for pervasive, ceaseless sharing. Mae becomes the corporation’s spokesperson, the face that appears every day on the infinite channels of The Circle’s television network — the ambassador of the new credo.

The Circle is all about the utter  capture of human attention: ceaseless communication, mandatory friendliness and creation of a new neediness — the obsessive need to express and share. One may remark that Eggers is simply re-enacting Orwell more than 60 years after the publishing of 1984. That’s true, but in the final pages of the novel, Eggers goes further than Orwell, when Ty exposes the transhuman potency of the totalitarian nightmare.

In the last scene of the novel, the inventor and founder of The Circle manages to covertly meet Mae, the newbie seducing  the global audience. He has lost control of his own creature, the project he originally conceived, and is deprived of all power in its unstoppable self–deployment.

“I did not intend any of this to happen. And it’s moving so fast. I didn’t picture a world where Circle membership was mandatory, where all government and all life was channeled through one network ... there used to be the option of opting out. But now that’s over. Completion is the end. We are closing the circle around everyone. It’s a totalitarian nightmare.”

The automaton cannot be stopped, as even the creator himself becomes overpowered by his own invention: the circle of continuous attention, the circle of perfect transparence of everybody to everybody, the circle of total power and of total impotence.

PLEASURE, AFFECTION AND EMPATHY

At the beginning of the 21st century we are in a position that is similar to the position of Malinche: the conqueror is here, peaceful or aggressive, functionally superior, unattainable, incomprehensible. The bio-info automaton is taking shape from the connection between electronic machines, digital languages and minds formatted in such a way to comply with the code. The automaton’s flow of enunciation emanates a connective world that the conjunctive codes cannot interpret, a world that is symbolically incompatible with the social civilization that was the outcome of five centuries of Humanism, Enlightenment and Socialism.

The automaton is the reification of the networked cognitive activity of millions of semio-workers around the globe. Only if they become compatible with the code, the program, can semio-workers enter in the process of networking.

This implies the de-activation of old, subconsciously engrained, modes of communication and perception (compassion, empathy, solidarity, ambiguousness and irony), paving the way to the assimilation of the conscious organism with the digital automaton.

Will the general intellect be able to disentangle itself from the automaton? Can consciousness act on neural evolution? Will pleasure, affection, empathy find a way to re-emerge? Will we translate into human language the connective language of the automated meaning-making machine buzzing and buzzing in our heads?

These are questions that only  Malinche can answer, opening to the incomprehensible other, betraying her people and reinventing language in order to express what can not be said.

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<https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/116/malinche-and-automaton.html>