

**READING TWITTER'S MODE OF OPERATION THROUGH LACAN: THE
EXPERIENCE OF THE REAL IN SOCIAL MEDIA AGE**

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TWITTER'İN İŞLEYİŞ BİÇİMİNİ LACAN ÜZERİNDEN OKUMAK: SOSYAL
MEDYA ÇAĞINDA GERÇEK DENEYİMİ

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ABSTRACT

Reading Twitter's Mode of Operation Through Lacan: The Experience of The Real In Social Media Age

This thesis aims to study Twitter from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis. By using the Lacanian notions and concepts in order to understand and explain how Twitter has a mode of operation, this thesis tries to establish a systematic thought on a widely using social phenomenon. This thesis proposes that the unsymbolizable Real can be constantly experienced, by considering 140-character limit of Twitter as a constitutive feature. Moreover, the problem of the process of subjectivation, and the usage of the language are at the locus of this thesis. Thus, this thesis pursue the answer of how user experience on Twitter can be substantialized through fragments of texts and images. In order to achieve this goal, this thesis raises the analogy between Lacanian concepts of desire, fantasy, *jouissance*, and the features of Twitter.

ÖZET

Twitter'ın İşleyiş Biçimini Lacan Üzerinden Okumak: Sosyal Medya Çağında Gerçek Deneyimi

Bu tezin amacı Twitter'ı Lacancı psikanalizin perspektifinden çalışmaktır. Twitter'ın nasıl bir işleyiş biçimine sahip olduğunu anlamaya ve açıklamayı amaçlayan bu tez, Lacancı nosyon ve kavramları kullanarak, geniş ölçüde kullanılan bir toplumsal fenomen hakkında sistematik bir düşünce oluşturmaya çalışmaktadır. Twitter'daki 140 karakter sınırını kurucu bir özellik olarak gören bu tez, simgeselleştirilemeyen Gerçek'in sürekli olarak deneyimlenebileceğini öne sürmektedir. Ayrıca bu tezde öznelleşme süreci ve dilin kullanımına ilişkin sorunlar da merkezi bir yer tutmaktadır. Bu yüzden, bu tez Twitter'daki kullanıcı deneyiminin metin ve görsel fragmanlar vasıtasıyla nasıl somutlaştırılabileceği sorusunun cevabını aramaktadır. Bu amaca ulaşmak için de, Lacan'ın arzu, fantazi ve *jouissance* kavramları ile Twitter'ın özellikleri arasında benzerlik kurmaktadır.

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Communication makes you laugh – Jacques Lacan

INTRODUCTION

0.1. New Media in a Cultural Context

Internet is a product of new communication technology and an operational system founded in USA in the late 20th century in order to be benefited for military purposes. Etimologically it is the abbreviation of “Interconnected Networks” that indicates the dissemination process of personal networks into more common ones. While the initial goal of founding internet is to establish a limited communication network in a closed circuit system, it has become widespread throughout the world since 1990’s and has been using as the most popular communication medium today.

Internet operates on a system called World Wide Web (WWW) which allows people to access the content created by websites online. WWW is also has a hypertext structure. Thus users could get access to the various form of contents through dynamic webpages.

Over the years, the fundamental characteristics of WWW have shifted and Web 1.0 has transformed into Web 2.0. The former marks the internet users acting as consumers of content on a static page, while the latter defines the user’s common environment of producing and sharing his or her user-generated content through his or her own social networks. The primary and acutal outcome of Web 2.0 is to urge users to form their networks, to expand them onto

the networks of other users network, and to get interaction. In that sense, Web 2.0 marks a breaking point for internet itself since it differentiates the new media from the traditional one.

0.2. New Media and Cyberspace

The new media could basically be defined through the user-generated contents on the network that belongs to the user himself or herself. But it's not easy to define new media because internet has always-already been a rapidly changing structure and the new using styles and operations are emerging.

Lister defines new media through computed communication: “[N]ew media is the social practices of communication, representation and expression that have developed using the digital, multimedia, networked computer” (2003: 2). The emphasis on social practices, which can be developed through networks, means that new media connote heavily the internet itself. “A person using the term ‘new media’ may have one thing in the mind (the Internet),” (2003: 12) says Lister.

“New media,” says Manovich, “change our concept of what an image is – because they turn a viewer into an active user” (2002: 183) So, the fundamental characteristic of new media is based on the position occupied by the user – who can be said a subject in terms of being subjected to someone and being an individual subject. In the traditional media, a user is just a person who spectates the screen, while in new media, a user is not the person who only spectates but also acts by himself or herself in his or her network. Thus it can be said that new media paves the way for users to become agents through their interactivity.

But one should not take these considerations, as if there is a strict contrast between the traditional media and the new one, into account since, as Chun and Keenan say, “the new media do not mean that other media are old or dead, because new media [. . .] are an interactive medium or form of distribution as independent as the information relayed” (2006:

1). In order to understand and corroborate this reflection, we can employ the term coined by Jenkins: Convergence culture. He notes, “By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms” (Jenkins, 2006: 2). Consequently, new media do not exclude traditional media or do not replace it, new and traditional one co-exist. Yet it is clear that new media dominates the domain of traditional media in the 21st century.

The place in which user activity widely operates is the domain of new media, which also includes in cyberspace. The term cyberspace is derived from Wiener’s term “cybernetics” which was first used in Gibson’s novel titled *Neuromancer*:

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding. (1991: 69)

One should bear in mind that cyberspace is not equal to new media. Instead it is more than that, which also has an important reflection on biotechnology and medicine etc., even though it relies on internet to a large extent. Ploug defines cyberspace through virtuality: “[C]yberspace is a virtual place, room or space sustained and accessed through networks of interconnected computers in which agents are interacting” (2009: 69-70).

Cyberspace creates a reality, a virtual one distinct from our everyday actuality. Virtual reality (VR) is not necessarily in contradiction with our truth which we perceive from our surroundings. “The virtual, strictly defined, has little relationship to that which is false, illusory or imaginary. The virtual is by no means the opposite of the real... The virtual

should, properly speaking, be compared not to the real but to the actual” (Lévy and Bonono, 1998: 16, 24).

Thus the cyberapace is a domain which allows the agents of internet to interact with, communicate, and act through new media. So it can be argued that the new media modifies the mode of subjectivity. As Poster says, “The subject of internet is not the same with the modern definition of subject and that the ‘communication practices that constitute subjects as unstable, multiple and diffuse’” (1996: 138).

Indeed, a user’s mode of being on internet is radically different from the mode of being in everyday reality. The latter is totally constituted by the Symbolic order, while the former is based on more than that. We will discuss this point in the next chapters. Thus we can speak of an agent/subject which is constituted by communication and interaction that allow the kernel of being to emerge. At the very moment that the communication and interaction are absent, agent/subject transforms into the merely spectating one, who exactly goes out of cyberspace; which reminds us of the very difference between traditional media and the new one.

0.3. Psychoanalytic Media Studies

Psychoanalysis has been applied to different forms of popular culture, from literature to art, from cinema to music. The preliminary example of psychoanalytic intervention to popular culture is presented by Freud, who uses psychoanalysis as a tool for the cultural critique of political and social situations including religion, sexes, war and art. The most important works on this issue by Freud are *Leonardo da Vinci and A Memory of His Childhood*, *Moses And*

Monotheism, Totem And Taboo, and Civilization and Its Discontents. He developed some concepts based on his works based on an historical event or an artistic painting.

3 or 4 decades later, popular culture and psychoanalysis came together in an inseparable way. On the other hand, psychoanalytic studies on cinema and television has become prominent since 1960's because these tools are accepted worldwide as a major part of everyday life. This can be considered as the first encounter of psychoanalysis with media. Especially movies were the most important issue that draw's cultural critics' interests. The vast majority of film studies under the umbrellalla of media studies has concentrated on films. "Generally speaking, film scholars have used psychoanalytic concepts to explain the structure and appeal of films according to the unconscious desires discussed in the works of Freud and Lacan" (Ott and Mack, 2010: 158). In these works, scholars have focused on the relationship between the movie screen and the spectator in order to understand and explain the reality and film's reflection of cultural unconscious of the society. Although psychoanalytic film theorists continue to understand the cultural meaning of the films, they also concentrate upon the ideology in the filmic structure created by the director and hence his or her unconscious. Thus, it can be said that the problem of the dissemination of ideology is an important site for the psychoanalytic film studies.

These theories have used a unique terminology. The concepts used by Freudian film theories were the unconscious, Oedipus complex, castration and the return of the repressed – which have a certain significance in the areas of the subjectivity of the spectator and sexuality. But in Lacanian theory, the spectatorial process were explained through the concepts of fantasy, desire and gaze, which have varied outcomes in terms of the Imaginary and the Symbolic order.

0.3.1. Overview of Lacanian Media Studies: Film Analysis and the Concept of the Real

Lacanian psychoanalysis has been getting into contact with the domain of media since 1970's. Cinema has been and is a subject for Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyze and employ some concepts and notions through the cultural meaning of movies. In this sense, media must not be understood as a tool for communication which includes new media.

Those who worked on this issue have used some Lacanian notions in order to adapt them into cinema, which is also applicable today.

As McGowan argues, Lacanian film readings heavily rely on spectatorship, that is, the gaze (2003: 27) which is, for Lacan, a term that constitutes "a permanent possibility of being seen by the Other" for the spectator. Apart from our physical eyes, the gaze relies on the spectator against the motion picture screen rather than a gaze included in the movie. Because, on the one hand, gaze allows a spectator to keep its distance to fiction itself, it also "represents a point of identification" (2003: 28) for the spectator.

Being a person who watches a movie, who stands against the motion picture screen is accompanied by reflecting on a scene and/or on a character etc. This point indicates the Lacanian notion of "mirror stage." According to Lacan "the function of the mirror stage [. . .] establish[es] a relationship between an organism [body] and its reality" (2006: 78). By this way, the subject is formed; the subject sees himself or herself out of his bodily domain and then constitutes himself or herself as *I*. Mirror stage "[. . .] symbolizes the *I*'s mental permanence, at the same time as it is prefigures its alienating destination." (Lacan, 2006: 76).

In parallel to this, “traditional Lacanian film theory understands the gaze as it appears in the mirror stage [. . .]” (McGowan, 2003: 27). As Mulvey put it, in the mirror stage, through the cinematic gaze, “the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, [. . .] [which] gives rise to the future generation of identification with others” (1975: 345). These concepts we speak of (the gaze, mirror stage) operate in the Imaginary domain where the subject supposed to appear. The domain of Imaginary allows the formation of the ego. But the Imaginary order has its significance through its interconnectedness, its inseparability with the Symbolic order.

Subject gets involved in the Symbolic domain, as from when he or she encounters himself or herself in the mirror, which becomes later a universe of language. Henceforth, objects that bring him or her to existence were once symbolized and then they are able to be expressed by language. Because “the most elementary form of exchange is communication itself” (Lacan, 1991: 189) by means of speech.

Consequently, we can say that the Lacanian film analysis focuses fundamentally on the gaze and the mirror stage. Both of these notions take the relationship between spectator and the screen into consideration rather than the content of the film. (McGowan, 2003: 40, 43).

But one can clearly see that the Lacanian film theory does not concern the term the Real as it does the the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Even if some psychoanalysts and scholars employ this term in some works, in a particular sense, it would not be enough for the Real to be understood in depth. McGowan, too, argues the same: “By focusing entirely on the relationship between the imaginary and symbolic order, Lacanian film theory overlooks the role of the Real [. . .] in the functioning of the gaze and in the filmic experience” (2003: 28). Nowadays, philosopher Slavoj Žižek uses the Real in order to understand what contemporary

films mean, since the publication of the *Sublime Object Of Ideology*, through the role of the fantasy in the scene and that how the spectator perceives it.

0.3.2. The Connection Between Lacanian Psychoanalysis and the New Media

It can be said that the relationship between Lacanian psychoanalysis and new media has been too limited. These studies could not get up to date on the one hand and does not have a satisfactory reflection on Lacanian thought. On this point, we will try to combine these two domains which seems quite different, but enables us to see how one can provide a possibility of protective contemplating on new media studies. In order to satisfy our aim, we will suggest a new kind of reading between Lacanian psychoanalysis and Twitter, which is not only possible but also contingent.

“Twitter is an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short 140-character messages called ‘tweets’” (“Twitter”). Twitter has at least 320 million users and the number gradually increases. People who signs up Twitter can instantly tweet, follow other profiles, only after profiling. Homepage of Twitter is designed as a tweet flow that allows users to see what people writes.

The reason we read Twitter through Lacanian psychoanalysis is that the website has not a complex mode of operation both in the sense of user experience and in terms of conceptualization. Since “digital media represent history through fragments, in the form of images, sound bites, and video clips, without revealing the whole in detail” (Nusselder, 2009: 185). Twitter has an unequivocal system consisted of content producing structure that includes basically 140-character tweets, photos, videos and surveys, and of sharing method

composed of retweets and likes (formerly called “favorites”). We will implement some of Lacanian concepts to the mode of operation and draw a conclusion regarding the status of our everyday reality and fantasies.

The principal reason we chose Twitter is that Twitter has a unique place for social media in terms of its textual mechanism. When the prominence the visuality of Instagram, or interpersonal interaction of Facebook is taken into account, interactivity on Twitter can be done only by means of text, whether it has a meaning or not – user interaction is shaped through the textual interactivity of users. However, it must be noted that, while Twitter, in its initial years, was solely a text-based social media, it presents now a wider visual user experience. Even though the basis of its mode of operation is 140-character limit is a strong sign of a paradigm shift based on the competition with Instagram and Facebook, it is certainly not true that the importance of the text on Twitter is decreased. Without its textual structure, Twitter would lost its unique mode of operation.

Another significant change on Twitter is the increase of the mobile using of Twitter. But we will focus on the desktop interface, not the mobile one. Precisely because Twitter initially established as a desktop application and the user experience is slightly different. Although the interfaces are different, the inner logic of Twitter poses the idea of the I to the user. In the same vein, there seems no radical divergence between the desktop user experience and the mobile one since mobile version of Twitter is based on the desktop one. But in order to compose a general user experience view, we will take the desktop version of Twitter as basis. It will establish a reference point for us while defining the user experience.

0.4. From Symbolic Mode of Operation to the Real One

In this thesis, we will examine Twitter's mode of operation through Lacanian notions of fantasy, desire and ego-ideal. By making comparisons and matchups, we will try to reveal what do Twitter timeline, tweets and profiles mean from Lacanian psychoanalytic point of view.

In order to achieve this goal, and make the thesis more concrete, we will focus the user experience. We will constitute an ideal type of user experience as a basis for Twitter's mode of since the spectrum of Twitter users are radically varied and it is too hard to classify them with respect to their intentions, their form of projecting their ego-ideals to the screen, trending topics, and their textual context. Thus, we will place the ideal user experience type as a product of Twitter's mode of operation, interface and design in order to contain the intentions of the user in a most broadest sense, and to explain the textual structure of Twitter. In short, the subject we will mention hereafter as "the user" is actually is a subjective entity who performs, on an optimum level, the obligations and the things Twitter's mode of operation is entailed.

Some scholars and philosophers claimed that internet has created another kind of reality which help people to pull themselves away from everyday reality. Most theories have pessimistic views in terms of technological development which, especially, focus on the assumptions and conclusions that internet has turned people's lives into a spectacle, as Debord expresses as "The loss of the language of communication" (1977). However, contrary to Debord's idea, we claim that the language of communication has not lost on Twitter but communication itself has become an aimless spot, since the goal of interaction is just to get more interaction and to get contacted continuously.

Having an ambivalent position to Debord's ultra pessimistic ideas, our intention is to reveal how new media changed people's economy of desire which has not a structure that

allows its locus to roam unrestrainedly but a law (Copjec, 2015: 25). According to Lacan, the law manifests itself in guise of the language since the most basic form of exchange is communication itself: "What we see here is the tight bond between desire and Law" (1977: 66). Although it seems purely visual, our acts are held on Twitter is via language in a limited form which "screens" the desire of the user through fantasies. This is the place where the law of Twitter emerges. Because to get an interaction and to establish a network on Twitter transform the desires of the user, inasmuch as s/he change their tendency to draw on their goals. These changes can be monitored on Twitter's timeline.

According to Lacan, "The subject's desire is for the desire of the Other. (1998: 235). As an expression of the inaccessible, absolutely exterior position, the Other is an omnipotent spectator by which we would like to be seen. On Twitter, we position ourselves to the Other we virtually incarnated on our profiles. We will examine what this Otherness means on Twitter as a formation of the ego-ideal, the supportive mediator of being a Cartesian subject. In order to explain this alteration, we will discuss the fantasmatic dimension of desire. As Zizek says, "Through fantasy we learn how to desire" (1992: 6) and fantasy is also an important part of the communication since, on Twitter, there is a textual interaction that is in question.

With respect to proper communication, or in Lacanian terms, a proper speech in a textual universe, desire forms a discourse (truth) when it comes to Twitter. Lacan states that "proper speech has a proper meaning" (Lacan, 1977b: 11)ç

Where Lacan conceptualized the language and textuality is in the Symbolic domain. According to him, everyday life is totally constituted and determined by the Symbolic order. Any structure that can be symbolised consists in the language system and hence the Symbolic

domain. However, 140-character based textuality limits its semiotic structure which makes impossible to speak of the Symbolic as Lacan proposes.

In order to understand this limitation and disintegration better, suffice it to take a look at the Lacanian concepts of utterance (*énoncé*) and enunciation (*énonciation*). According to Lacan, utterance is what is articulated, while enunciation is the way of formation of an articulation. “The only subject Lacan allots to the statement is the conscious subject of the utterance” (Fink, 1997: 40) states Fink. At the rest of the phrase, he says that the utterance is represented by an *I*. In this thesis, we will claim that whatever shared on Twitter can be defined solely as utterance not as enunciation. Thus we will see how semantic structure is broken and how the Real emerges as a base structure.

This point will be our reference point that allows us to expand our way of analysing onto the Real apart from the Symbolic. In conclusion, our fundamental claim is that Twitter creates another symbolic form, and that it is quite possible for online users to encounter with the Real which drains out of the Symbolic’s gap.

To work in the field of new media through Lacanian psychoanalysis has a certain meaning for the psychoanalysis itself. Our claim is that the Lacanian psychoanalysis, its film studies could give us the insight of how new media operates in our times. Thus, we will use a methodology of comparative reading between Lacanian psychoanalysis and the new media. While doing this, we will not just focus on how Lacanian psychoanalysis understands new media. Rather, we will sometimes reveal the interlinks of new media where Lacanian psychoanalysis falls short. In this sense, it can be said that our way of reading is an intrinsic one, not just the application of some theoretical concepts on a determined subject. Consequently, we will claim the responsibility of the failures and ineffectiveness of Lacanian psychoanalysis and suggest the formulation to overcome. But our basic suggestion is that

Lacanian psychoanalysis and its concepts used for 40 years could still have a meaning to understand new media. Throughout this work, we will see what kind of replacements and modifications Lacanian psychoanalysis have needed when discussing new media as a tool of everyday communication.

CHAPTER 1

FROM OLD MEDIA TO NEW MEDIA

1.1. Communication and the Media

Communication is an essential feature of human entity. What we are doing in social life inevitably refers to the communication. Its basic form is the verbal communication. According to media theorist McLuhan,

The spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new way. [. . .] Words are complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience into our uttered or outered senses (McLuhan, 1995: 57).

So it can be said that communication is all about using words in order for people to understand themselves and the things surround them.

Communication is also an extension of human entity, not an inner quality. For example, all forms of verbal communication is learned afterwards. As far as contemporary era is concerned, we learn not only languages but we also dwell in the sphere of media: Televisions, radios, computers and smartphones have become our indispensable tools to communicate with the others. Most of these new technologies are imposed on us mainly by culture.

Media also continues to change our point of views, opinions, the forms of communication, our attainment to these tools and our libidinal investments. As McLuhan says, “If a technology is introduced either from within or from without a culture, and if it gives new stress or ascendancy to one or another of our senses, the ratio among all of our senses is altered. We no longer feel the same, nor do our eyes and ears and other senses remain the same” (2011: 24).

What is important here is that “writing affects speech directly, not only its accidence and syntax but also its enunciation and social uses” (McLuhan, 1996: 125). We can trace the change in our times thereby emphasising the process of transition from old media to new media and thereby what their existence affect has a meaning for today.

1.2. New Media and Old Media as Symptoms of Culture

The difference between old and new media is not crystal clear but rather a complex problem. Most people think that new media is totally new and the old one is bygone. In order to understand how this process occurred, we must take a look at the definitions.

Old or traditional media marks a system that the communication is unilateral and that the user is integrated to the system as a receiver. Traditional media, on the one hand has a closed system that allows one-way information flow, and has a passive involvement that does not allow for the user to create content on the other. For example, a viewer can only watch the TV show – the sole chance he or she has turning it over. Same goes for the radio and television. In addition to that, all have a formal and unique language, most media platforms impose users a certain kind of information which is framed.

But in new media this kind of relationship is subverted: We can speak of an active involvement, an informal language and, on the other hand, the user has the control of the circulation of information. Moreover, it is not important that the circulated information is true or not. In new media, information is transformed into (or replaced by) the content that is designed as a readable and sharable hypertext. On the other hand, the communication is replaced by the interactivity. “Interactivity is a process-related, variable characteristic of communication settings. Like face-to-face communication, computer-mediated communication has the capacity of enabling high interactivity. One postulated outcome of interactivity is engagement. Interactivity can lead to sociability” (Rafaeli, 2006). This is why we can call new media “social media.” This unstructured interaction on which new media based also promotes the individual rather than a generalised typology of audience. “New media follows, or rather runs a heads up, a quite different logic of post-industrial society – that individual customization, rather than mass standardization.” (Manovich, 2001: 30).

New media is not a monoblock entity. Rather, it could be integrated in other systems but at the same time it could be separated from other technological devices. For instance, some applications could be used instantly but also could be deleted on demand. It’s up to users to engage a new media interaction. Users are able to decide when they would like to get online on their social media accounts and contribute. In this sense, new media enables users to curate the content they would like to access – they are forced to choose. So it can be said that “A new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions” (Manovich, 2001: 30).

But that does not mean that new media killed traditional media. Quite on the contrary, traditional media transformed and adapted itself to new media world. We should keep in mind that, as Jenkins puts it, traditional media is not dead and traditional and new media constitutes a form of coexistence (2006: 24). For example, TV shows use their Twitter accounts to get in

contact with the viewers and turn them into an active users in a traditional media sphere. Same goes for the radio and newspapers. The term “transmedia storytelling” coined by Jenkins could tell us more than that. According to him, “Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins, 2007). Different extensions of the media, regardless of traditional or new, come together and creates a unique kind of interaction. This is how new media world constructed.

1.3. “Social Media”

As a result of these general features, social media platforms were emerged. These platforms allow users to generate content, post texts, pictures, videos and share links and other users’ posts.

Even though it is too challenging to define it, it must be noted that there is a broad and commonalities-based definition: “Social media are Web 2.0 internet-based applications, user-generated content (UGC) is the lifeblood of the social media organism, users create service-specific profiles for the site or app that are designed and maintained by the social media organization and social media facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user’s profile with those of other individuals and/or groups” (Obar and Wilson, 2005: 745).

The most popular platforms of social media, respectively, are Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Launched in 2004, Facebook has now 1.09 billion daily active users as of March

2016 (“Company Info”). Instagram, born in 2010, has now more than 500 million daily active users as of June 2016 (“Instagram Today”). Founded in 2006, Twitter has now 310 million monthly active users as of March 2016 (“Company About”). YouTube, LinkedIn and Snapchat and the others are also among the social media.

1.4. Earlier Insights on New Media

But the issue of social media is not new. It is discussed in earlier times before social media emerged as a popular tool of the internet.

The difference between old and new media is foreseen by McLuhan as a distinction between hot media and cool media: “[H]ot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience. Naturally, therefore, a hot medium like radio has very different effects on the user from a cool medium like the telephone” (McLuhan, 1995: 23). His analysis basically depends on sociability: [. . .] [T]he hot form excludes, and the cool one includes.” (23)

Williams and Williams, too, speaks of the irreversible change by the technology itself in the society: “The new technologies are invented as it were in an independent sphere, and then create new societies or new human conditions” (2003: 13). According to Williams and Williams, these changes pave the way for new communication systems: “The decisive and earlier transformation of industrial production, and its new social forms, which had grown out of a long history of capital accumulation and working technical improvements, created new needs but also new possibilities, and the communications systems, down to television, were

their intrinsic outcome” (19). Their definition of television is very close to the description of social media: “One of the strengths of television is that it can enter areas of immediate and contemporary public and, in some senses, private action more fully and more powerfully than any other technology” (73).

Starting from this point of view, in the next chapter, we will try to reach the same insights that make us capable of understand what social media means for the contemporary subject. Our main intention is to produce a Lacanian insight to Twitter. Based on the question that would the Lacanian concepts are useful to comprehend both the position of the user, and Twitter’s mode of operation, we will analyze Twitter’s features with regards to the subjective interactivity in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE LAW OF TWITTER: BETWEEN THE USER ACTION AND THE MODE OF OPERATION

2.1. Emerging Social Structures

Along with the centrality of social media and internet in the contemporary social life, the time people spent in front of the screens of computers, smartphones and tablets is gradually increasing. So much so that, people's primary attention, concern and sympathy to social media were spread to the public transportations, cafés and also homes. According to researchers, most people are inclined to take a look at their Twitter accounts rather than to look at their friends' faces or surrounding when they cannot find something to talk about for a while (Tardanico, 2012). The expansion of social media made us think that social media went beyond our physical world on some points.

It can be said that social media paved the way of the emergence of a social structure which is formed by the users. What sustains this structure is not only the togetherness of multiple agents but also their incessant and intersubjective interactions through 140-charactered tweets. Thus, here we can speak of a social practices directly and solely based on communication. At first glance, this practice seems to be formed by social media's mode of

operation or a series of principles through its interface. It is true, but just up to a point. On Twitter, users are limited and reduced to, and determined by 140-character. However, as we have said before, this restrictedness could be broken through third part applications.

2.2. The Symbolic Order as the Name-of-the-Father

Provided that staying in the domain of language and the system constituted by it, users act by themselves. But a small step on these acts paves the way for *point de capitone* and makes the new structure in the form of a rule, and hence, an order. The formalisation of social relations, social order as *point de capitone* indicates that this omnipotent *point the capitone* coalesces around the signifiers. According to Lacan, signifiers clearly indicate that "the notion of structure and that of signifier appear inseparable" (1993: 184). Completely free-floating, the signifiers, for Lacan, have meaning only when they encounter another signifier which represents a subject for another signifier (1998: 207).

Thus, *point de capitone* is also where all the signifiers contingently encounter but still form a systematical "order." The order, the law of the language (*lalange*) and the Symbolic domain are radically constituted by this quilting point by means of letters, words, sentences and significant linguistic subsystems and arrangements.

On this very point, Lacan says, "It [point de capitone] is the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively" (2013: 268). So, for the Symbolic domain, *point de capitone* constitutes the fundamental relationship that does not only determines but also, through a signifier, creates a

starting point around which all the symbolic social system is spontaneously constructed and operated by the agents who contributed the system they are also parts of.

The ultimately finite but paradoxically continually diffusing social system of Twitter is akin to the notion of “social network.” Social network sites are varied and incorporate new information and communication tools such as mobile connection, photo, video, sharing and blogging (2007). In social media sphere, being social and being connected to are considered to be the same thing – since the latter overdetermines the former. From this point of view, Lacanian term of the *point de capiton* and social network – the trademark of social media – seem to be converged on a certain “point” which they already set its infrastructure up when the users’ activity on social media begins. van Dijk puts it by using the terms “ties” and “nodes”:

Notions of sociality and connectivity are naturally related to, and arguable rooted in, the concept of networks. Networks are both infrastructural and social organizations – systems of technologies and people – made up of “ties” and “nodes” which render them conduits for connectivity (2013: 57).

The combination and coalescence of these ties and nodes of the *point de capitone* make the Symbolic order itself possible through its internal principles. By means of these principles, the human subject apprehends his or her subjectivity and acknowledges the cultural structure s/he lives in. This is what Lacan would call the Law, a structure that governs all the forms of social exchange – in our situation, of social communication and interaction. Lacan, who sees the Law “identical to an order of Language” (1968: 40), also claims that there is no way out of the Law when one once gets into it:

No one is supposed to be ignorant of the law; this formulation, provided by the humor in our Code of Laws, nevertheless expresses the truth in which our

experience is grounded, and which our experience confirms. No man is actually ignorant of it, because the law of man has been the law of language since the first words of recognition presided over the first gifts... (Lacan, 2006: 225)

It can be said, from a Lacanian point of view, that language is the key element that allows and forces an infant to be a subject and to be subjected to (his or her father). Because language *qua* Symbolic order has some rules in order to communicate with the others and to be accepted in any social spheres, but it is not a liberating force, quite on the contrary a dictating one. This is why Lacan has associated the Symbolic order with the Name-of-the-Father which designates the prohibitive and enforcing functions of the father. Lacanian notion of the Name-of-the-Father is originally in French *le nom du père*. But at pronunciation it sounds also like *le non du père* (the no of the father) and *les non-dupes errent* (the non-dupes err). But it should be noted that Lacan's pun is totally intentional, not arbitrary. Because he aims to emphasise that there is no way out of Symbolic order. Žižek summarizes Lacan's tacit phrases: "[T]hose who do not let themselves be caught in the symbolic deception/fiction and continue to believe their eyes are the ones who err most" (2005).

The inescapability of the Symbolic order also reveals the intersubjective relations since these are completely relied on the symbols – in Lacanian terms, the letter. “The human action par excellence is originally founded on the existence of the world of the symbol, namely on laws and contracts" (Lacan, 1988: 230). In this sense, language creates our reality and a certain perception of the world we live. Only through language we can understand and construct a meaning for our external reality. Because it can only be narrated through and comprehended by language. Žižek puts it clearly,

A symbolic order involves the structure of the hermeneutic circle: it is by definition 'auto-poetic' and all-encompassing; as such, it has no externality, so that the human subject who dwells in language can never step out of it and assume a distance towards it – the very “external” reality always appears as such from within the horizon of language (1996: 146-7).

Language also establishes relationships in such a way that, in Twitter, the user “has to” base himself or herself on language. The user does not exist if s/he has not a language on Twitter, which affects his or her subjectivity and causes an ontological problem. S/he has to use language in order to prove his or her existence. As an essential condition of being a subject (a user), according to Lacan, language is an intersubjective entity: “Through the instrument of language a number of stable relations are established, inside which something that is much larger and goes much further than actual utterances [*énonciations*] can, of course, be inscribed” (2007: 13).

As we have stated earlier, Twitter has its own Symbolic order which has a restrictive-prohibitive structure that does not allow users to tweet in more than 140 characters. Although it has an easily breakable structure, it still establishes intersubjective relations through language. The idea is that, for Lacan, if we adapt his views to Twitter, is that the using of the language is just the Law of the language itself. To put it more in an everyday but also a philosophical discourse, it can be said that the act is the Law itself in Twitter. Or, the Law is inherent to the concept of act. A user could reach the Law only through acting, using the language.

2.3. Radical Ambiguity of the Law

The interface of a platform impose users a mode of operation. On Twitter, the user can use his or her timeline in just one way or can tweet only in 140-characters. On the other hand a user must follow a number of users in order to be accepted as a user, to put it from a reality-virtuality dimension, as a subject. If one wants to be a Twitter user, it is not enough to create a profile; s/he has to make a profile picture, a cover photo, profile information and do everything s/he can do in order to be known or acknowledged by the other users, hence the Other to whom we address unconsciously – here who speaks is the ideal-ego.

Dijk makes a similar comment with regards to Facebook, by arguing that the interface and protocols are the hard core of the Law. She says,

A platform's architecture – its interface design, code, algorithms, metadata – is always the temporary outcome of its owner's attempt to steer users' activities in a certain direction. For instance, Facebook's interface and protocols push readers towards making connections with unknown people and turning them into "friends" – a concept grounded in the exchange of small talks, self-made content, and informal updates (e.g. Facebook's feature "the Wall") (Dijk, 2013: 47).

Thus, it can be said that, on Twitter, users form a concept of content, a format of communication through our tweets that has, imperatively and necessarily, an ethical and superegoic character. But the Law manifests itself just on Twitter's surface through users' profiles. It is neither inherent nor exterior to Twitter – it has an *extimate* feature. When a user realizes that s/he is subjected to the Law, it makes him or her to be a subject s/he inevitably faces the traumatic core of Twitter *qua* the Lacanian Real. However, on the other hand, a user who is unaware of the Law is the one who already know what it is but stil...¹ Therefore it can

¹ Je sais bien, mais quand même – I know very well, but stil...

be said that the Law on Twitter has an unconscious character since it “is already quite ready to encompass the history of each individual” (Lacan, 1988: 177). On Twitter, a profile’s subjectivity is transferred into linguistic plane only through the Law.

As we have said before, Twitter includes the ego-ideal through which a user performs the person he or she wants or seems to be. Because on Twitter, each user tweets for another user, another one whom he or she idealized – in Lacanian terms, the Other which always already perceived as an omnipotent order-ideal, for which could only have been done by means of writing. This is where a user’s subjectivity is narrated by language in various ways. Thus it can be said that the Law has different implications oscillating between the prohibitive imperative function and the enjoyment one. Žižek puts it clearly:

Lacan draws a line of demarcation between the two facets of law: on the one hand, law qua symbolic EgoIdeal -- i.e., law in its pacifying function, law qua guarantee of the social pact, qua the intermediating Third which dissolves the impasse of imaginary aggressivity; on the other hand, law in its superego dimension – i.e., law qua "irrational" pressure, the force of culpabilization totally incommensurable with our actual responsibility, the agency in whose eyes we are a priori guilty and which gives body to the impossible imperative of enjoyment (1993: 46-7).

In Twitter, the Law *qua* inevitable Symbolic order has two opposite yet non-contradictional faces. As we have said, in order users to appear on Twitter through their virtually formed profiles which could retroactively be modified, that is, in order users to exist as ontological substances, they “have to” tweet. Besides, users are wanted to retweet and like any content they do not own, reflect some tweets to their followers. Thus, it can be said that the desire imposed upon users are written content. Unlike verbal culture, written text

incarcerates the word based on speech to its own domain (Ong, 2012: 146). it can be said that Twitter forces its users to pursue the written speech strain. But it must be noted that Twitter's reflection of written speech through 140-character texts are radically ambivalent.

2.4. "The Law's Happening?"

On the top of the timeline, Twitter asks users to tweet something about "What's happening." Twitter's summon into users in a form of question sentence directly entails them to answer in a tweet. Twitter wants users to answer – but who are you answering to?

On Twitter, however, users are allowed to include pictures, records, videos and hyperlinks into their tweets – it paves the way of building more complex texts and of attracting others' attention. In recent years, Twitter activates a series of features for users that allows them to embed Vine and YouTube videos into their tweets. Because of this, it can be observed that the picture ratio in tweets were considerably increased. It can be easily found a picture in an ordinary tweet like, for instance, "I'm having my coffee." Moreover, social media marketing experts claims that using pictures in tweets has a positive impact on users' buying behaviour (Faber and Vohs, 2004: 513). Some others say same goes for emojis – indeed, remarkably popular now (Vidal, Ares and Jaeger, 2016: 124). On the other hand, Twitter enabled the preview mode for hyperlink-included tweets so that users' could see, at least a little bit of it, the content (heading, picture and brief summary) on the link.

It can be claimed that all of these features are produced just in order to cling users to Twitter timeline, so it is presented as an improved user experience (Crumlish and Malone, 2009: 11-13). Thus, it can be suggested that Twitter gradually entrenches its mode of

operation in a more visual way. So, the best way to comprehend the reciprocal Law of Twitter can be summarized by the timeline, since it is where users confront the uniqueness of the Law – in the both sense of the word – when they enter Twitter.

One of the most important reasons for this is that the Twitter timeline is a distant encountering point where the users would recognise each other through their tweets, nicknames², profile pictures and bios. Thus it can be said that the enjoyment part of the Law manifests itself by the possibility of user's co-recognition, since it has become on Twitter that every recognition of someone else is the identification of oneself, which reminds us of the Lacanian mirror stage. The mirror stage is "a phenomenon to which I assign a twofold value. In the first place, it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image" (Lacan, 1953: 14).

But when it comes to ego-ideal, things would become dissimilar. As we have been practicing on Twitter timeline everyday, the user's encountering with texts and pictures, and the inevitably aleatoric recognition of themselves point not a libidinal relation with the body image as it has been at the mirror stage but with the ego-ideal. However, does not the any action users have been involved in on Twitter, any act of recognition/identification examples of libidinal investment? (Freud, 2014). It can be said that, based on the mood on which this thesis is constructed, the Law inherent to the Twitter's mode of operation is the Law of the libidinal investment.

2.5. The Law of the (m)Other: How to Identify with Your Profile?

² Users do not have to use nickname. Instead they could pick their real name. One could find varied examples when researching Twitter.

The addressee of the libidinal investment on Twitter is the Other *qua* others. The definition of the Other differentiates when it comes to Twitter since its users manifest themselves as virtual entities which always-already attribute to physical ones. Through pure reality's looking glass, user profiles do not bear a qualification of entities, instead they could be the imagined audience. The imagined audience is a "mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating" (Eden, 2012: 331). It also means that the user's addressee is ambiguous but still has an hardcore through which he or she could get interaction from his or her imagined (also targeted) audience.

In fact, users have a general prospect about "targeted audience" (Schmidt, 2014: 3-14) or "imagined audience" (Eden, 2012: 331) in order to information they have and they will share with their followers are appropriate, that is, libidinally satisfactory (Katrin, et al, 2014: 56). Is not the imagined audience we speak of here the Other on condition that being a plurality in which oneself is excluded? In a Lacanian sense,

The big Other designates radical alterity, an otherness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Lacan equates the big Other with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the symbolic order. Indeed, the big Other is the symbolic insofar as it is particularized for each subject (Evans, 1996: 133).

Thus it can be said that Twitter users are in a continual struggle to identify with the (m)Other³ – which is, unfortunately, foredoomed. Because the Other, even if it is radically excluded from human subjectivity, is akin to the structures like the Party, the State, the

³ Fink explains it very clearly: "The very expression we use about it – "mother tongue" – is indicative of the fact that it is some Other's tongue first, the mOther's tongue, that is, the mOther's language, and in speaking of childhood experience, Lacan often virtually equates the Other with the mother" (1997: 7).

Society – which Lacan have called the discourse. Likewise, the Other is radically imagined, and in our case, virtual. The Other is both inherent to and excluded from the subject who is repressed by it since the Other is both another subject in its radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that subject (Lacan, 1993: 274). It is therefore be said that the Other as a subject is possible only insofar as the subject may occupy this position and thereby embody the Other for another subject (Lacan, 1998: 202).

Users on Twitter suppose that they always bespeak to a certain (imagined or targeted) audience which presents us a proof that the Other on Twitter does exist in a form of text. One should bear in mind that the Lacanian motto of “The big Other does not exist” because the Other is also indebted its virtual-material existence to the Symbolic order, that is why it could be expressed through language – it is enunciated. As Žižek puts it clearly,

[I]t never existed in the first place, i.e., the "big Other's" inexistence is ultimately equivalent to its being the symbolic order, the order of symbolic fictions which operate at a level different from direct material causality. In short, the "inexistence of the big Other" is strictly correlative to the notion of belief, of symbolic trust, of credence, of taking what other's say "at their word's value" (1997).

Thus, it can be said that what we suppose on Twitter is that the thing we clearly fathom and penetrate linguistically veiled appearance of the Other *qua* others, and that it would eventually see and response to our tweets. The position of the Twitter user on this point is, in a Lacanian way, “the subject supposed to communicate with the other.” As a result, the Other as the Symbolic order is a necessary feature for Twitter on the one hand, and it is a structure which acts through an uncanny enjoyment for subjects and it is, as it were, a

physical subject which one must be subjected to in order to be recognised on Twitter. Users believe the Other's existence on Twitter than in reality since the Other as the Law presents itself both in a prohibitive and an enjoyable form.

2.6. "My Tweets, My Interactions, My Decision – Your Law"

One could clearly see this on Twitter's "Interactions" page, a place where most users compulsively check whether their followers engaged their tweets. "Interactions" page is defined as follows: "The Notifications timeline offers a simple way to see how others on Twitter are interacting with you" ("About the Notifications"). On this place, which has also a timeline structure, users could see retweets, likes and replies – newer interactions stand on top of the page; while using mobile version, users get notifications. Recently, Twitter announced a new kind of feature which allows people to see most interactive tweets on top of their timelines. It is a structure that prioritise interactivity since it propogates the perception that users must be active on Twitter as an intersubjective domain. Beyond this, Twitter started to show tweets that featured, most interactivated tweets worldwide on its homepage to users who do not singed in.

In a similar vein, "Tweet Activity" page allows users to monitor interaction about their tweets in a statistically/quantitative way. "The Tweet activity dashboard shows you a detailed analysis of your Twitter activity" ("Tweet Activity"). What differs it from Interactions page is that users could see their interactions in a quantitative and detailed way, so they monitor their Twitter performance, that is, popularity. On "Tweet Activity" page, which makes possible for users to understand their imagined audience, users could track impressions, total engagements, retweets, detail expands, likes, profile clicks, replies, retweets, photo or video

clicks and video views. But on this page it is impossible to see which users exactly got engaged in one's tweets. So it can be said that Twitter pushes users to get a perception of imagined audience as far as their intersubjective relation with their followers is concerned, but it does not let them to perceive their profiles, by forcing them to stay in a certain distance. Therefore it can be also said that the imagined audience as users on "Tweet Activity" page are reduced to numbers since they lost their existence and plurality *qua* virtual entities. As a result, users on Twitter becomes not only the position of the omnipotent but also the unfathomable Other itself, which marks the users' existence on Twitter, defines them and affirms their virtual bodies as profiles.

But this is not to say that our identities are totally different from our real-world identities in the relationship with the Other since while we create the Law on Twitter, its mode of operation is imposed on us. As Waggoner says,

Our real-world identities are also molded by social pressures and limitations: we live in a world not entirely of our own creation, bending to laws and ethical conventions that were discursively established long before we ever entered the conversation. So too are our virtual identities bound by discursive conventions (2009: 161).

However, the Other here is radically different from Lacanian one – it is quantitative and it is as though it is as others. As a result it could be spoken of here the Lacanian Law since the Other's position on Twitter is inevitable, irrevocable and necessary. Because it cannot be spoken of the nomadic subject who stands outside the law, who has a certain distance to it in such a way that the subject of Twitter assumes a position of alterity. Where there is subject there must be the Law since the Law is subject's *raison d'être*. But that does

not mean that the subject of Twitter is a product of the Law that is caused by its mode of operation through users' activities.

So it can be said that what marks the Twitter's mode of operation is the idiotic nature of the relationship between the subject and the Law – since the Law divides the subject and make him or her as lacking. From this point on, the subject on Twitter becomes more active to fill the void on its own subjectivity and to lose its own lack. According to Lacan, the lack in the subject has something to do with its existence and has the facets: “The subject in order to come to be as subject must choose between the being as lacking (*manque-à-être*) of subjective existence in the realm of the Other, the lack of being (*manque-à-être*) which would be proper to the subject of the law, or it must refuse subjectivity altogether” (1998: 86).

2.7. On The Impossibility to Be A (W)hole on Twitter

Activity of the users, their compulsion to tweet, the obsessive desire of their tweets to be seen by the Other, monitoring the “Interactions” page and the “Tweet Activity” feature is completely an endeavor not to lose the position of *manque-à-être*, that is, the position of seeing oneself as a whole entity when monitoring the screen but all the same profile pages always destined to be incomplete.

While this is true, it is also seems contradictory that it is possible oneself to see as complete out of his or her subjectivity on Twitter. Because if we think users as separate entities which, on the one hand, the one who stand against the screen and the one who is a profile, that is @username on the other, we could understand the subjectivity on Twitter in its fragility and oscillation.

Thus, we can come to the conclusion that, on Twitter, what creates the Law is users' operation on the site. The Law on Twitter has a fluid structure, so that when users ceases to operate the Law would have no meaning. The Law on Twitter also render the Lacanian Other as a countable entity, so it is not possible to speak of it, from now on, as a linguistic domain. The last and the most important effect on the Law is on the subject. The subject is divided by the Law on Twitter with regards to solely users activities contrary to Lacanian dividedness through Symbolic order. But still one could see the Law's general feature, even if it comes to Twitter: People respect the Law since it is just the Law.

2.8. Freedom and the Law on Twitter

In order to understand the Law on Twitter through an analogy, we should take a glance at Lacan's comments on the relation between the God and the Law.

Twitter is always considered to be an emancipative virtual domain by scholars, political analysts and activists. For the last half a decade, most people think that Twitter makes people free by letting them express their views as they are and organise meetings and demonstrations, so much so that anyone who runs a proper, fully-fledged campaign is able to make a revolution. This idea stems notably from the so-called Arab Spring and protest wave of Europe against economic crisis and austerity measures because most of them were successful and, even if not, had an impact on contemporary politics and activism. Most people also claim that Twitter as a liberative medium – you are free if you use it.⁴ They act like there is no Law for Twitter but many of them do not realize that they are the ones who let the Law

⁴ The examples on this claim can be found on the studies and works on social media and political activism, or contemporary social movements.

operates. This reminds us of the Lacanian debate on Dostoyevski's "The Karamazov Brothers": "If God doesn't exist, the father (Karamazov) says, then everything is permitted. Quite evidently a naive notion, for we analysts know full well that if God doesn't exist, then nothing at all is permitted any longer" (Lacan, 1991: 128). In our case here, it can be said that even if there is no Law for Twiter, nothing is still permitted – or, in a more Lacanian point of view, not all is permitted.

We can experience it when we become obsessed with our Twitter accounts, so much so that, we check repetitively our Twitter timeline via our smartphones or laptops in order to learn about if there are notifications, or topics we are inclined to be interested in. Considering that fact that Twitter's mode of operation imposes this on us as we have said above, our actions triggers the Law to prevail by making us feel free. It means "that the loss of belief in an authority that prohibits our actions opens the door not to freedom but rather to the creation of new limits. [. . .] Nowadays, however, it is not that these limits are imposed on us by an external authority, such as parents, or teachers, but rather that we create our own prohibitions" (Salecl, 2011: 13) So, it can be said that even the seemingly free act on Twitter make users subjected to the Law.

In the next chapter we will discuss the Twitter's mode of operation in a more linguistic way. We will focus on the 140-character, and the problem of communication, proper speech and meaning.

CHAPTER 3

140-CHARACTER AND ITS DISCONTENTS

3.1. The Textual Interactivity on Twitter

Writing is the most basic form of communicating with the others and of expressing oneself when it comes to internet (Jones, 1997: 2). Through writing-based communication, the activity on the internet among users turns into interactivity. The same goes for Twitter as an application built on text, and those who use Twitter are primarily allowed to express themselves through texts or writing.

However the textual interactivity on internet has its own limits – anyone could envisage the situation of where one should know his or her limits when it comes to his or her texts, even though the principles of the internet are radically ambiguous and far from its own ethical rules (Fischer and Reuber, 2011: 4). While the text is essential for the internet, users experience the textual interactivity is in bites, thorough fragments. As Savage says, “[D]igital media represent history through fragments, in the form of images, sound bites, and video clips, without revealing the whole in detail” (2000: 55).

3.2. 140-Character and The Impossibility of Proper Speech

Users are enabled to write anything by using 140-character in a tweet on Twitter. Moreover, what Twitter allow for users is posting tweets or retweeting. Thus it can be said that the fundamental hallmark of Twitter is 140-character. As acclaimed French director Jean-Luc Godard states “The cinema is truth 24 frames-per-second,” (1963) we could clearly say, in the same vein, that the truth of Twitter is 140-character tweet.

Besides, Twitter promises users to write a text by using maximum 140 characters but posted tweets does not have to be a phrase or a word that have any meaning. Basically, it cannot be found any significant difference between these two tweets:

- qywxjvqeytvbhoaecjkn p nsvonevsyrbsdbklh sscceyajowdtqdoajsdgyoqta vashbc
oasjydgaojycajdfa wjtydavsjdv gafwdyvwjdjv gw nalskjlfhaksjnxz alkjs
- I am tired of writing my thesis.

However, it is true that the fundamental difference between two tweets is based on meaning. It can be seen from Lacan’s point of view on the relation between the signifier and the signified. For Lacan, “That there are in the unconscious signifying chains which subsist as such, and which from there structure, act on the organism, influence what appears from the outside as a symptom, this is the whole basis of analytic experience” (1957: 7). So it can be deduced from this quote that, tweets are symptoms of our signifying chains which are marked by Symbolic order operated in Twitter.

According to Lacan, even though the signifier is an expression of a concept through language, words and sounds. Yet what he means by stating this is solely the words since

human subjects can only think through language. For signifiers are "subjected to the double condition of being reducible to ultimate differential elements and of combining according to the laws of a closed order" (Lacan, 2006: 418). On the other hand, the signified is what creates an imagination of a concept in one's mind (Saussure, 1916: 66).

For Lacan, the relationship between signifier and signified is formalized as such (2006: 428):

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

He states that the concepts can be expressed in language determines their content. Thus, he clearly indicates that "the notion of structure and that of signifier appear inseparable" (1993: 184). It might be true for our everyday speech: If I say "the table", this word would probably refer to an actual table; and the count of the letters that allow me for someone else to imagine what the table is are limited – I cannot but use connotations.⁵ I must use a proper word in order to communicate with the other people. But on Twitter anything is permitted insofar the tweet is written in 140 characters. What I imply in a tweet does not have to be written in meaningful words.

On this point, what is in issue here is the term "empty/floating signifier"⁶ which does not necessarily express the enounced word. "An 'empty' or 'floating signifier' is variously defined as a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecificable or non-existent signified" (Chandler, 2001: 78). Thus it can be said that a signifier (a word), however it does not signify anything, can obscurely connote a signified (a thing or an image). In sum, the empty/floating

⁵ In order to comprehend it in a more broad perspective, see Lacan's example of toilet: train arrives at a station. "A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated across from each other in a compartment next to the outside window that provides a view of the station platform buildings going by as the train comes to a stop. 'Look,' says the brother, 'we're at Ladies!' 'Imbecile!' replies his sister, 'Don't you see we're at Gentlemen'" (Lacan, 2006: 416-417).

⁶ I prefer using the term "floating" rather than "empty" prior to signifier in order to avoid giving an impression that I mean the meanings of the tweets' are totally empty.

signifier may mean different things to different people. For example, a tweet, by itself, may have various meanings for each user – tweets “may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean” (Chandler, 2001: 79). So, it can be said that a word we use in our everyday speech always/already points to another thing, it does not necessarily happen on Twitter.

As far as a 140-character online text is concerned, it is hard to speak of a proper relation between signifier and signified since the floating signifier inclined to break the symbolic chain and make its value to zero. “In such a state of radical disconnection between signifier and signified, a sign only means that it means. Such a disconnection is perhaps clearest in literary and aesthetic texts which foreground the act and form of expression and undermine any sense of a natural or transparent connection between a signifier and a referent” (Chandler, 2001: 78). But in Twitter this disconnection is implicit because its mode of operation leans on a flow based on time and context which are a result of trending topics.

According to Lacan, “such a floating signifier – which is said to possess ‘symbolic value zero’ – necessarily results to allow symbolic thought to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it” (2006: 693). Actually, the contradiction inherent to Symbolic order can be seen on Twitter’s incessant tweet flux since it is also installs Twitter in a very broad freedom space. When a user posts a tweet, s/he thinks that s/he has done it freely but it is radically restricted by 140-character and the pressure of recognition by the instant trends on Twitter. Thus one should think the relation between the signifier and the signified on this plane. Although Turkle explains the situation in a way linked to postmodernism, it can be said that the phrase “[T]echnology is bringing a set of ideas associated with postmodernism – in this case, ideas about the instability of meanings and the lack of universal and knowable truths – into everyday life,” (Turkle, 1995: 18) is also true to Twitter.

3.3. Instability of the Meaning

Indeed, Twitter's mode of operation prompts the instability of the meaning on Twitter, what is more, it does this by the extinguishing the indispensability of the mode since there is no anchor/reference point on Twitter that guarantees the meaning in a linguistic plane. Rather, the meaning on tweets consistently dissolves, Lacanian rule of "signifier over the signified" loses its validity. For example, the imaginary tweet we recently spoke of, "qywxjvqeytvbhoaecjknpsvonevsyrbsdbklhsscceyajowdtqdoajsdgyoqta vashbc oasjydgaojycajdfa wjtydavsjdvgafwdywdjdvgnalskjlfhaksjnxz alkjs" seems that it has no meaning and signified, but it easily be founded its signified insofar as it is situated in a proper context. Thus it can be said that meaning is not necessary on Twitter but it is always possible to find it just because the reproduction of the whole social interactions is shaped by social media discourse – which is, according to Lacan, distinguished within the planes of recognition and *communiqué*.⁷

If we take these features of Twitter as Lacanian symptoms, what we should deal with is the term "Symbolic deficiency." Since the meaning becomes fluid, instable and is too wide off the integrity, says Dean, "There is no ultimate guarantor of meaning, no recognized authority that stops our questioning or assuages our doubts" (2009: 64).

3.4. Symbolic Domain Disintegrated: The Decline of Symbolic Efficiency

⁷ "Two planes have always been distinguished within which the exchange of human speech is played out – the plane of recognition in so far as speech links the subjects together into this pact which transforms them, and sets them up as human subjects communicating – the plane of the *communiqué*, in which one can distinguish all sorts of levels, the call, discussion, knowledge, information, but which, in the final analysis, involves a tendency to reach an agreement on the object. The term 'agreement' is still here, but here the emphasis is placed on the object considered as external to the action of speech, which speech expresses" (Lacan, 1991: 108).

So, from now on, our claim is that the Symbolic domain which connotes and guarantees the linguistic plane is radically disintegrated on Twitter, since as far as its stability is concerned, conformity cannot be found on Twitter in its concrete form, but, somehow, it continues to operate. In this sense, the language system on Twitter's mode of operation reminds us of the quantum mechanics. Theoretically calculated, cannot be observed, has its own effects. They can exist only in such a small time that we can assume that it does not exist, or even, it takes the time back with its negative value (Žižek, 2012: 905-963). Or, On Twitter, too, it cannot be spoken of proper speech *qua* language but the mode of operation is based on its effects.

So, the Symbolic process on Twitter for user to be a subject, that is, language is almost completely depends on the decline of symbolic efficiency. Dean's definition of the term is useful:

In the loosest, most general sense, symbolic efficiency refers to structures of trust and belief. A symbol is efficient when it can travel without being stopped and questioned. This in no way implies that people actually believe the symbol, that what the symbol says is true or right; rather, it simply means that people are willing to let it pass, to take it at face value because that's the way things are (2002: 131).

In this context, in our everyday lives people are more inclined to believe that there's an authority that guarantees the completeness of their Symbolic universe. This might be a strong politician or a person whose words are believed to be reliable – even though s/he apparently lies. Therefore this situation should be spoken of in a certain context and some words are necessarily imply the different meanings. But when the symbolic efficiency of

Twitter is declined, it is not possible to speak of a complete Symbolic domain upon which the Word based.

What Žižek describes as the decline of symbolic efficiency – a mistrust of what is said in favor of what can be detected – aligns itself with the generalized skepticism towards metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984: 61). There is no system on Twitter that the narrative can be placed as “meta” because it is not possible to find the source and the basis of the meaning. “The decline of symbolic efficiency thus designates the breakdown of this generalized trust in the symbolic institution” (Dean, 2002: 131). Thus, on Twitter, language (Symbolic domain) is counted upon and its mode of operation renders the trustment unnecessary based on 140-character.

So, the decline of symbolic efficiency manifests the importance of the big Other for the Symbolic consistency which, through the language, allows us to express ourselves without a threat of semiotic disintegration, and makes us capable of treating ourselves as “I”s – that could be found in the notorious postulate by Descartes: *Cogito, ergo sum*. From this point of view, it can be said that social norms and values, and the system constructed upon them come true solely insofar as they are recognized by the big Other. On Twitter, users and their tweets must be known by the big Other in order to be recognized by its system, so their ego-ideals can be reflected on the screen.

What symbolic efficiency suggests is that there are multiple subjectivities for an individual in a Symbolic register. It is more prevalent for the situation on Twitter since users are allowed to change their names, profile pictures, or, in its most basic form, their tendency of writing style, which all of them are determined and strictly limited by Twitter’s mode of operation.

Another effect of the symbolic efficiency on Twitter is that its mode of operation has become the big Other for its Symbolic register. Each user addresses the big Other as a system in which they act in order to guarantee their symbolic consistency. But this coherence is multi-faceted in such a way that it always creates polysemy. Theoretically unidimensional-seeming tweet “always-already” has different meanings since each users’ perception of it is diversified – it is a process of extrapolation. According to Žižek, symbolic efficiency relies upon “the distance (between ‘things’ and ‘words’) which opens up the space of ... symbolic engagement” (2000: 197). Because “the symbolic mask-mandate matters more than the direct reality of the individual who wears this mask and/or assumes this mandate” (196). On Twitter, this mask could be seen in guise of popularity and follower count, or even a tweet by itself, to a large extent.

A text zipped in 140-character in a tweet does not mean anything to a large extent when it comes to the tweet example we have mentioned above. Because one should approach a tweet through which the context that accompanies it – a tweet is generally written in a certain context. Thus the effectiveness and validity of the tweet, and its presence on a Symbolic register resides in its bond with its metanarrative. In this sense, it can be spoken of the decline of symbolic efficiency if there is no such bond.

The decline of symbolic efficiency cannot be easily realized for the ones who use Twitter in normal circumstances. It is also too hard to provide an exterior glance to the decline of symbolic efficiency since it incorporates the situation as a structural problem and the users act on Twitter as active subjects. Despite the fact that it happens out of the users knowledge and perception, the user effort to get rid of 140-character manifests the existence of the symbolic efficiency.

Many users choose to flood in order to write their long tweets since 140-character limits the text, restraining users from explaining their thought in a fully fledged, free way. Some users, mainly the younger user profile, which corresponds to 32 percent of the all Twitter users (Duggan, 2015) utilizes the non-proper speech. For example, a user can post tweets such as “i dunno whn...” – that constitutes a more thrifty style of writing but also contracts the domain of meaning – which means directly the decline of symbolic efficiency. Or, in a more Lacanian sense, it can be said that the signifiers in the tweet necessarily floats, the radical line between S and s becomes vague (Lacan, 1993: 119-120). And in some cases, the bond between the two breaks – which is resulted in the empty/floating signifier (Lacan, 1957: 47). On the other hand, Twitter officially make provisions against the 140-character limit in order for the speech to operate in a more proper way. For example, some users write the text in an image and tweet it, so they could not have to deal with the limit.

Websites like Storify and Twitlonger allow users to merge their tweets into a platform, more likely in a blog post in such a way that there is no character limit to write a tweet or a tweety flood. Users can read all the text on these websites at a time. However we are not able to speak of how Symbolic domain operates on Twitter since reading is not acted on Twitter itself but on the third part website.

3.5. Contraction and Expansion of the Symbolic Order

Over the last three years, Twitter integrated Vine loops, videos, GIF's and YouTube videos to the tweets – thus an audiovisual transference becomes possible and there is no need to sole text to interaction among the users. However, tweets that do not include text but solely audiovisual content restricts the directness of the language and makes it indirect. That is, the

text, the speech, the discourse enunciated through the audiovisual act, which can be thought of as the presentation of self in everyday life. Since “[w]hen an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed” (Goffman, 1978: 135). On a more linguistic plane, indirectness can be considered as “the means in which one’s meaning is conveyed indirectly through utterances or non-verbal behaviors in order to achieve certain goal, or the means in which one’s intend is revealed in a roundabout way” (Zhang and You, 2009: 99).

The most important update on Twitter over the last years, apart from the ones we have mentioned before, is about the loosening of 140-character limit. Twitter has announced that it has ceased counting photos, GIFs, polls, and quotes against the 140-characters limit, which allows users to post longer tweets 50 characters more. Of course, it is not an arbitrary decision but depends on the rising popularity of smartphones, the rapid increase of mobile internet using, and hence the prevalency of posting tweets with images.

Thus, when tweets with add-ons like images, GIF’s, videos are posted, the textual structure of the Symbolic order opens a semiotic expansion space. It can be told more in a tweet with add-ons than the one constituted by sole text. And it also can be said that the add-ons and important updates by Twitter makes the Symbolic structure of Twitter contractive and expansive. However the language is restricted, all the limits on Twitter can be transgressed through add-ons, which offers a new insight of beyond-language semiotic structure. On the other hand, all the updates and add-ons constitute the reaction and the escapeway against the 140-character limit – of course, this process occurs on Twitter’s mode of operation.

The bilateral linguistic format of Twitter is based on a signifying chain. Because, in this sense, according to Somay, “[e]ach act of understanding establishes/creates the symbolic order in which it is embedded” (2004: 42). Used obsessively by most people, in such a way

that it occupies most of everyday life time, Twitter allows many users to express their opinions, by embedding them into a “certain” Symbolic order and by making them as parts of it. But the way of expression on Twitter does not reflect the everyday motive of enunciation since the process of enunciation is not *de facto* present on Twitter – here we can speak only of *enoncé*, what is uttered. Moreover, Twitter is composed of *enoncés* that correspond to tweets. As we have said before, tweets are subjected to the Law that stems from the Twitter’s mode of operation – what we are going to propose on following chapters is that tweets are posted by Lacanian notions of fantasy and desire. When considered from this point of view, Symbolic order on/of Twiter is fissured and lost its very inner consistency which is never-already present. So, it can be said that, with its contractive and expansive structure, the Real is penetrated into Twitter’s Symbolic order in a way that “the Real is less and less distinguishable from its imaginary [for our claim, the symbolic] simulation, lies in the retreat of ‘symbolic efficiency’” (Zizek, 2000: 195).

In this sense, 140 characters and usage of language (*langue*) on Twitter reminds us of the mode of operation that allows the very intervention of the Real. Maybe the most important and significant reason people to use Twitter in an obsessive way and to never miss a post is to add meaning to the unfathomable Real, and to be a part of the Symbolic order with its contractive and expansive structure – which is necessary for users to exist. Because, “every act of interpretation, each signifier to incorporate in the symbolic order is accompanied by a lack. Through this lack, each attempt of symbolization reminds us of the Real that is/never will be contained by the symbolic order” (Zizek, 2000: 29). In order to comprehend the Symbolic order’s contractive and expansive structure in a more broad way, we should discuss this point through the Lacanian notions of desire and fantasy.

CHAPTER 4

THREE FORMS OF ENUNCIATION ON TWITTER: DESIRE, FANTASY, *JOUISSANCE*

4.1. Twitter's Mode of Operation

With reference to the terms the Law, the Other, the Symbolic order and tweet, these are the means required Twitter to operate, to compose the Twitter homepage, thereby establishing the effectiveness of its mode of operation.

The homepage of Twitter has a usual outlook consisted of an header and three columns. Users are allowed to change the color of the texts as they wish and they were able to upload a background picture for their profiles but Twitter cancelled this option for a while ago. Apart from these, users are subjected to current mode of operation.

On the left side of the header, there are “Home” tab that directs users to the homepage and shows new tweets, “Notifications” tab that shows the interactions and mentions, and “Messages” tab that shows the private direct messages. On the right side of the header, there are “Search Twitter” tab, “Profile” tab, and “Tweet” tab.

On the top-left side of the Twitter homepage, there is a summary of the profile that composed of (nick)name, tweets and, following-followers count, and profile picture but any detailed information about the profile does not included. Below, it can be seen selected “Trends” that shows the trending topics on which uses write. On the right column, there are “Who to Follow” that suggests users who to follow.

The real activity goes on Twitter is the “What’s happening” section that is placed on the center column. Users are allowed to follow and read the tweets here. New tweets are shown with numbers, and by clicking on it, it is possible to keep the timeline up to date.

As we have mentioned in the previous chapters, Twitter’s timeline directly engenders the Symbolic order itself by means of users’ tweets, thereby linguistic activity. Users expresses their identities, thoughts etc. in order to be included in the signifying chain. Moreover, according to Lacan, the subject is an effect, an always-already outcome of the signifying chain which guarantees the reciprocity of the signifier and the signified. Lacan puts subject in the domain of signified, not of signifier, by sying that “The subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers” (2006: 502).

4.2. Enunciation of Desire in 140-Character

In this sense, although posting tweets is the guarantee for users to be a *subject*, it is the enunciation of the desire to be a subject.

Besides, it is not a coincidence that what are posted on Twitter are tweets. Since tweeting is consisted of birds’ voice to express their desire for a mate or to mark their

territory. So, tweeting is an act “to utter a succession of light tremulous notes; to chirp continuously with a tremulous effect” (Morey, 2015: 53).

Just in the same way as with birds, the function of tweets for humans as users is to utter desire. “As a noun, a twitter is implicated with desire, and so twittering delivers a performance of desire: a condition of twittering or tremulous excitement (from eager desire, fear, etc.)” (Morey, 2015: 227). But unlike birds, users on Twitter express themselves through writing/tweeting. Thus it can be said that twittering is a favorable metaphor for users’ activity of posting tweets. According to Lacan, desire is tight-knit to language, therefore the Symbolic order: “[H]uman desire is ceaselessly mediated by re-entering the system of language” (1988: 179).

Lacan states, however, that one needs the Other to activate the language, or else it would be the need what is uttered not the desire itself. One cannot express his/her desire without the Other since it is the guarantee of the Symbolic order. Lacan puts it clearly: “The subject's desire is for the desire of the Other,” (1998: 235) who is an expression of the inaccessible, absolute exterior position to the subject; and, who is an omnipotent spectator by which the subject would like to be seen. But one should bear in mind that Lacan uses the term the Other in such a stretchy way that it means both the others (any other person but me) and *lalangue* itself. Therefore, the Other becomes the guarantee of the Symbolic integration and incarnation.

4.3. Linguistic Interactivity: Posting Tweets to Be Liked and Retweeted

Users on Twitter post tweets in order to be liked and retweeted by other users. But the O/other we employ here is ambiguous: It means both the everyday others in the meaning of other profiles and users, and the Other as the reflection of the ego-ideal which indicates the ideals or persons desired to be. Because, according to Lacan, "In the human subject, desire is realised in the other, by the other – *in* the other [chez l'autre] (1988: 177).

So the point the user desire shapes in flesh and bones when it is uttered on Twitter is the O/other itself since, according to Lacan, human desire emerges in the linguistic interactivity:

From then on, the desire of the other, which is man's desire, enters into mediation of language. It is in the other, by [*par*] the other, that desire is named. It enters into the symbolic relation of *I* and *you*, in a relation of mutual recognition and transcendence, into the order of a law which is already quite ready to encompass the history of each individual (1988: 177).

By stating that, Lacan, focuses on the meaning of the language in terms of desire and shows reference to the Law. As we have mentioned before, users post their tweets according to 140 charactered Symbolic order of Twitter and their linguistic activity takes shape with regard to Twitter's mode of operation. Thus, it can be said that the desires we have uttered on Twitter differs to our use of language. Our way of expression in order to believe that desire to exist on Twitter ranges from our way of making profile, of choosing a picture, of the topics we use to tweet. On this point, one should bear in mind the Lacan's explanation, "That the subject should come to recognise and to name his desire; that is the efficacious action of analysis. But it isn't a question of recognising something which would be entirely given. ... In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world" (Lacan, 1988: 228-9).

According to the Lacanian scheme, the subject assume his/her own subjective position insofar as s/he utter himself/herself – but this position cannot be embraced in a fully way. On Twitter, in turn, subject utter himself/herself by posting tweets but the utterance itself is not the indicator that subject has a complete structure since his/her desire to post tweets never ends, which marks the intensive linguistic activity that is conceptualized as the failure of becoming a subject. Because “[A]s far as subjectivity is concerned, in the beginning was a failure,” (Johnston, 2008: 9) which is formulated by Dolar as “The subject is precisely the failure to become the subject (1993: 77-8). This is because utterance does not create the fully-fledged subject since “Speech can express the being of the subject, but up to a certain point, it never succeeds in so doing” (Lacan, 1988: 107).

Indeed, users could feel that they are subjects in a virtual world up to a certain point on Twitter. First, they try to get more followers and want to be retweeted and liked by the other – which is never enough for them. The more retweet, like and follower you get, the more you want. Here we should remember Žižek’s Coca Cola example: “We are obliged to enjoy. Enjoyment becomes a kind of a weird perverted duty. The paradox of Coke is that you are thirsty, you drink it, but as everyone knows the more you drink it the more thirsty you get” (Fiennes, Rosenbaum, Žižek, 2014).

As we are aware of we should enjoy drinking Coca Cola, we are, too, aware of the same feeling posting tweets. A tweet, that we imagine we could get more retweets, likes and followers, is destined to fail as from it is posted. Thus, users are forced to post more tweets, thereby thinking that they can be the (complete) subjects. But the utterance of the desire on Twitter’s order of *langage* is based on the very failure inherent to it because of the “incompatibility between desire and speech” (Lacan, 2006: 275). Yet there is no option for users to express themselves other than the language and writing. Which is why “Desire always becomes manifest at the joint of speech, where it makes its appearance, its sudden

emergence, its surge forwards. Desire emerges just as it becomes embodied in speech, it emerges with symbolism” (Lacan, 2013: 234).

In sum, Twitter’s mode of operation manifests the fact that users’ desire to be recognized as Other’s object of desire is continually referred. This kind of understanding has a total harmony with Lacan’s phrase that “The object of desire is continually deferred, which is why desire is a metonymy” (2006: 432).

4.4. *Langage* of Twitter and Its Object of Desire

The object of desire on Twitter is radically deferred since it gets meaning insofar as it is exchanged with the others. Trending topics or viral contents on Twitter seems designed as means of reaching the user’s objects of desire. Users are expected to form a domain of intersubjectivity with their interactivity between others and then they are able to express their desire. Lacan puts it in a different way by saying that the object of desire, originally, belongs to the Other:

The object of man’s desire, and we are not the first to say this, is essentially an object desired by someone else. One object can become equivalent to another, owing to the effect produced by this intermediary, in making it possible for objects to be exchanged and compared. This process tends to diminish the special significance of any one particular object, but at the same time it brings into view the existence of objects without number (Lacan, 1953: 11).

The subject who desires his/her object is not the user himself/herself. Twitter’s mode of operation allows users to desire certain subjects and in a sense restricts them. Twitter has

not too many objects of desire apart from online recognition and to be acknowledged by the other users. Henceforth, all the users are subjected to these rules in order to become subjects, which carries an inner failure.

It is true that the Law is the cause of desire but it can only be happened on a proper-working Symbolic order. As we have mentioned before, 140-character limit on Twitter changes the structure of the Law. The desire cannot be uttered on a contracted and restricted Symbolic order since this situation contracts both the desire itself and its object, eventually changing them.

To put it in a more Lacanian way, Lacan himself encourages analyst to focus his or her attention to the language in order to see the rhetorical figures disguising unconscious thought. He focused on the linguistic gaps beyond the slips of the tongue as we have mentioned in the previous chapter. But while Lacan speaks of the unconscious linguistic gaps, Twitter sets users to make conscious contractions because of 140-character limit. According to Lacan, these linguistic gaps also include “catachresis [the misuse of a signifier], litotes [understatements], antonomasia [substitution of a proper name for a broad class of nouns, or of a title for a proper name], and hypotyposis [vivid description]” (2006: 161).

4.5. Maintaining Desire on Twitter: Fantasy

These linguistic gaps, when thinking of 140-character limit on Twitter, does not provide us an adequate and efficacious ground to utter users desire. As Lacan says, "I always tell the truth; not the whole truth, because we are not capable of telling it all. Telling it all is

materially impossible" (1990: 9). Thus, users need a point which they can see themselves apart from their inner plane in order to "tell" their truth of desires.

As we have stated above, Twitter's mode of operation depends on the maintenance of desire and does not allow the desire to be interrupted. Lacan says that the fundamental goal of the fantasy is the maintenance of the desire (1998: 185). However, the function of fantasy can be understood when the demand to satisfy the desire vanishes: It is an obstacle for desire to vanish. Users can express recognition, likability and audience of their libidinally-invested tweets' only by means of fantasy – the fantasy of "imagined audience" can be thought in that way. Users can maintain his or her desire only insofar as s/he fantasize that his or her tweets are read and recognized by others. "Let us say that, in its fundamental use, fantasy is the means by which the subject maintains himself at the level of his vanishing desire, vanishing inasmuch as the very satisfaction of demand deprives him of his object" (Lacan, 2006: 637).

However, fantasy should not be confused with the imagination; two concepts are radically different: "[A]ny attempt to reduce [fantasy] to the imagination [. . .] is a permanent misconception." (Lacan, 2006: 272). But, according to Lacan, it is possible to find some bits of image in the fantasy since it has a function on the signifying chains, so it has its effects on the Symbolic order (272). Its counterpart on Twitter can be seen as the intensity of the linguistic activity since the fundamental aim of the user is, first of all, to be recognized by the Other, to demystify it. In this context, Žižek explains Lacanian definition of fantasy through strawberry cake example:

For Lacan, fantasy provides an answer to the enigma of Other's desire. The first thing to note about fantasy is that it literally teaches us how to desire: fantasy does not mean that, when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasize about eating it; the problem is rather, how do I know that I

desire a strawberry cake in the first place? This is what fantasy tells me (2009: 40).

What fantasy tells users on Twitter is to utter that the fantasy of posting tweets, that is, of properly speaking is possible rather than getting retweets and likes. As we remember that speaking properly on Twitter is an intersubjective activity made solely through the Other, which guarantees the user's *langage*, fantasy on Twitter is close to the neurotic fantasy.⁸ According to Lacan, "The neurotic fantasy, which Lacan formalises in the matheme ($\$ \diamond a$), appears in the graph of desire as the subject's response to the enigmatic desire of the Other, a way of answering the question about what the other wants from me (*Che voui?*)" (Evans, 2006: 61).

As a consequence, Twitter's mode of operation is based on maintenance of desire. But one should bear in mind that the object of desire is always manifests itself by its inaccessibility, that is, its inclination of vanishing. Thus, it can be said that Twitter is connected with the desire's promise of object and the threat of losing it. The best example for this could be Twitter's timeline structure: Tweets posted are can be seen to the extend permitted by the screen size of the laptop or smartphone. On a standart laptop or smartphone scrren, one can see five or six tweets at once. When a tweet is posted, it is quickly dissapears – users have to tap to the screen in order to access more, which can be done through the user's fantasies. Users find opportunity to make libidinal investment to their tweets even after they dissapeared from the timeline screen. In this sense, computer or smartphone screens, when opened a social media application, especially Twitter, can be counted as the screens that allow desire to flow incessantly in front of the user. Through fantasies, we "shape the world into a

⁸ Although Lacan gives a general formulation and structure on fantasy, in his Seminar VII (1997), and Seminar VI (unpublished) he speaks of the various forms of fantasy, such as hysterical, perverted and obsessional ones. Lacanian fantasy formulas could be varied with reference to his formula of fantasy and sexuation in Seminar XX (1998). And it must be noted that differences between the fantasies are based on clinical practice.

desirable reality; [fantasy] functions as a screen that designs a world of (pleasurable) surfaces (Nusselder, 2009: 105). Its potential pleasure stems from the promise of getting the user desire to be expressed through, as Nusselder says, “fantasy screen”. According to her, “[T]he computer screen functions in cyberspace as a psychological space—as the screen of fantasy” (5). Since fantasy is the guarantee Twitter promised the users: to be a part of the Symbolic order and become a complete entity without lack, by each user’s posting tweets onto the timeline which functions as desire-fantasy flux. Thus it can be said that each tweet is the expressed, uttered and revealed desire – the desire to be recognized by the Other and to become a subject.

4.5.1. Traversing the Fantasy

We have explained that Twitter user’s objects of desire, that is, a posted tweet, not the act of posting a tweets, are assumed belonging to the Other. But tweet’s constant disappearance, vanishing of the relation to the Other and its ethical responsibility given by users necessarily changes the attachment of the user to the Other and the position of reciprocity. In any circumstances, the user never ceases to aim their desire and its object-cause – which differentiates the anchoring point (*le point de capitone*) of the user since s/he always has to deal with the 140 character limit. Lacan names it in an analytic process, “traversing the fantasy.” For Lacan, “The traversing of fantasy involves the subject's assumption of a new position with respect to the Other as language and the Other as desire [. . .] a utopian moment beyond neurosis” (Fink, 1997: 62).

In this sense, traversing the fantasy does not necessitate a process of maintaining the desire, and holding onto the subjectivity in its failure to become a subject. Instead, by

traversing the fantasy, subjects form the proper social bonds, and more importantly, *langage* on Twitter. To traverse the fantasy, Lacan theorizes, is to cease positing that the Other has taken the "lost" object of desire. Does not Twitter want each user to comply with the command "Therefore, traversing the fantasy can be tied to the moment in which the subject realizes that its entire being is structured around a central nothingness?" (Zizek, 1992: 35).

Thus, the basis of desire supported by fantasy on Twitter, and virtual reality plane constituted by both desire and fantasy is the subject's realization that s/he can become a subject with its inner nothingness, through impossible proper-speech – that marks the splitted subject of the Symbolic order on Twitter. The terms "nothingness" and "impossible proper-speech" must remind us "a little bit of the Real" since, through language, subject cannot express himself/herself completely; s/he always includes the Thing which resists symbolization, named by Lacan as the Real. Besides, traversing the fantasy is also a way of dealing with the Real (Zizek, 1992: 35).

In sum, Symbolic order which incapsulates the virtual reality constituted by Twitter's mode of operation cannot be formed by the language, tweets even they shape the language on Twitter. According to Lacan, traversing the fantasy is not an eventual solution to deal with the Real and its effects: "What, then, does he who has passed through the experience [. . .] who has traversed the radical phantasy [. . .] become?" (1998: 273).

4.6. The Meaning of *Jouissance*

We have mentioned above that the possible effects of the desire and fantasy of Twitter's mode of operation against users performance on Twitter. Basically, Twitter allows

the user to express his or her desire freely, but s/he is subjected to the Law marked by 140-character limit which restricts his or her desire to utter properly. On the other hand fantasy paves the way for the user to the Other understand his or her desire and recognize it by responding their desires – fantasy guarantees the user to maintain his or her desire with no limits, in an extended way. But in terms of traversing the fantasy, it always reminds the user that it is impossible to be a full subject on Twitter.

When it comes to the Real aspect of Twitter, the fundamental rule that desire formed through fantasy and expressed through *langage*, which resulted as tweets, and the user's attachments and involvements to Twitter's timeline as desire flux, mask the intervention of *jouissance*. Because the operation of the Real (in Lacanian terms, Symbolically impossible) on Twitter can be seen on the failure of becoming a subject and on the presentation the object of desire itself as glimpsing but eventually ungraspable.

The term *jouissance* is always confused with enjoyment but has a different tone. Zizek puts it clearly, "...enjoyment (*jouissance*, *Genuss*) is not to be equated with pleasure (*Lust*): enjoyment is precisely 'Lust im Unlust'; it designates the paradoxical satisfaction procured by a painful encounter with a Thing that perturbs the equilibrium of the 'pleasure principle.' In other words, enjoyment is located 'beyond the pleasure principle'" (1993: 280). It is "beyond" the pleasure principle just because, while desire is a function of the Symbolic domain which serves to its consistency by hiding the core of *jouissance*, it is highly related to the object of desire (*objet petit a*) that has only effects mainly as promise and threat. On Twitter, the user can desire everything since it is allowed to him or her. But they cannot get its *jouissance* since Twitter is an intersubjective area – the main fantasy on Twitter is to be an omnipotent "subject" with billions of followers who are subjected to him/her, but also they must not be exist, at least in Symbolic order – so the "subject" of Twitter can realize his/her fantasy. While *jouissance* marks this impossibility marked by Lacanian Real, Twitter creates an

illusion for users to get this *jouissance* designed by its mode of operation just through tweeting. In the first look, it can be said that writing tweets on Twitter cannot be a promise of opening the way of the Real (*jouissance*), which is true. But when it comes to 140-characters limit, that restricts users to use their language properly, there comes an illusion: the illusion of pre- or post-lingual universe is possible, so the user can express his or her desire with no inhibition and reach their ungraspable and unattainable *jouissances*.

According to Lacan, “Desire is a defense, a defence against going beyond a limit in *jouissance*” (2006: 825). That is why *jouissance* can be understood only by its effects; direct touch with *jouissance* is *de facto* impossible and is act in vain – desire cannot reach *jouissance*: “The subject will realise that his desire is merely a vain detour with the aim of catching the *jouissance* of the other” (Lacan, 1998: 183-4). Zizek puts the relation between *jouissance* and the Real:

The illusion that pertains to a *qua* surplus-enjoyment is therefore the very illusion that, behind it, there is the lost substance of *jouissance*. In other words, a *qua* semblance deceives in a Lacanian way: not because it is a deceitful substitute of the Real, but precisely because it invokes the impression of some substantial Real behind it; it deceives by posing as a shadow of the underlying Real (1993. 36-7).

In this context, Twitter transforms our libidinal investments and the form of the user’s position and relation to the Other. The user’s investment to texts, images and representations increases the enjoyment by prohibiting its fullness. Thus, posting tweets and checking what others posted in a repetitive way mean an expansion of the user’s position to Real, since they post their tweets in *langage*.

According to Lacan, *jouissance* can be grasped through its mark on the prohibition: “The sole indication of this *jouissance* in its infinitude, which brings with it the mark of its prohibition, and which requires a sacrifice in order to constitute this mark” (2006: 822). This prohibition also marks the failure of becoming a subject on Twitter. *Jouissance* can be comprehended only insofar as the user, a subject manifests itself without a failure, in a complete form. Besides, when the user, a subject in a Symbolic order encounters with *jouissance*, s/he cannot endure his or her painful enjoyment and collapses. (Lacan, 1997: 218).

As we have said before, limited language supposed to be used on Twitter that opens up the possibility of going beyond the meaning. This is an effect of *jouissance*, and hence the Real. Meaning can only take place within the (Symbolic) Law; the moment we trespass the domain of Law, meaning changes into *jouis-sense* (enjoy-meant/enjoyment in sense) – which can be seen in Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* within the coherent meanings on unmeaningful words. When the user tweet his or her use of language do not manifest any difference from *jouis-sense* texts: 140-character can have any meaning with its form of senselessness. Since “*jouis-sens* as the structural crystallization of *jouissance* in an through signifiers reduced to their nonsensical, ‘fleshly’ materiality” (Johnston, 2008: 89). So, it can be said that the linguistic meaning and *jouissance* can overcome on Twitter, which paves the way for the language proliferation in all directions. In addition, the subject can obtain *jouissance* in a way that the pleasure falls short of the idealized standard – which explains the subject’s position to Twitter.

CHAPTER 5

SYMBOLIC ORDER DISINTEGRATED: WHERE THE IMAGINARY-REAL OF TWITTER EMERGES

5.1. New Reality of Twitter

In the light of the thoughts expressed in former chapters, it can be concluded that tweets posted on Twitter get meaning with respect to the relation constituted between desire, fantasy and *jouissance*. A tweet must set a convergible interrelation with *jouissance*, which the user's desire is mirrored in a fantasmatic context, in order a tweet to encapsulate full meaning. Moreover, Twitter's mode of operation performs this action to a large extent by expressing the Lacanian imperative, "Act in such a way as to maximize your *jouissance*" (Miller, 2003: 64). We have also said, in the previous chapter, that meaning changes into *jouis-sense* (enjoyment/enjoyment in sense) which includes the coherent meanings in unmeaningful words.

However, language is not a way of getting *jouissance* pointed by the user's desire on Twitter, even though it can be only expressed through language. By contrast with normal Lacanian schemata, function of the Symbolic order on Twitter is minimized. Namely, users are allowed to post tweets with 140-character which do not have to make sense: A tweet can be constituted by a verbiage or gibberish; or, it is possible for a user to post an empty tweet insofar as a picture, GIF, video or any kind of hyperlink is included in it. Although it is possible to make a tweet flood comprised of multiple tweets, it does not change the character count in one tweet. So, sentences may not include the objects, adjectives, adverbs, etc.

Thus the problematic of Twitter for us is the disintegration of the language since it can clearly be seen that the language, which is supposed to open Twitter users a possibility of communication, also has a non-communicative aspect. It can be radically ambiguous when it is restricted.

In sum, it can be said that the disintegration of the language on Twitter forms a kind of reality which does not similar to our daily one. In order to apprehend this new kind of reality marked by virtuality, we will employ the Lacanian term of *aletheia*.

5.2. Twitter-Sphere: Truth in Question

Standing up to the absence (a) of forgetting (lethe), *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια) is a word coined by Heidegger, which has two meanings: disclosure and truth (Barthes, 1974: 18). However, the truth pointed by *aletheia* in an in-itself form, is not self-proclaimed; quite on the contrary, it marks the open truth which is also disguised and unveiled. According to Heidegger, *aletheia* does not completely represent the truth: "*Aletheia*, disclosure thought of as the opening of

presence, is not yet truth. Is *aletheia* then less than truth? Or is it more because it first grants truth as *adequatio* and *certitudo*, because there can be no presence and presenting outside of the realm of the opening?" (1972: 69). In this regard, truth is not established in its entirety but its basis is framed by the opening moves "towards" the truth.

But Lacan takes this term as a sphere in the formation of the meaning-world and says, "In every entry of being into its habitation in words, there's a margin of forgetting, a *lethe* complementary to every *aletheia*" (1988: 192). What he means here is the unattainable formation of the meaning in an arbitrary sphere as a contingent cumulation of linguistic activity. This reminds us of Twitter's mode of operation: Millions of users – some of them are real (supposed to post tweets as himself or herself) some of them are pseudonym (their identities are uncertain), and some of them are simply bots (they do not exist as users) – do the same thing by posting tweets in a repetitive and an obsessive way, not intending to form a kind of truth.

Here we can recall the Engels' letter to Bloch who explains the problematic of how history is made. He emphasises the intersecting forces, – as they are, as users, on Twitter – which merges into an aggregate pinpoint, which marks, for us, the formation and sustainability of Twitter:

[. . .] history is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each in turn has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant — the historical event. This may again itself be viewed as the product of a power which works as a whole unconsciously and without volition. For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed. Thus

history has proceeded hitherto in the manner of a natural process and is essentially subject to the same laws of motion. But from the fact that the wills of individuals — each of whom desires what he is impelled to by his physical constitution and external, in the last resort economic, circumstances (either his own personal circumstances or those of society in general) — do not attain what they want, but are merged into an aggregate mean, a common resultant, it must not be concluded that they are equal to zero. On the contrary, each contributes to the resultant and is to this extent included in it (Engels, 1999).

Even if a Twitter user post tweets involuntarily to form a truth, they eventually forms a linguistic sphere consisted of meaningful or unmeaningful words and audiovisual elements.

Lacan calls this aggregate pinpoint the “aletosphere,” which leans of the term we used above, “aletheia.” For him, aletosphere “is a space filled with creations, effects of a formalized truth [. / .] [that] signals the connection between modern science and the kind of truth it produces” (Voruz, 2010: 437). What Lacan means here by the term science is the communication devices since his focus on late works was on new technologies. Indeed, Lacan gives importance to the prevalency of televisions, telephones and radios from 1960’s to 70’s (Lacan, 1991; 1970).

5.3. Emergence of the Real

In a same vein, as an analogy, it can be claimed that Twitter constitutes an ever-changing information sphere, involuntarily organized by its users, through linguistically restricted tweets which are not supposed to carry meanings. When a user logs into Twitter, s/he

necessarily becomes a part of this information sphere since, as we mentioned in former chapters, a tweet gets interaction even if it is seen or read by users. In his Seminar XVII, Lacan refers to the same implication:

Don't get too excited. The aletosphere gets recorded. If you have a little microphone here, you are plugged into aletosphere. What is really something is that if you are in a little vehicle that is transporting you toward Mars you can still plug into the aletosphere (2007: 161).

However, although the interaction process on Twitter forms a layer of information, it does not have a possibility to form a truth which entails the language, since the means that have been using on Twitter do not allow users to enunciate. The aim of Twitter, yet, is based on enunciation and expression. It is clearly stated in its homepage: "Connect with your friends – and other fascinating people. Get in-the-moment updates on the things that interest you. And watch events unfold, in real time, from every angle" ("Twitter."). The reason for this is that Twitter has a feature of being temporariness in such a way that it is too hard to find older tweets: Such that a user has to expend energy to find a tweet posted 3-4 hours ago.

But the information sphere formed by Twitter users consisted of one-page dimension – which is stored in a numerous servers. There is nothing Symbolic behind the screen. So, meaningful and unmeaningful tweets posted by the user are translated into 1's and 0's and stored in the servers. They are the mediator of the domain of the Real since they cannot make sense in a linguistic manner; and they do not have any anchoring point.

So, what separates us from the technological Real, consisted of the manipulation of the Real of bytes (Zizek, 1997: 212) is the screen itself. Because the repetitive use of 0's and 1's limits the language in such a way that one cannot establish a radius of action, and stays in the

domain of the Real. What we have get on the screen, in a paradoxical way, is the Real of bytes with a virtually Symbolic position.

According to Nusselder, screen protects the subject against (a too direct intrusion of) the Real (2009: 110) since what users see on the screen correspond to the Lacanian Real, the unfathomable Thing, which resists symbolization. The Real character of Twitter holds onto the usual new media procedures, as we mentioned in the Chapter 1: New media establishes an interactive way of communication – the subject can change what is on the screen – while traditional media passivates the subject because s/he cannot but do watch the screen. “[S]pectators perform in the new media system” (Jenkins, 2006: 3).

5.4. The Altered Subject of Twitter

As a part of the new media system, Twitter alters the subject since there is no material basis that allows the subject, in an everyday human form, to emerge on Twitter. So it can be said that, “these environments produce new forms of subjectivity, versions of the self that break from orthodox modern conceptions” (Gordo-Lopez, 1999: 51). McLuhan also follows the same path years before the new media studies emerged, and states that the decisive role of media, by saying that, “[A]ny (new) technology gradually creates a totally new human environment” (McLuhan, 1964: 34).

It can be summarized in a Lacanian sense, by emphasizing the radical difference between being a subject in a mirror stage and in the domain of new media. In the mirror stage, Lacan states, when human infant faces with the mirror, s/he turns his or her fragmented body image into a totality (2006: 78). Thus, human infant can see himself or herself as an outer entity – in

the eyes of the Other. By this way, the subject is formed; the subject sees himself of herself out of his bodily domain and then constitutes himself or herself as *I*. When the mirror stage comes to an end, according to Lacan, “through identification with the imago of one’s semblable and the drama of primordial jealousy [. . .], the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situation” (2006: 79). The way the subject is formed can be found in the Lacanian film theories which presupposes the ultimate identification of the spectator and the screen.

On the new media side, however, there is a subject which stands both against and in a screen, on a screen surface as a profile page which circulates his or her bytes (bits) of subjectivity through tweets consisted of mostly audiovisual hypertexts. This dividedness manifests the fact that, when people participates in the new electronic environments they configure themselves as different types of subject (Parker, 2007: 65).

5.5. Subject as Object

With its limitless multiplication, Twitter gives users different kinds of modalities such as profiling, following/unfollowing, being followed/unfollowed, using of the language; curation of the follower list and the content of the tweet itself, meaningful or unmeaningful, based only on text or audiovisual. When the user post tweets, changes their profile pictures, even reads tweets posted by the others, s/he projects his or her ego-ideals to the screen. The bits of the ego-ideal can always-already be found on the each letter limited in 140-character, which the user writes on their tweets – therefore they seem to form a complete subject fantasy. Therefore it can be said that the user activity on Twitter is to be a complete, unlackling

subjects since Twitter's mode of operation "is best conceptualized as a factor in the formation of subjectivity" (Hartman, 2011: 470).

The subjectivation process on Twitter, which is more interactive than the mirror stage with regards to its constitutiveness, does not postulate a one-sided identification structure. Instead, the user of Twitter as a subject is also a profile page for other users consisted of real ones, fake ones and bots. Given the fact that the apparatuses on Twitter subject to use for projecting his or her identities onto screen and getting the recognition from the Other, they can very well become objects.

Zizek's example of female porn actor and male porn viewer is ideally suits here, in order to understand how users are objectivized while, at the same time, being subjectivized. According to Zizek, porn movies go beyond the limit of representability: "[P]ornography by definition 'goes too far' and thus misses what remained concealed in the 'normal,' nonpornographic love scene [. . .] because all cannot be shown" (1989: 33). What is veiled here is the subjective and objective positions in such a way that each factor in a porn movie seems to objectivize the female actor and the male porn viewer. But Zizek thinks that this fallacy is not true since the glance of the female actor to the camera objectivizes the male spectator behind the screen. He says:

I absolutely disagree with Laura Mulvey, the cinema theorist, that in heterosexual pornography, the woman is reduced to the object of the male gaze. Not at all. Do you notice how the woman being fucked is allowed to break the basic rule of fiction movies and look directly into the camera? Men, no. You don't identify with the man fucking the woman. He is a pure instrument. If you are a hetero guy observing a hardcore movie, what you are looking for—and this is signaled to you by the woman—is some confirmation that the woman really enjoys it. The true object is the

poor guy, usually some poor sailor fucking her. Which is why the woman, as a rule, has to make all those sounds all the time (2013).

Same precisely goes for Twitter users since each user is an object for other users. When the user posts a tweet, s/he does it for other users to read and, in one way or another, to interact with it. User “Interaction can thus consist of communication with other users, manipulation of digital objects, and navigation through a digital space of information” (Simons, 2002: 79). It opens up a strong possibility for users to be subjects. “Because the interface is interactive, the human user is not solely a passive spectator but can actively intervene in, or navigate, the representations that the computer generates” (Nusselder, 2009: 36). This fits very well to the Lacanian scheme of the formation of subjectivity. By making an intermediate space between seeing and being seen, indeed, Lacan, marks the human body as a reversible entity which could become a subject and an object at the same time. This process of subjectivization-objectivization operates in a disintegrated Symbolic order on Twitter.

5.6. Impossibility of Complete Subject of Twitter in The Symbolic Order

We have mentioned briefly above that when a Twitter user post tweets or change their profile pictures, s/he projects their ego-ideals to the screen. Thus, s/he is reduced to a textual thing for the Other, as other users does the same for him or her. In this manner, Twitter user can exclude, persecute and mask his or her undesired idiosyncracies in order to preserve the ideal image which Twitter’s mode of operation imposes on users as wholeness – this is why Twitter works through a complete subject fantasy as we mentioned in the previous chapters. But it must be noted that this fantasy can never be accomplished precisely because Twitter’s

140-character limit does not allow it. This is why users post tweets in an obsessive and repetitive way; to be a complete subject is a promise for them which is impossible to keep.

The projection of the ego-ideal to the Twitter as tweets or profile pages is important because they can get their Symbolic identity. As Salecl argues, “The subject often identifies with some egoideal (i.e. authority or ideals that are respected in his or her culture) in order to acquire a symbolic identity, which will inscribe them in a desirable way into society” (2004: 86). By doing that, subject identifies with his or her image and get recognized by the Twitter community. Of course, another step to accomodate with Twitter habitus is to obey the Law of Twitter which is marked by its mode of operation, that is, posting a tweet in a 140-characters, to a large extent. So Twitter encourages the subject’s profile page to be completed inasmuch that verified account policy of Twitter is rendered more flexible in order to urge people to identify with themselves through their ego-ideals (“About Verified Accounts”).

Developing an ego-ideal, however, requires a Symbolic process and the manifestation of it on Twitter can be monitored in the act of tweeting. “This image (as when subjects observe themselves in a mirror) is always supported by the symbolic, since language and culture determine our perception of ourselves” (Salecl, 2004: 87). But one should bear in mind that getting a symbolic identity on Twitter is radically an imaginary process since all s/he can address to and being addressed is the screen itself: The symbolic identity on Twitter operates in the Imaginary. “The ego-ideal is the point where identification is inscribed in the symbolic, the point from which the subject wants to be seen, where he or she gets his or her symbolic identity” (Salecl, 2004: 139).

In sum, the subjective position on Twitter for users necessiates the screen identification with the ego-ideal, creates a point of view from which they can appear likeable to themselves: As complete and perfect subjects which are impossible for the Symbolic order. In this very

point, our argument is, through the restricted and disintegrated Symbolic order, that Twitter opens up a possibility for Imaginary-Real domain.

5.7. Symbolic Order Disturbed: Imaginary-Real Aspect of Twitter

The new domain is radically determined by the position of the reality on Twitter. Because Twitter is not a place a subject can easily get stuck in, it does not have a closed circuit system. While millions of users are online each second on Twitter, they do not have a necessary activity there. Although, broadly speaking, the screen might be a gate for another kind of reality to be entered, all the users have the control on it: Twitter, and internet in general, do not present unavoidably the user to the platform. It depends on the user when to get online and offline on Twitter. Our everyday reality, however, cannot be got out of; there is no switch button to defuse it, like it is on laptops and smartphones.

According to Turkle, “The internet streams in yet another experience of reality that expands upon access and allows multiple realities to coexist and to be true at any moment” (1996: 52). Twitter also creates a sphere of reality, a space that allows subjects and objects to establish a proper interactivity: “[T]he Internet gets the data about the object and projects them onto any plain surface. You interact with a real object, but at the same time you can project on it all the data. And I think it’s an interesting thing because the effect is a kind of magic. Objects answer you, telling all about themselves” (Zizek, 2013).

But in order to spend time in Twitter’s reality, users have to obey the rules of Twitter: its mode of operation, its limitation, its duties – which are ruled by the non-Symbolic algorithm codes. So it can be said that Twitter does not only mean to post tweets; the desire of the user radically depends on the Law. According to Hayles, “[T]he real problem is hiding in the realm of paradoxical algorithmic Symbolic order. Virtual worlds are ruled by the algorithm that calculates, quantifies, and produces code – but does not produce any Symbolic order,

narrative interpretation, or more broadly, any contextualized human experience” (2008: 51). Thus, Twitter’s designated form of reality is predetermined but the user activity is radically arbitrary.

The structure of reality on Twitter we have described above characterizes the Lacanian domains of the Imaginary and the Real, where the Symbolic activity of users becomes excessive. Because the unfathomable features of the Real permeates into the screen in such a way that the Real becomes perceptible on Twitter in the form of the fantasy of complete subjects who say “I am.” But still it must be noted that “The real can only be inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalization” (Lacan, 2011: 93). So, the Imaginary-ness of the Real becomes possible on the screen.

The screen here has a constitutive role in creating the Imaginary real (Zizek and Daly, 2004: 68-9) since it has a function of being a mediating fixture between the Symbolic and the Real: between the linguistic overactivity, subjective image, and Twitter’s coded background, the user’s position on Twitter.

Marked by the virtual reality, Twitter does not constitute a monolithic and singular universe of reality; quite on the contrary, it is a construction of coalescing the virtual and real. For Zizek, it creates a difference, a gap between reality and the user’s subjective interpretation. So, it is the Symbolic order which cannot be interpreted here in the sense of radical linguistic disintegration and limitation. As far as all the features of Twitter with regards to the Imaginary, the Symbolic and Real domains are concerned, it can be argued that Twitter is the place where the possibility of an answer of the Real is opened up for the subject (Zizek, 1989: 178-182).

Finally, it is said that “the Imaginary-Real is that part of an image that disrupts the very integrity of the image *in toto*. [. . .] The Imaginary-Real is thereby the place within the image

which introduces a division. The division threatens very integrity of the image *qua* image by reducing it to the pure division of the Real” (Butler, 2015: 216). Where the integrity of screen image disrupted is the moment when users trying to post tweets since 140-character limit do not allow them to express themselves in a fully-fledged way: One always-already failed to enunciate the meaning in a realm where the characters are important.

By this process, users fantasize about a complete subjectivity onto which they projected profiles formed by their ego-ideals. Thus it can be argued that, on Twitter, “[T]here is no longer (enough) distance between the self and its image” (Nusselder, 2009: 98) since the subject is already completed. It leaves a point on the Symbolic activity on Twitter – which might both resist symbolization, and promotes the consistency by means of the Imaginary. This dimension of Twitter, disturbs the Symbolic construction and transforms the position of the subject with regards to reality.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION: NUSSELDER AND ZIZEK AS CYBERSPACE

PHILOSOPHERS

6.1. Various Lacanian Aspects of Cyberspace

We have discussed Twitter's mode of operation and its relation with Lacanian psychoanalysis. While doing this throughout the dissertation, we have substantially and primarily relied on Lacan's works rather than works on Lacan, in order to make a sheer explanation, and to express an unequivocal employment, and of course unavoidably, decipherment, of Lacan on Twitter.

Even though Lacanian psychoanalysis has a broad literature as we have demonstrated in Introduction, it cannot be found major works on contemporary cultural environment. Somehow, Lacanian psychoanalysis gets late when it comes to interpreting popular culture, and the forms of everyday life from a theoretical position. The reason for this is maybe

Lacanian thought seems very complex, such that it might be too hard to borrow some concepts from Lacan in a proper way and read a societal phenomenon through it.

6.2. Lacanian Impact on Media Studies

The impact of Lacanian psychoanalysis on new media is almost insignificant at the time because it is too hard to find a major work on it. We have discussed this issue in Introduction, by denoting that Lacanian scholars have written some major works within the domain of media since 1970's. But rather than media devices, cinema has been an important subject for Lacanian psychoanalysis for years. We also have shown that the most frequently referred concepts of Lacan are the Other, the gaze, and the mirror stage, which are elements of both the Imaginary and the Symbolic order.

And indeed, the most outstanding Lacanian works could be founded on movies – which is also true for now; for example, cinema is the most used explanatory medium for Žižek, who is acknowledged as the most important Lacanian philosopher.

But to claim that Lacanian psychoanalysis has less affected the domain of new media is not to say that it is impossible to find a Lacanian view on new media. Although many Lacanian scholars interested in the new media, they do not specialize it as we have tried to do in this dissertation. Instead, they take the domain of new media as cyberspace or internet with their general features while using Lacanian notions.

6.3. Lacanian Thought on Cyberspace

However, we think that a general overview of Lacanian thought on cyberspace and internet may give us an insight to comprehend Twitter more dynamically from a Lacanian point of view. But it must be noted that the Lacanian reading of Twitter and cyberspace is strictly distinct.

In order to do this, we are going to take a look at the works of three, Nusselder, Flieger, and Žižek who, respectively, bring the position of user against the screen at issue, discuss the importance of the Father and the Law in the internet age, and employ the notion of the Lacanian Real in order to explain the domain of cyberspace. By doing so, we will have an opportunity to compare our hypotheses with them and to expose similarities and differences.

6.4. Nusselder: Screen, Fantasy, and The Virtual

In her work, “Interface Fantasy,” Nusselder tries to read the realm of internet and human interaction with it, thereby using Lacanian concepts and notions. Taking the screen as a reference point, she claims that there is two different kinds of reality: against the screen and on the screen. She makes the distinction through the term fantasy, which is, for her, “a vital window for being in the world,” (2009: 12) in order to show how “the computer screen functions in a cyberspace as a psychological space” (5). Which is why she uses the term for computer screen “fantasy screen” (3).

6.4.1. Screen as A Distinctive and Constitutive Element

According to Nusselder, screen is the flat surface which separates internet users as on the side of the reality and of the virtual. Everyday life of the user as human being apart from his or her computer or smartphone completely constitutes the real, she claims, but when they get interact with the internet, they cross the side of imaginary. But that does not mean, however, that the fantasy screen is not only a blank separator which has no function other than projecting the virtual into the real. Instead, it is the place where the virtuality and the real combines. In this sense, it can be said that, the screen is an intermediary space between the real and the virtual. She states, “Fantasy, I want to show, is exactly the place that interfaces the virtual and the real. The computerized simulated environments resemble the

'intermediary' space of fantasy; they are between the real and the fictional (Nusselder, 2009: 63).

In this sense, Nusselder's contemplation on fantasy resembles the Real-Imaginary aspect of Twitter we have mentioned above: Here we can see the un-enunciated aspect of the Imaginary. Since, she claims, as we have done, that the subject's attachment to the Symbolic order, that is, to language, is weakened. She says, "The virtual object, our Self that communicates by means of signifiers, thus still connects to the physical space of its body and world. In technological virtuality, the individual is less bound to a symbolic order, leaving more space for fantasy – the whole issue of role playing in cyberspace testifies to this" (74).

Claiming that the domain of fantasy is expanded in cyberspace, Nusselder, states that the domain of reality is contracted. In this sense, her anchoring point to mark the cyberspace is Lacanian mirror stage on which internet users are acted. But she does not present a clear scheme about how the relation between reality and virtual is altered. In the previous chapters, however, we have remarked that the effectiveness of the Symbolic order on Twitter is radically disintegrated since 140-character limitation make users incapable of properly expressing themselves. We have also said that Twitter is a unique space that allows the Symbolic order to contract. But, apparently, Nusselder thinks that internet is a place where virtuality emerges while reality vanishes: "The real necessarily slips away: we all notice of it in our reality are its remainders, remnants, and surpluses" (107). In order something to be virtual, there must be any entity which are both incomprehensible and resisting symbolization; we will see how Žižek puts hereafter.

6.4.2. Reality versus Virtuality

However it is not true that the reality is replaced by the virtual, Nusselder's claim on the transformation of subjectivity seems pretty parallel to our claims, especially when it comes to

the subject and his or her Twitter profile on the screen. Having said that the life in cyberspace is no longer an exploration but a compensation, she argues “When life in cyberspace becomes such a hallucination (cyberspace itself as a ‘consensual hallucination’), there is no longer (enough) *distance* between the self and its image, and no space for (a symbolic, ethical, ‘regulating’; that is, not narcissistic) desire. Cyberspace needs a ‘free’ subject of desire in order not to be wrapped up in it” (98). We have also stated that the user projects his or her ego-ideal to the Twitter profile and realizes the fantasy of reaching his or her object of desire by means of unmediated narcissistic identification. So it can be said that the subject Nusselder described is very similar to our subject of Twitter profile with regards to its fundamental emerging point. She says, “In a virtual world, text-based or graphical, I not only look at a flat screen but also ‘live on the screen’ by means of my identifications with the textual or visual appearances of myself” (117).

Even though the subject of cyberspace can be operated on Twitter, it would not be the same with other platforms since Twitter is different with its contracted and disintegrated Symbolic order. On the other hand, other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp etc. have no significant limit for users to express themselves.

In this sense, it can be argued that the constitutive element of cyberspace is the Symbolic order itself, for us, rather than the screen since without the language, or any kind of semantic system, one cannot get interact with the screen – even if s/he is a real person or just a profile page. Thus the form of subjectivity Nusselder has made a distinction as the bodily and the virtual ones does not prevail. Because the bodily subject could dwell into the realm of cyberspace with his or her material features such as, basically, his language, but on the other hand, the virtual subject (as user profile) has also an impact to the bodily one since it reflects the projected ego-ideals out of the screen.

In sum, it can be said that Nusselder has a Lacanian insight to understand the realm of cyberspace but, although she draws a general picture, she has failed to working out the fine details. Nonetheless her scheme, in a sense, paves the way for understanding Twitter and cyberspace as different realms and comprehending that the key differences between them are based on the Symbolic order, that is, the language.

6.5. Zizek: Impact of the Real

Known as the most influential Lacanian philosopher of the 21st century, Zizek has done much less work about the cyberspace or the internet as he is expected. Although his works are limited with the domain of cyberspace, he can still give us a perspective of how social media phenomenon like Twitter can be read from a Lacanian point of view.

6.5.1. Virtual “Real”ity

The main article Zizek considers the problem of internet is “Cyberspace, or The Unbearable Closure of Being,” which he marks the elements of cyberspace such as sounds, text, images, video clips, etc. as a shift from reality to simulation (1997: 167). Even though he uses the term virtuality in order to describe the internet, he makes a distinction between the content (computer technology) and the appearance (screen): “[T]he emergence of the pure appearance which cannot be reduced to the simple effect of its bodily causes; none the less, this emergence is the effect of the digitalized Real” (169). The notion of the Lacanian Real pervades throughout his text with its different angles; eventual deductions made by Zizek also indicates the inseparability of cyberspace with the Real. So it can be said that Zizek’s understanding of internet is a product of the Real.

In this sense, he makes a distinction between the true and the virtual reality, by saying that we lost contact with the true reality, and these two different domains establish a space of internet. He says, “In so far as the VR [virtual reality] apparatus is potentially able to generate

experience of the ‘true’ reality, VR undermines the difference between ‘true’ reality and semblance. This ‘loss of reality’ occurs not only in computer generated VR but, at a more elementary level, already with the growing ‘hyperrealism’ of the images with which the media bombard us – more and more, we perceive only colour and outline, no longer depth and volume” (170-171). Here, again, it can be said that Zizek’s point of view about the experience of internet reminds us of Nusselder’s concept of interface fantasy.

6.5.2. Subject of Multi-User Dimension

Apart from what we have claimed in this dissertation – the important thing is how a subject projects his or her ego-ideal to the screen and how a profile as a virtual and complete subject is formed – Zizek takes the subject who uses internet into consideration and argues that the s/he is derailed, lost the coordination of his body (173). But soon afterwards, it turns out that Zizek’s intention is to emphasize the notion of desire by stressing the loop of symbolic castration (174). By this term, he claims that the domain of Symbolic is castrated, it is contracted while the virtuality becomes the main foundational element of the internet.

Claiming that the subject formed in the cyberspace is more real than it is in the real life, Zizek states that the subject forms a structure on the screen, a point that s/he can do more than s/he is able to, and that s/he can do almost everything: “I can do it, act it out, without really doing it, and thus avoid the anxiety connected with the RL activity – I can do it, and since I know I’m not really do it, the inhibition or shame is suspended” (177). On this point, Zizek’s definition of the subject on the internet reminds us of the position of the unconscious as a domain of return of the repressed; but the bizzare is that it is not possible to speak of repression on cyberspace. So, he says “[O]ne can say that [the subject] thereby expresses the repressed side of himself,” (176) by stressing the subjective identifications in a place where s/he confronts another subjects – which externalizes the repressed content: “[T]he

suspension of the symbolic rules which regulate my RL activity enables me to stage-externalize my repressed content which I am otherwise unable to confront” (178). He does not, however, explain clearly how could this be possible, even through he refers to the imaginary and symbolic identifications. We have said that the subjective identification, and hence, the formation of the subject is done through the projection of the ego-ideal to the screen, and a fantasy of complete subject on Twitter.

According to Zizek, multi-user dimension as a close point to social media means many persons outside a single body. “[T]hese persons refer to the body which exists outside the cyberspace, in ‘reality,’ with the (ideological) presupposition that this body accomodates a ‘true person’ behind the multiple masks (screen personae) in VR” (180). This indicates that Zizek’s conception of the subject on the internet splits the subject into two: the virtual one and the bodily one.

Zizek asserts that the subject, splitted as its semblance and body, has various identifications on the internet, which results as a decentered subject coined by Lacan, a subject can be shaped by different implications made him or her amorphous. But we have said that the subject cannot realize himself of herself beyond the limits of fantasy: The subject can only be shaped to the extent permitted by his or her own ego-ideal projected on the screen. Serving as an extension of the subject, and acting on it, “[A] cyberspace agent is not ‘another subject’ but simply the subject’s *ego*, ego as the subject’s supplement – it is, of course, a kind of ‘alter ego’, but Lacan’s point is that ego itself is always-already ‘alter’ with regard to the subject whose ego it is” (Zizek, 1997: 182).

6.5.3. The Real as Virtual

The subject in cyberspace, according to Zizek, exists in a symbolically castrated universe in Lacanian sense. Because he claims that the Symbolic order of the internet

strengthen the fictional structure of the truth (Lacan, 2006: 376). He says, “[C]yberspace merely radicalizes the gap constitutive of the symbolic order: (symbolic) reality always-already was ‘virtual’; that is to say: *every access to (social) reality has to be supported by an implicit phantasmic hypertext*” (Zizek, 1997: 184).

On this point, it can be said that Zizek describes the domain of cyberspace less than the Symbolic domain. One can deduce that he claims that the virtuality which constitutes the very core truth of the internet is precisely the Real – which we have said with regards to Twitter in a very similar way: “[T]he virtualization cancels the distance between neighbour and a distant foreigner, in so far as it suspends the presence of the Other in the massive weight of the Real: neighbours and foreigners are all equal in their spectral screen presence” (199).

Having said that the problem with the cyberspace is that reality is virtualized, Zizek claims that the reality of virtuality in cyberspace constitutes the absences of the symbolic texture – so that internet users become distanced from the Symbolic order, which creates the loss of reality for Zizek: “[W]hat brings about the ‘loss of reality’ in cyberspace is not its emptiness [. . .] but, on the contrary, its very excessive fullness” (198). Although Zizek does not seem clear here to explain what the fullness does mean, it apparently has to do with what we have described as a fantasy of being a complete subject on Twitter, considering the fact that he focuses on the relation between the Symbolic order and the subject. For him, the spectral identity of the Other which guarantees the subject’s Symbolic (always-already lacked) consistency vanishes on the internet – what he means is that the Other gains a tactile feature in cyberspace. So, Zizek’s argument on the Other overlaps with our discussion of the Other which has a countable position on Twitter.

In such an order described by Zizek, “[T]he Word which guarantees the semblance of Meaning will disintegrate” (206). But what he elaborates here is not the Real which emerges a

little bit to disturb the consistency of the linguistic order and the symbolic consistency of the subject. Quite on the contrary, a Real which Lacan describes as a mathematical order: Consisted of scientific formulas, in a technological way, 0's and 1's, binary system, or, bytes that constitute the screen projection.

The notion of the Real discussed above in terms of Lacan in this dissertation is not the same with Zizek's conception. Unlike him, our modality of the Real focuses on user experience on Twitter. For us, the Imaginary-Real aspect necessarily emerges because of Twitter's mode of operation – and its constitutive feature is 140-character limit.

6.6. Overview

Throughout this chapter, we have examined the different approaches to the issue of cyberspace which we think that they will pave the way for us to deal with the problem of Twitter through a Lacanian glance. Although the works we have mentioned above are old dated, and cover a general concept of cyberspace – which, now, extends its horizon to internet of things – rather than a specific medium, they still provide an insight for us to understand how a small-scaled internet phenomenon should be analysed.

These works also form a general basis in order to make a detailed investigation on Twitter. Because we have used the Lacanian notions they have employed to explain the internet, they formed a basis for our viewpoint. And these works have enabled us to see the similarities and differences in terms of points of views.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, we have tried to understand and explain Twitter, one of the most effectively used tool of social media, by means of some notion of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Even though the so-called social media and Lacanian psychoanalysis is seen as a different and incompatible study fields, our claim was to propose that these two distinctive fields could be closely related. And our aim was to try to manifest that how productive these fields are – if it is possible to bring a theory of Lacanian psychoanalysis on Twitter.

We had two different intentions here: First, recognized as a classical and stereotyped theoretical framework, to open up a space for the interaction between Lacanian

psychoanalysis and social media; and second, to theorize Twitter as a contemporary social symptom.

Of course, one of the challenges about writing the thesis on such an issue is that the rate of change of Twitter can be measured by only days, while the change of Lacanian psychoanalysis extends over decades. In this sense, it is not an easy task to merge a slow theory and an extremely fast object. Indeed, some updates like Twitter's stretching its 140-character limit to 10.000 characters ("Twitter to Allow") would complicate and invalidate this thesis.

On the other hand, we have not overlooked the important updates on Twitter. For example, we have mentioned the tweet extensions like GIF, Vine, video, link preview or live stream on the very basis of Twitter.

We have seen that, through these updates, Lacanian Imaginary-Real level comes into prominence on Twitter. Because 140-character limit remained stable, which manifests its relation with the Real in a sense that it contracts the Symbolic domain – this is where we exactly rely on. Although Twitter's mode of operation is based on the contraction of Symbolic domain, it is now easier to take a picture and to tweet it as a part of a global technological developments. Now it can be seen that most tweets are consisted of pictures which makes Twitter an Imaginary medium. By means of this, users found an opportunity to project their subjectivity to the screen: Users can express themselves through a language, both contracted by limitations and extended by images, on a Twitter screen, as Twitter profiles which reflects them as completed, un-lacking subjects.

We must say, however, that we have pointed the idealized way of Twitter's mode of operation and the user's mode of usage in order to create an entire insight since Twitter's usage trends are rapidly changing, and it is not realistic to track these updates properly in a

thesis. Each user's sphere of interest and mode of usage is, of course, different. In other words, although it seems possible to split Twitter users into various groups in terms of their usage trends, it is just an inappropriate categorization. Nevertheless, user categorization in terms of their way of projecting their ego-ideal to the screen can be achieved – as we have done it in a similar way: Fake profiles, realistic profiles and bots.

We have emphasized Twitter profiles in some parts of the thesis in a repetitive way since the subject of the new media has changed. As we have said before, new media and its mode of operation altered the mode of the being of subjectivity. We have stated the notion of Law as the first reason for this, exactly because it is radically limited to 140-character. The communication and interaction on Twitter is reduced to only a disintegrated language which leads up a new forming and constant reproduction a new kind of relations.

On the other hand, the interaction of users on Twitter is based on the numbers. The content of a tweet is not that important – what is important is their interactionability with the others through retweet, like of reading count. And it points the countability of the Law. As Lacan have said, “[T]here is no way out of the Law when one once gets into it” (2006: 225). In the same vein, it can be said that even the seemingly free act on Twitter make users subjected to the Law.

In such an environment, desire itself emerges unavoidably in the sphere of language and this is because the desire of getting recognized by the Other, accomodating to Symbolic order of Twitter, and being a whole with it is enunciated in an each tweet.

On Twitter, subject can see himself or herself apart from its self as human being. It is the way of seeing his or her subjectivity as a complete entity. This manifests the fantasy aspect of tweets since subjects project their ego-ideals to the screen, by expressing a complete subject

fantasy. In this sense, it can be concluded that the fundamental goal of the fantasy on Twitter is the maintenance of the desire.

However, language is not a way of getting *jouissance* pointed by user's desire on Twitter, even though it can be only expressed through language – since Twitter's domain of language is limited. On this point, some scholars and philosophers claimed that internet has created another kind of reality which help people to pull themselves away from everyday reality. We have seen, however, that the reality of Twitter, the virtual reality itself we have supposed, is out of our everyday reality. And it can be apprehended insofar as it has bonds with our normal reality.

Here, one of the hypotheses of this text was that Twitter has created another kind of Symbolic form, and the effect of the Real can be experienced by users has gone too far. Throughout the thesis, that users adopted a complete subjectivity by means of projection and identification could be formed in the Imaginary domain, since visuality becomes fundamental and constitutive element of Twitter. Thus, even though the unfathomable features of the Real permeates into the screen in such a way that the Real becomes perceptible on Twitter in the form of the fantasy of complete subjects who say "I am," a Twitter user cannot achieve a *de facto* completeness insofar as s/he is operated in a Symbolic domain. This is why we have tried to explain the situation in the Imaginary-Real domain. Because the fantasy of complete subject can be performed in a contracted Symbolic universe and achieved in an Imaginary way.

Even though we have dealt with the problem of what does Twitter's mode of operation mean from Lacanian point of view, for further works, qualitative and quantitative studies are needed considering the unique experiences of the user. In this manner, more narrower but the more explicit results can be achieved.

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