

Globalization and Visual Rhetoric

The Rise of a Global Media Order?

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ABSTRACT

In investigating and discussing the limitations and abstraction of “big data” quantitative measurement as a new capitalistic mode of operation that colonizes people’s perception of the world, the study settles on a qualitative “small data” approach to understand change. Thus, by means of digital ethnographic fieldwork and an alternative *media aesthetics* framework, assisted by the method of global iconology, the chapter aims to reassess globalization as a *visual-ideological* phenomenon. Specifically, it investigates how the “reglobalization” of the world is mediated under present conditions of image domination. It does so by focusing on Instagram visual social media cultures and the role that transnational digital media elites play in the destabilization of the imagined multipolar world order we live in. In adding nuance to an understanding of how capitalism is restructured and mediated in the era of computer vision, machine learning, and pattern recognition algorithms, the study will also speculate on the imperialistic role transnational media corporations play and on the possibility that they may, or may not, contribute to the rise of a global media order.

KEYWORDS

data capitalism, globalization, global media order, Instagram, media aesthetics, visual digital rhetoric

We live in a highly mediatized and image-saturated world in which social networks, assisted by echo chambers and “neural network algorithms,” are turned into the sites of contestation and threat to democracy and to democratic discourses. As a matter of fact, due to the digitalization of a large slice of existence and the massive use of electronic personal devices, a new world order is emerging: the

“global media order.” The “global media order” is a new form of political world order made possible by the rise of a transnational technocratic elite and the constitution of a transnational public sphere that sees the pervasive role of media-tech giants embedded within the broader framework of the social, political, economic, and cultural structures of society and its ideological state apparatuses.

As a result of the dramatic digital capitalistic restructuring of the society, like in a slow-motion movie scene, we are experiencing the fall of Western neoliberal democracy under the weight of a system of production and consumption that is based on intellectual capital (“knowledge economy”), the commodification of data (“data capitalism”), and the development of visual technologies of surveillance and control. This chapter explores the strategic role and power that visual technologies, visuals, and visual rhetoric play in the destabilization of liberal democracies and the “reglobalization” of the multipolar world order in which we live.

The strength of social networks to mobilize people from the digital arena of the different materiality of cyberspace to the physicality of the public square, by means of a finger push or a tweet, clearly marks the move from the modern society of spectacle and simulation to one of digital capitalism. See for instance the attack on the symbol of American democracy, Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021 (Tan, Shin, & Rindler, 2021), and the one on the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL, Italian General Confederation of Labour) in Rome, Italy, on October 11, 2021 (*Daily Mail*, 2021). This is just to offer you two similar cases. What is important to observe is that both at the U.S. Capitol (DeVega, 2021: see photo), the symbol of the American people and their government, the meeting place of the nation’s legislature, and in Rome (Joly, 2021: see video) at the head-quarter of the CGIL, the most representative organization of the national workers’ union, when the insurrectionists came, they came with flags, signs, and symbols.

Some media theorists argue that media representations have become central to the web-centric society in which we live to the point that reality consists of neither more nor less than multilayered levels of representations. However, while for some media saturation is cause for celebration, for others the plethora of images and simultaneous information in which we are submerged has reached the point where “it exceeds the interpretative capacity of the subject” (Stevenson, 2002: 162). Indeed, concurring with philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (1994), multilayered saturation makes almost impossible any sort of real society or truthful account of the world that lies beneath all mediated images and representations.

In this study I am focusing on facts that are produced, circulated, and consumed by millions of people worldwide, and there is not much space to discuss concepts such as “real society” or “truth” in relation to media representations. What I know is that people in their everyday life communicate, exchange, and consume media, no matter if they are “true” or false, or the product of strategically planned disinformation or unintentional misinformation. For this reason, media representations need to be taken into due consideration and critically investigated, since they constitute the same horizon of signification of the “real society,” which

is made up of “real people,” and, under the present conditions of digital capitalism and reglobalization of the world, media and the continuous barrage of media images are an integral part of our everyday life and practices. What is more, they dominate the values and the ways we understand the world and our place in it.

Deeply aware that the revolution cannot be tweeted and that social networks cannot provide what social change has always required—strong tie-connection, attention, nurturing to keep progress going, and momentum—one can say for sure that revolution and social change can be ideologically and emotionally spread in order to mobilize people from the electronic square to the physical urban arena of the cities. In this respect, symbols can contribute to connect people and places to shared systems of ideas and beliefs, by contributing to the deep polarization of the political-ideological discourse. Furthermore, the interplay of exclusion and inclusion produced by capitalist globalization relies on a political force that balances economic exclusion with cultural-ideological inclusion.

In the aftermath of the world failure by the absence of a global governance system to curb the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the boldest media-tech giants like Apple, Microsoft, Google (Alphabet), and Facebook/Meta, to name just a few, increasingly acted as sovereigns and rival states. Ian Bremmer, Eurasia Group president, observes that while nation-states had been the primary drivers of global affairs for nearly four hundred years, in charge of conducting war and peace, providing public goods, writing and enforcing laws, and controlling flows of information, goods, services, and people, this no longer happens. Global media conglomerates and tech giants’ influence will trigger plenty of backlash from leaders in the United States, China, and Europe, all of whom agree that they need to get tough on technology companies. “But,” Bremmer argues, “don’t expect any of these efforts to go all the way—in part because they lack the expertise and institutions to regulate Big Tech effectively and fear that overreaching could hamper innovation and growth” (Bremmer, 2021).

In *The Atlantic*, Adrienne LaFrance (2021) characterized Facebook as the largest autocracy on Earth. In her words, Mark Zuckerberg, unlike Einstein, did not dream up Facebook out of a sense of moral duty, or a zeal for world peace. This summer, the population of Zuckerberg’s supranational regime reached 2.9 billion monthly active users, more humans than those who live in the world’s two most populous nations—China and India—combined (LaFrance, 2021). Indeed, media-tech giants have become more and more powerful and ubiquitous in exercising a form of sovereignty over the digital space, though not exclusively, while also maintaining foreign relations and addressing shareholders, employees, users, and advertisers.

“Data capitalism,” a new form of capitalism that commodifies data and uses “big data and algorithms as tools to concentrate and consolidate power in ways that dramatically increase inequality along lines of race, class, gender, and disability,” assisted by Artificial Intelligence (AI) such as data mining and neural networks, represents the marketization of the whole existence, supported by digital

labor exploitation in order to maximize profits. As a result, they also contribute to destabilize liberal democracies, while at deep-subjective level are affecting people's social imaginaries and ideologies (Bremmer, 2021).

As Karl Marx's *Capital Volume I* ([1867] 1990) shows, in capitalism both the economic and the ideological dimensions play an important role in the formation of society and in the production of commodities. However, in this study I argue that capitalism and globalization commodities also have an aesthetic dimension that deeply contributes to deceive and manipulate humans. While the rise of data capitalism has revolutionized people's lives by turning personal data (the production of value) into a commodity, a source of profit for the few (the third-millennium oil, the new valuable resource), and inequality has never been higher, the emergence and consolidation of social networks have revolutionized the way in which people imagine their own existence, their social imaginaries and ideologies, and the ways in which they fit together. Digital technologies and new media have also changed people's lifestyles and the way in which they produce, spread, and consume ideas.

Fast-moving technological changes are affecting both liberal democracies and, at deep-subjective level, people's mindset worldwide. Digitization has also highlighted the fraught relationship between its benefits, such as ease of access to everything from everywhere and provision of services, with the risk of privacy and data-protection principles being undermined or eroded over time, particularly with such large and sensitive big data sets. Indeed, it also contributed to erode the gap between *us*, analog human beings—we are analog devices following biological modes of operation—and *them*, computational technologies operated and owned by the global media-tech giants: a capitalistic (digital) mode of operation in the hands of a technocratic elite-group that suggests that we can all flourish in the "Exponential Age" of *flows* and abstracted *timeless time* of the networked society. This well explains the ways in which the largest and most powerful media-tech corporations in the world wield power by means of "big data."¹

According to Oracle (2021), "big data" is made up by the three Vs: volume, velocity, and variety, which in other words means that big data contains a greater variety of data, with increasing volumes and greater velocity. Anyway, there are some limitations to the use of big data analytics. For instance, as Ciklum (2017) observes, data analysts use big data to tease out correlation: when one variable is linked to another. However, not all these correlations are substantial or meaningful. Also, it is up to the user to figure out which questions are meaningful. What is more, because much of the data you need analyzed lies behind a firewall or on a private cloud, it takes technical know-how and money to efficiently get this data to an analytics team. Lastly, sometimes the tools we use to gather big data sets are imprecise. For example, Google is famous for its tweaks and updates that change the search experience in countless ways; the results of a search on one day will likely be different from those on another day. If you were using Google search to

generate data sets, and these data sets changed often, then the correlations you would derive would change, too. Therefore, big data is questionable in terms of the nature of its quality and trust: any values missing from the data, any inconsistencies and/or errors existing in the data, any duplicates or outliers in the data, any normalization or other transformation of the data (Ciklum, 2017; Oracle, 2021).

Thus, it can be argued that the emergence of data capitalism as a new mode of operation and its AI apparatuses made up of deep machine learning, computer vision, and neural networking algorithms combined with visual digital technologies and cloud-based voice services are colonizing at deep-subjective level people's social imaginaries and ideologies, while contributing to what some scholars define as the "reglobalization" of the world.² As previously acknowledged, rapid technological development is contributing to changes in norms and values, with global media-tech giants forming their own transnational apparatuses of economies and cultures within and across existing nation-states. As a matter of fact, globalization, as we have known it for the past decades, seems to be morphologically changing its face while still embodying an extreme residual neoliberal attitude.

DIGITAL METHODS TO RESEARCH THE GLOBAL

To research the global in the different materiality of cyberspace, we need a digital and tailored methodology that includes digital methods. Digital methods are research strategies that can follow the evolving methods of the medium, in this case Instagram (Rogers, 2019). Among the available digital methods, visual ethnography is the one I consider most appropriate for my approach. Anthropologist Sarah Pink observes that visual ethnography is not a single stage in research. Rather, it is an embedded dialogical state in which theory, practice, and engagement with people in the real world happens. That being the case, the academic meanings that ethnographers give to photography are constituted in relation to fieldwork sites and encounters, disciplinary priorities, other stakeholders, methodological and theoretical approaches, and interventional agendas. We also cannot avoid bringing to these meanings our own personal experiences, memories, and imaginations. This contingency of meaning is inevitable (Pink, 2021: 150–69). Thus, following Pink and Rogers' arguments, it can be said that for this study I am turning Instagram into an epistemological machine, since "digital methods can be considered the deployment of online tools and data for the purposes of social medium research" (Rogers, 2019: 7).

However, while I am using visual ethnography as a practice and an approach in its relationship to the sensory and the digital, to better understand the role that visual rhetoric plays in digital environments and at deep-subjective level, I am also using the method and approach of critical visual analysis of "global iconology" to develop an in-depth reflexive understanding of how visuals participate in the production of ethnographic knowledge and academic understanding of change in the

global age of data capitalism. Global iconology will assist to better understand how the prereflexive dimension of the social imaginary is turned into the symbolic and social construction of people's common sense of "the global" in their everyday life. To research the social app/network, I opened a private account on Instagram. This was necessary to research the app, due to the participatory and interactive nature of social media and the need of my investigation to take the form of social observing and listening to the contents and information produced online to uncover trends and insights that emerge from those data.³

THE SYMBOLIC SYSTEM OF INSTAGRAM

The search for the Instagram dataset on Google Scholar on January 18, 2022, in only 0.04 seconds returned about 59,400 conference papers and academic articles. A significant proportion of these publications and papers are from computer science and media studies. They have analyzed various aspects of the Instagram platform and its multiple users by means of large samples of data sets (photos) and their metadata. The attention to the social network clearly explains its importance. However, by contrast, in this study I will focus on "small data." If the term *big data* is about machines and quantitative methodology, *small data* is about people and qualitative methodology, which means that the data are accessible, informative, and actionable (Pollock, 2013).

I chose Instagram because, as a symbolic system, it was able to visually reimagine the relationship between human representation and Artificial Intelligence, mind and machine, and, specifically, because it was able, for the good and for the bad, to produce a global Instagrammar aesthetics. This technologically manipulated aesthetics also affects people who are not members of the digital community or who are simple followers, and for this reason it requires more attention. As a matter of fact, Instagram was able to combine in one single app/platform/medium a larger real-life experience as no other social media was able so far to achieve. Camera, photo paper, a darkroom, exhibition spaces such as private and public galleries, and publication venues such as magazines exist together in one app of people's smartphones (Manovich, 2017).

Beyond the technological, aesthetic, and ideological rupture represented by being the first dedicated visual social media allowing the production exchange and consumption of images, as previously already acknowledged, Instagram was able to establish a new global aesthetic: the "global Instagrammatic aesthetics (visual culture of social media)." By the term *global Instagrammatic aesthetics*, I mean the underlying approach, ideologies, and system of values that lead people (users and followers of the social network) to actively work on a continuous redefinition of their *digital self-branding*, which in other words means the ways in which they make use of images, colors, fonts, logos, layouts, tones, and filters to produce their *visual identity* on the digital set of their social relations that connects people through the

World Wide Web (social web). Thus, it can be said that from the birth of Instagram (October 6, 2010), with respect to “personal self-branding” (a uniform public image marketing strategy) and “visual rhetoric,” no matter if in the digital space of the Internet or in the physical world, nothing is anymore the same as it was before.

This study understands “visual rhetoric” as the study of visual communication and the investigation of how images work. In doing so, it also considers the ideological function of discourse as an interest of rhetoric, both in the stage of production and in that one of circulation and consumption. Visual rhetoric, the study of visual imagery within the discipline of rhetoric, is founded on its visual transdisciplinary nature. Specifically, I understand visual rhetoric as the means by which “visuals”—any types of visual imagery, still or moving—can be used by means of communication to shape people’s minds, lifestyles, opinions, and beliefs. Therefore, to study visual rhetoric, it is necessary to ask the question: “How do images act rhetorically upon viewers?” (Hill & Helmes, 2004). Interestingly, to assist their users and followers with a stronger real-life experience, and to fight the dominance of YouTube and Tick Tock in the visual social media experience, currently Instagram has opened to the moving image: the video (Mosseri, 2021). This will help to turn the social app into the *State of Visual Commerce*.

Instagram, owned by Facebook/Meta, celebrated its twelfth birthday in 2022; Instagram is the seventh most visited website in the world, the ninth most Googled search term, and the second most downloaded app in the world. A total of 1.22 billion people use Instagram each month; it is Gen Z’s favorite social platform. Instagram’s audience is split fairly evenly between males and females. India has the most Instagram users in the world; 59 percent of U.S. adults use Instagram daily (McLachlan, 2022).

THE DIGITAL DIMENSION OF THE MILLENNIAL’S DREAM

To provide one example of how image acts rhetorically upon viewers (users and followers), I identified a personality who works well as a transnational case. I chose to explore the millennial American socialite and media personality Kim Kardashian’s Instagram account (@kimkardashian). Although media are globally saturated with images of the American pop culture icon, I selected her Instagram account as a case study because it well condenses the *global Instagrammatic aesthetics* this study argues about. Assisted by the mobile app / social platform and the use of digital tools of photographic/visual aesthetic manipulation, Kim was able to turn herself from a “scandalous” millennial—a person reaching young adulthood in the early twenty-first century—into a global logo-brand and, more broadly, into an aesthetic paradigm shift: Kardashian Life (@kardashianlife). *Time Magazine* ranked the American socialite among its one hundred most influential people in 2021 (*Time*, 2021). She is currently one of the top fashion icons of the Hollywood industry,

and the UK-based start-up *Hopper HQ*—the Instagram planning and scheduling tool—*Official Instagram Richlist* (2018–21) ranked her number six on the list with 278 million followers (Social Tracker, n.d.). In January 2022, one of her Instagram posts was worth \$1,419,000. Furthermore, when in February 2021 America's self-made woman filed for divorce from husband Kanye West, her real-time net worth according to *Forbes* on September 06, 2022, was \$1.8 billion. Interestingly, with wall of fame and in the spare time, the global pop icon, core product of digital capitalism, currently seems also politically engaged (Instagrammar politics?), occasionally advocating for criminal justice reform, gun safety, and cancer causes.

Celebrity culture is an inescapable part of our media landscape and our everyday lives. Celebrity and fame could perhaps be also perceived as a new kind of contemporary religion for our culture (Douglas & McDonnell, 2019). The late Barbara Walters, an American broadcast journalist, author, and television personality, in an interview with the Kardashians on Walters's annual "10 Most Fascinating People" special in 2011, asked them, "You don't really act, you don't sing, you don't dance, you don't have any—forgive me—any talent!" Kim's answer was: "I think it's more of a challenge for you to go on a reality show and get people to fall in love with you for being you, so there is definitely a lot more pressure, I think, for being famous for being ourselves" (Marcus, 2011). It may be that Kim Kardashian has no particular skills or talent, as Walters stated in her viral interview (larfoutloudLOL, 2011). However, it can be argued that Kim was able to master her self-branding better than many entrepreneurs and marketing strategists (Blurter of brilliance, 2021).⁴

What we can learn from Kim Kardashian's Instagram case study is that conveying your brand's personality by means of strategic marketing in the form of a *visual-ideological identity* makes you look more professional and reliable. This will also give you a status, while helping your followers to instantly recognize your brand contents when they appear on the Instagram global mall, rather than in the shop in your neighborhood. What is more, self-branding assists in building loyalty and converting visitors to your profile into lifelong followers, which in other words means that by symbolic capitalization you can maximize your profits in the real world: a life insurance. However, it is worth observing that the extreme concentration of wealth, influence, and attention is a fundamental condition in the rising inequality affecting two-thirds of the globe (UNDESA, 2020).

It is not surprising that, in exploring the power of *aisthēsis* (sensation) in relation to the art of persuasion (rhetoric) and by focusing on the networked images of Kim Kardashian on Instagram, we can acknowledge that images, no matter if networked (digital) or analogue, capture moments that are *seldom comprehensive or entirely representative*, while text can provide broader and deeper context, as this study suggests. However, it can be argued that, in a world dominated by images, many more people see the pictures associated with a social network or news reports without ever reading the corresponding captions or the accompanying articles that provide the context for the images, while the *asymmetric visibility* of users that favors celebrities, influential institutions, and media-tech corporations

contributes to the global economic rising inequality and countries' asymmetric power relations.

Along with other participatory media, Instagram suggests, supports, and sustains the uses of *visual rhetoric* in order to allow businesses to effectively maximize the use of their platform and, in turn, maximize theirs and Instagram's profits. Visual rhetoric is the way rhetors use *symbolic images* to communicate, create meaning, make arguments, and persuade. An image as rhetorical device becomes a reality in itself. Corporations use visual rhetoric and the ability to persuade users and followers to buy their "products." Because Instagram is a visually based creative platform, corporations and global conglomerates make use of strategic communication by means of visual rhetoric practices for their social media posts to cater to their Instagram target audience and market globally. Although the connection between *rhetoric* (persuasion) and *aisthēsis* (sensation) is as ancient as human history (the Romans teach), rhetoric still can be used in a very powerful way due to the unchanged nature of human beings. The scholar of rhetoric Kenneth Burke observes that, wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric, and wherever there is "meaning" there is "persuasion" (Burke, 1969: 169–73).

In her book *No Filter*, Bloomberg social media expert Sarah Frier observes that it is perhaps enjoyable to think that bikini shots and Brazilian bum lifts are Instagram's biggest impact on society. However, the reality is much more complex and "people still know the way to win at Instagram is to do something visually arresting [. . .] I don't think that's going to go away." From the moment Instagram introduced reality-adjusting filters, it changed the way people, not only followers, present their selves to the world. A further striking observation in *No Filter* is that Instagram wanted to build a community that valued art and creativity. Instead, "they built a mall" (Frier, 2020). While much is made of beautiful influencers pushing diet pills and luxury travel on the app, *everyone on Instagram is selling their life in some way*. Nevertheless, whether you use the app or not, Instagram has shaped people's mindset, and for these reasons we must take it into due consideration. As a matter of fact, Instagram's dominance of the state of visual order in the global age of data capitalism acts as a lens on the whole of liberal democracies, though not exclusively, highlighting on the one hand our conflicting and anxious relationship with technology, on the other hand the battle between global media-tech giants for their most valuable commodity: people's attention.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: TOWARDS A GLOBAL MEDIA ORDER?

Moving towards an image-dominated society, visual technologies will no longer be an occasional issue of national security. Instead, they will be placed at the core of the web-centric society to operate 24/7 in order to surveil and control people's ordinary everyday life. What future generations will experience is a *global digital panopticon* made up by global media-tech giants to turn the complex society in

which we live into a web-centric society of surveillance and control under conditions of a global media order—something more sophisticated and violent, paradoxically “invisible,” than the reality we are experiencing now.

The global media order will emerge from inside the destabilized modern self-contained nation-state that is still at the core of current processes of reglobalization, by the same economic, political, and cultural forces. Ideologically fragmented by the transnational spread of nationalistic ideologies that are connected to the system of values and beliefs of populism and dominated by images, the current fragile multipolar world we live in will crash. This will occur due to the deep restructuration of the economic formation of capitalism into data capitalism, and by means of a *deep-technological mediatization* of people’s daily life.

Thus, it can be argued that, as a result of the digital restructuration of society by data capitalism and the use of big data as a new mode of capitalistic operation, in the context of an image-dominated world, media-tech giants will definitively contribute to colonizing our whole existence. As a matter of fact, our future in the global age of data capitalism and decentralized technologies (DeFi) will be built on the Ethereum blockchain—a decentralized blockchain platform. Currently, the rise of data capitalism and the digitization of our whole existence have already developed widespread concern, both in academic and public media discourse, regarding the dominance of social network echo chambers. At the same time, the function and power of visual intelligence systems—a computer science discipline that trains machines to make sense of visual images and visual data the same way people do—and of visibility are underestimated, if not disregarded.

Beyond people’s analog nostalgia, which can be considered as *modern antiques*, the transition to digital is marked by the downgrading of the human condition in the human-technology relationship. Therefore, we must confront digitality at subjective-objective level and at every scale of the global, which is “possible only when we recognize that our analogue essence has its real home only in nature.”⁵ Still, to confront digitality, the variables to be analyzed are too many, even when we use big data and Artificial Intelligence. What is more, under present economic conditions, controlling information means controlling the world. Just think about the influence that Facebook’s hidden algorithm, which prioritized the corporate business model above all other objectives, has had and still has on our politics.

Since capitalistic restructuration as well as global processes are in constant flux, in the era of planetary corporate capitalism, global Instagrammar politics and neural networks, without an appropriate confrontation/resistance at every scale of the global, fundamental things like power remain almost the same, this time in the hands of an elite group of authoritarian technocrats. What is concerning under data capitalism is the power of social networks and the fact that any resistance, fight, or protest, including the academic exercises of critique, are turned into stimulus to the continuous adjustments of the capitalist system, the same thing

these movements often intend to fight. This is because digital capitalism is able to devour everything that is produced, circulated, and consumed, in the name of the neoliberal marketized nature of society in which we live. Like with the symbol of Ouroboros—the snake or serpent eating its own tail, variously signifying infinity and the cycle of birth and death—capitalism is cannibalizing itself by turning our whole existence into a commodity ready to be consumed and, as a result, reified. Thus, the love and hate of capitalism, the critique of the system, is turned into the form that structures the *visual-ideological* (dominant) discourse, which according to Michel Foucault is intimately intertwined with relations of power (Foucault, 1980).

There is the high risk that social lives are separated from us and stored in servers owned and controlled by the technocracy represented by media-tech giants and that this will cause “algorithmic alienation” of users’ lives. A new technocratic world order and aesthetic regime of the global based on the marketization, surveillance, and control of people’s whole existence.⁶ A context in which the control of the wealth of the world will be in the hands of a bunch of technocrat billionaires who—right now—are designing humanity’s future.

NOTES

1. For arguments in “favor” or “failure” of “digitality,” see Azeem (2021). This passionate work by a technology analyst offers a set of policy solutions that can prevent the growing “exponential gap” from fragmenting, weakening, or even destroying our societies. This is a manifesto over the widening gap between AI, automation, and big data—and our ability to deal with its effects. The body of work by Fuchs (2014, 2021) (*Digital Capitalism* is volume 3 of a dedicated series) illuminates how digital capitalist society’s economy, politics, and culture work and interact. In Hassan (2020), the media theorist suggests that “digitality” is a condition and not an ideology of time and space, stressing that David Harvey’s time-space compression takes on new features including those of “outward” and “inward” globalization and the commodification of all spheres of existence. In doing so, he recognizes digitality as a new form of reality and the urgent need to assert more democratic control over it. In Negroponte (1995), the media theorist’s optimism is disarming in its empowerment of *being digital*. In order to understand the importance of “big data” and why you cannot manage something if you cannot measure it, see McAfee & Brynjolfsson (2012). I also suggest reading a provocative piece, by the editor of *Wired*, Chris Anderson (2008), titled “The End of Theory.” Anderson was referring to the ways computers, algorithms, and big data can potentially generate more insightful, useful, accurate, or true results than specialists who traditionally craft targeted hypotheses and research strategies. For an argument in favor of why theory matters even more in the Global Age of “big data,” see Wise & Shaffer (2015).

2. For comprehensive studies on “reglobalization,” see Benedikter, Gruber, & Kofler (2022) and Steger & James (2019: 199).

3. For more information, see Durante (n.d., 2021, 2022).

4. Kim Kardashian’s Instagram page is at www.instagram.com/kimkardashian/.

5. On the issue of the transition to digitality as “analog” human beings see Hassan (2022) and Hassan & Sutherland (2017: 225). On the topic of “blockchain” see Casey & Vigna (2019).

6. On the topic of “algorithmic alienation,” see Andrejevic (2014) and Fuchs (2022: 207–8).

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