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Post-Symbolic Coloniality: The Metasimulacrum of Otherness in Digital Culture

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Abstract

This article develops the concept of the metasimulacrum of otherness to analyze the structural transformations of difference in digital culture. Unlike traditional representations of otherness, the metasimulacrum reorganizes the very conditions of perception, producing otherness as a managed, aestheticized, and commodified flow. Digital platforms no longer marginalize or suppress difference; they integrate it into the architecture of engagement, neutralizing its disruptive force through algorithmic formatting. Otherness becomes a preformatted stimulus—clickable, reproducible, and emotionally manageable—without preserving its political or subjective density. This dynamic is situated within a broader framework of post-symbolic coloniality, where visibility itself becomes a mechanism of control rather than liberation. The analysis traces how platforms engineer conditions in which alterity appears safe, consumable, and endlessly circulated, while any radical rupture is filtered out. The article critiques liberal hopes of visibility as empowerment, arguing that digital spectacularization of otherness demands a radical rethinking of ethical relations. It proposes an ethics of refusal—respecting the Other's right to opacity and withdrawal from the economies of attention. Ultimately, the metasimulacrum of otherness reveals how difference is preserved not to challenge, but to stabilize the algorithmic logic of contemporary platform capitalism.

Keywords

Post-Symbolic Coloniality; Metasimulacrum; Algorithmic Visibility; Interface; Digital Coloniality; Ethics of Otherness

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Постсимволическая колониальность: метасимулякр инаковости в цифровой культуре

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Аннотация

В данной статье разрабатывается концепт метасимулякра инаковости для анализа структурных трансформаций различия в цифровой культуре. В отличие от традиционных репрезентаций инаковости, метасимулякр перестраивает сами условия восприятия, производя инаковость как управляемый, эстетизированный и коммерциализированный поток. Цифровые платформы больше не маргинализируют и не подавляют различие, они интегрируют его в архитектуру вовлечения, нейтрализуя его подрывной потенциал через алгоритмическое форматирование. Инаковость становится заранее отформатированным стимулом, то есть кликабельным, воспроизводимым и эмоционально управляемым, но лишённым политической и субъективной плотности. Эта динамика помещается в более широкий контекст постсимволической колониальности, где сама видимость превращается в механизм контроля, а не освобождения. Анализ прослеживает, как платформы конструируют условия, при которых инаковость предстаёт как безопасная, потребляемая и бесконечно циркулирующая, в то время как любое радикальное прерывание отфильтровывается. Статья критикует либеральные надежды на видимость как форму наделения властью, утверждая, что цифровая спектакуляризация инаковости требует радикального переосмысления этических отношений. В качестве альтернативы предлагается этика отказа — уважение права Другого на непрозрачность и выход из экономики внимания. В конечном счёте, метасимулякр инаковости показывает, как различие сохраняется не для вызова, а для стабилизации алгоритмической логики современного платформенного капитализма.

Ключевые слова

постсимволическая колониальность; метасимулякр; алгоритмическая видимость; интерфейс; цифровая колониальность; этика инаковости

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Introduction: The Production of Differences as Managed Aesthetic Visibility

Today, the major digital platforms—TikTok, Facebook*[1], Instagram*[2], and YouTube—have long ceased to operate merely as arenas of communication. They have been transformed into sophisticated machines for sorting, filtering, and redistributing the visible—complex mechanisms of platform-based capture. As Geert Lovink observes, these are not "neutral" technologies of information transmission but meticulously engineered environments designed to compel engagement (Lovink, 2022), where algorithms do not reflect reality but rather predict and modulate behavior, subordinating the subject to the rhythm of perpetual involvement.

Within this new regime, otherness—whether racial, gendered, or cultural—loses its critical force. It no longer presents a rupture or a limit to thought but becomes yet another module in the architecture of entertainment, a further component in the production line of "virality" and "viewability." Alternative subjectivity no longer tears through the fabric of the algorithmic field; it is formatted, calculated, and rendered into "content" optimized for circulation. As Wendy Chun emphasizes, difference today is not so much erased in digital space as it is processed through algorithmic correlations, reinforcing entrenched lines of discrimination under the guise of objective data handling (Chun & Barnett, 2021, p. 58).

As Tarleton Gillespie has noted, algorithms do not act as mirrors of society; they function as moderators, curators of the visible, deciding what merits visibility and what must disappear (Gillespie, 2018, p. 22). Although platforms publicly continue to profess the myths of "neutrality" and "free speech," their operative logic is that of selection and the optimization of engagement. Visibility today is regulated not according to political salience or ethical recognition of alterity but according to the maximization of engagement.

This dynamic is embedded within a broader economic formation that Shoshana Zuboff has termed "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2019). In this regime, human experience is neither an end in itself nor an intrinsic value; it is raw material for algorithmic factories of prediction. Not merely information about the Other, but behavioral patterns themselves are commodified and sold on markets of future behavior. In this process, otherness is subordinated to the utilitarian imperatives of predictability. Thus, the platform does not merely display the Other; it produces the Other in a consumable format. Whereas once the image of the Other preserved

1 The platform belongs to Meta, a company recognized as extremist in Russia. Hereinafter references will be accompanied by an asterisk *

2 The platform belongs to Meta, a company recognized as extremist in Russia. Hereinafter references will be accompanied by an asterisk *

the potential for rupture, scandal, or challenge, it is now absorbed into the algorithmic logic of smoothing difference into a managed aesthetic.

In classical forms of marginalization, otherness was relegated to the peripheries of the visible: the Other inhabited the blind spots of social imagination, threatening the norm while remaining absent from its public representations. However, the algorithmic culture of platforms introduces a paradoxical reversal: otherness is no longer exiled. Instead, it is put on display—but precisely as content, as an element within the aesthetic program of endless circulation. As Sara Ahmed observes, emotions, rather than being internal states, are practices of public orientation capable not only of constituting collective bodies but also of neutralizing alterity, transforming it into an object of emotional consumption (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10). While emotions can imbue otherness with the charge of fear, disgust, or anger, in algorithmic spaces they increasingly operate otherwise: packaging alterity into sanitized forms compatible with the cultural logic of pleasure and entertainment.

It is within this process that what Catherine Squires terms "post-racial mystification" takes shape: otherness becomes safe, manageable, stripped of its political sharpness (Squires, 2014, p. 7). Diversity, once intended to provoke debates about power, justice, and reparation, is transfigured into a backdrop—a ritualized acknowledgment of multiplicity without any genuine reckoning with historical trauma. In the aestheticized environment of platforms, the Other is omnipresent but only in sterilized form: as "interesting difference" rather than as political provocation. Ahmed aptly notes that emotions create the surfaces of collective bodies through acts of adhesion (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10), producing what appear to be natural boundaries between "us" and "them." Yet whereas emotions once unsettled these boundaries, exposing their vulnerability, today, within algorithmic capitalism, they increasingly serve to smooth differences, capitalizing on them in the form of attractiveness. Otherness no longer threatens; it is marketed. Algorithms do not expel the Other; they reformat it to solicit not fear but likes, shares, and instantaneous consumption.

This transition—from otherness as a site of challenge to otherness as a commodity—marks a fundamental mutation in the very political nature of visibility. The platform no longer hides the Other. Rather, it renders their presence safe for the majority—so safe that presence itself becomes toothless, rendered decorative. Visibility without subjectivity; alterity without otherness.

In this sense, we may say that the Other today is not so much marginalized as integrated into the center of attention—but in a sterilized form that forecloses the possibility of genuine political emergence. The circulation of otherness within algorithmic spaces is thus the circulation of content, not contestation.

Here, I propose the following hypothesis: digital culture does not merely represent otherness; it reproduces colonial mechanisms of appropriation. What we are witnessing is not the violent suppression of the Other but the integra-

tion of alterity into the algorithmic matrix of clickability, reproducibility, and predictability. Just as the colonial gaze once transformed the Other into an object of anthropological fascination, an exhibit, or a commodity, digital platforms now render the Other into a module of templated consumption—instantaneous, scalable, and algorithmically managed.

Walter Mignolo has argued that Western modernity is inseparable from its darker side—coloniality (Mignolo, 2011). Digital culture, as its contemporary avatar, inherits this dual structure: the rhetoric of openness, globality, and "accessibility for all" merely masks underlying mechanisms of structural capture. Algorithms do not merely process data about the Other; they extract alterity into a commodified form, erasing context, political pain, and trauma. What once required expeditions, study, and domination in classical colonialism is now achieved through code—automated, faceless, and nameless, but guided by the same vector of power.

Paola Ricaurte explicitly names this dynamic "digital coloniality": a new form of expansion in which data becomes the territory of capture, and information extraction operates as a displacement of alternative worlds (Ricaurte, 2019, p. 351–352). Rather than moderating visibility, platforms construct permissible ways of being Other within the logic of data: ways that are compatible, monetizable, and predictable. The rebellion of alterity—the possibility of alternative ways of being—is thus domesticated within algorithmic networks.

In this context, the critique advanced by Safiya Noble becomes particularly urgent: algorithms are not only non-neutral but are embedded within the infrastructures of structural racism and gendered hierarchy (Noble, 2018, p. 108). Giants like Google, behind the façade of convenience and universality, actively participate in the redistribution of social power, reinforcing existing asymmetries. The platform does not merely find the Other; it defines what the Other must be in order to become visible. Under such conditions, digital culture does not present a plurality of possible worlds but rather a mechanism for replicating a singular world, where the Other exists only as a functional element within the networked economy of attention. Platform coloniality does not expel the Other; it transforms the Other into a resource. This is its most insidious feature: appropriation without overt violence, control without expulsion, the disappearance of alterity under the guise of its endless availability.

To analyze the mechanisms of platform coloniality of otherness, I introduce the concept of the *metasimulacrum*. Unlike the classical simulacrum described by Jean Baudrillard, which conceals the absence of a referent, the metasimulacrum operates more actively and insidiously: it does not merely replace reality with an image; it produces the very regimes of perception. Within digital culture, the Other exists not as a real difference but as a managed, aesthetically formatted structure of visibility.

Jean Baudrillard argued that simulacra of the third order do not conceal reality but function in its place (Baudrillard, 2022, p. 382). Yet within algorithmic culture,

we encounter a novel configuration: the *metasimulacrum* not only substitutes for reality but actively models the very conditions of perceiving otherness. It transforms difference into a reproducible pattern—clickable, predictable, and economically managed. Here, the radical reconfiguration of the visible in the digital era becomes apparent. As Byung-Chul Han emphasizes, the digital space abolishes the distance necessary for respect and reflection (Han & Butler, 2017, p. 1–2): interaction with the Other now becomes an immediate reaction—a like, a dislike—rather than a process of contemplation. In this way, the metasimulacrum of otherness strips difference of its depth, of its disruptive force. The Other becomes a convenient object for instantaneous affective response rather than a subject of dialogue.

In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti highlights that under posthumanist conditions, the figure of the autonomous subject with a stable identity disappears (Braidotti, 2013, p. 101). Strikingly, the metasimulacrum of otherness fits seamlessly into this logic: otherness is not encountered as the experience of an alien consciousness but as an element of the circulating flow of signs, endlessly remixable without threatening the cognitive boundaries of the self. In this sense, the metasimulacrum departs both from the classical simulacrum and from traditional mechanisms of capitalist recuperation of difference, as described by Mark Fisher (Fisher, 2009, p. 15). While for Fisher capitalism neutralized and commercialized difference through aesthetic incorporation, the metasimulacrum preemptively models difference to be commodifiable from the outset. Difference is projected in the format of algorithmic predictability: the Other appears as always already familiar, recognizable, and emotionally manageable. Thus, the metasimulacrum of otherness is neither the representation of the Other nor its simulation. It is the production of a reality in which otherness is from the beginning disarmed, rendered into a module for the circulation of attention. Here, difference no longer resists the structure of visibility; it is produced by it.

Within the logic of digital platforms, otherness is integrated into the center of attention. Yet this attention is impersonal: the Other appears not as a subject carrying a challenge but as a formatted, consumable object. The paradox of this new publicity lies in the fact that otherness becomes universally accessible and yet radically devalued. This situation fundamentally departs from the bourgeois model of the public sphere described by Jürgen Habermas, wherein rational-critical debate was assumed to be the condition of political legitimacy (Habermas, 1991). In platform economies, as Nancy Fraser has shown, the illusion of participant equality becomes untenable (Fraser, 1990, p. 60): status differences are not bracketed out but structurally reproduced, now within algorithmically managed flows of visibility. Today's otherness becomes visible not despite structural barriers but through them, and precisely as a strategic resource for the capitalization of attention.

Here, the digital logic reveals what Fraser called the “dark side of publicity”: power over visibility is redistributed but not eliminated; on the contrary, it is intensified through new mechanisms of filtering and selection (Fraser, 1990, p. 60–61).

In this process, otherness loses the political unpredictability that Hannah Arendt celebrated as the source of new beginnings, indeterminacy, and freedom inherent in the act of appearing (Arendt, 1998). In digital culture, otherness is aestheticized, archived, and transformed into a content module—something to be liked, shared, and forgotten.

Thus, whereas for Habermas the public sphere was an arena for rational discussion of common concerns, today it has become an arena for the algorithmic selection of affective objects (van Dijck 2013, p. 17). As Zeynep Tufekci insightfully notes, digital action tends toward signaling rather than transformation (Tufekci, 2017): algorithms amplify the capacity for swift mobilization but erode the potential for sustained institutional action. The platform does not simply permit otherness; it constructs it in a form compatible with the attention economy—safe, commodifiable, stripped of the dangerous unpredictability that the Other traditionally brought into the space of living action. This, then, is the logic of the *metasimulacrum* of otherness: the production of difference as managed aesthetic visibility, neutralized for capitalist consumption of attention.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework: Metasimulation or Platform Colonialism?

The *metasimulacrum* of otherness constitutes the central analytical tool of this study. Unlike Baudrillard's classical simulacrum, which masks the absence of a referent behind the brilliance of the copy (Baudrillard, 2022, p. 385), the metasimulacrum does not conceal a void. Rather, it defines the very conditions of visibility: it pre-codes what may be perceived as otherness and dictates the format in which this perception must occur. The metasimulacrum is an architecture of imaginal perception, embedded within the digital interface, the algorithm, the screen. Baudrillard described the simulacrum as the disappearance of reality in favor of a play of signs, where the distinction between truth and its falsification becomes impossible (Baudrillard, 2022, p. 382). However, in algorithmic culture, the issue is no longer the play between truth and its absence. The metasimulacrum constructs the reality of perception itself as a space of programmable differences, optimized for the demands of attention circulation.

In *The Transparency Society*, Byung-Chul Han notes how the pressures of transparency and immediate accessibility flatten alterity, strip interactions of depth, and reduce communication to a shallow flow of stimuli (Han, 2015, vii–viii). His critique reinforces my argument: the metasimulacrum of otherness does not conceal the Other but renders it immediately accessible—not as a real subject, but as a functional element of the algorithmic economy of attention. It eliminates the distance necessary for the reflective apprehension of difference. In this logic, the metasimulacrum of otherness must be understood not as a distortion or falsification of the Other, but as the formation of a governing logic of difference—an aesthetically formatted, predictable, and commodifiable visibility. Here, other-

ness does not oppose structures of power; it becomes an active resource for them: adjustable, modular, and fully compatible with the imperatives of digital capitalism.

This marks a crucial departure from earlier models of representation that still assumed the possibility of deformation or critique: in the case of the metasimulacrum, the very possibility of alterity as disruption is foreclosed. The algorithm does not permit the threat of the unexpected. It permits only controlled "otherness," aesthetically formatted for the production of clicks, likes, and views.

Baudrillard convincingly argued that in postmodernity, images cease to represent reality—they steal it, murder it without leaving traces (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 6). The real does not vanish into illusion; rather, illusion vanishes into an integral reality that no longer tolerates difference or duality. However, platform logic moves even further: it codes the very conditions of perception and interaction with the visible. Today, otherness in digital space functions not as a sign of an absent referent but as a viral simulation engineered for maximum engagement. It is constructed by algorithms not as an Other to be understood, but as an Other to be clicked. In this shift, the metasimulacrum of otherness does not simply mask the disappearance of alterity in favor of empty form; it reorganizes the structure of perception itself, rewriting the very possibility of difference according to the operational logic of attention circulation.

Whereas for Baudrillard the simulacrum masked the loss of reality, the metasimulacrum operates more insidiously: it produces a type of "reality" that integrates alterity into a regime of predicative power—one that no longer requires either representation or negation but only the management of formats of appearance. Baudrillard still discerned a residual trace of the crime: the very fact that the world presented itself through visibility was, for him, evidence against reality (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 1–2). Today, however, we are confronted with a system in which even the "trace" is absorbed into planned production: the algorithm itself designs the routes of perception, such that the crime leaves no illusory residue. Thus, the metasimulacrum of otherness transforms the real into an interface of managed difference. Otherness is no longer hidden behind signs; it is placed on display—but only in a sterilized form, compatible with the interests of the platform economy: predictable, safe, commodifiable. Paradoxically, the more otherness appears on screens, the less it exists in the space of lived experience. For screen-mediated otherness is no longer the alterity of the Other; it is otherness under the dominion of algorithms.

Homi Bhabha captured the ambiguity of colonial mimicry in its oscillation between similarity and difference: "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 2003, p. 89). Mimicry, in his account, constitutes the persistent slippage of alterity through the colonial order—a reproduction of difference precisely at the moment of its supposed eradication. However, algorithmic culture produces a new type of mimicry: not ambivalent, but predictable. Here, otherness no longer threatens, irritates, or disrupts the order; it is synchronized with it, embedded within the metric

machinery of clicks and likes. Rather than being "almost the same but not quite," the Other becomes precisely what the algorithm expects: the Asian influencer emphasizing kawaii aesthetics, Black joy stripped of radical critique of racism, queer fashion presented as stylized decor devoid of political sharpness. The colonial gaze analyzed by Bhabha as a source of traumatic alterity mutates into an algorithmic gaze that recognizes otherness only within the bounds of its functional compatibility with engagement metrics. Ambivalence vanishes; in its place emerges the smooth production of "difference without difference," where alterity persists merely as modular exoticism devoid of friction.

Sara Ahmed insisted that otherness is not merely a sign or image but an embodied experience saturated with bodily affects (Ahmed, 2013, p. 38–40). The racialized, gendered, and cultural body bears not only the mark of distinction but also the scars of historical encounters. In digital culture, however, the body of the Other remains visible but is stripped of weight: it becomes an interface, a slippery surface for conversion into views. The algorithm manages the visibility of the body, severing it from affective depth, depriving it of the capacity to express suffering, anger, or resistance. The body is present, but as an object of consumption, not as a subject of experience. In this context, we can recall Robert Young's insight that colonialism has always been not only an economic but also an aesthetic project of difference management (Young, 2016, p. 4–6). Postcolonial alterity within digital spaces continues this logic: control is no longer exercised through stigmatization or exclusion but through curated hypervisibility. The algorithmic platform does not deny the Other—it curates, anticipates, and modulates alterity. Here, the *metasimulacrum* of otherness reveals itself fully: it does not conceal or annihilate difference but produces it in a managed form—as aestheticized exoticism, as "diversity" emptied of political context. Otherness becomes simultaneously ubiquitous and toothless: it can be seen everywhere but cannot be truly experienced.

The virtual stage of platforms intensifies the process described by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*: life is no longer lived but staged, and meaning dissolves into endless circulation of images (Debord, 2002). Yet today the spectacle engineers alterity as a preprogrammed module, embedded within the algorithmic dramaturgy of virality. The platform emerges as a new director who does not conceal the script: algorithms rigidly structure visibility, turning expressions of difference into carefully curated, aesthetically optimized roles. Debord still hoped that reality might be glimpsed behind the spectacle; today, the reality of the Other is formatted according to the imperatives of maximum clickability. There is no space for disruption, no event of genuine alterity. Otherness is permitted not as a challenge but as a predictable artifact of consumption.

In this sense, we are not merely witnessing another stage of capitalist spectacle but a new phase of coloniality, as theorized by Mignolo and Quijano (Mignolo, 2011, p. 16). Coloniality has not disappeared with the formal end of colonial empires; it has mutated, embedding itself within the architecture of data and

the logic of visibility moderation. Control is no longer exercised by excluding otherness from the public sphere, as in traditional colonial regimes; instead, otherness is incorporated as a decorative element within the consumable world-interface. Algorithmic publicity thus emerges as a new epistemic regime of power: it governs who may be seen and in what form. Otherness loses its affective, embodied, and political density, becoming a managed aesthetic category.

Rosi Braidotti, in *The Posthuman*, already emphasized that the subject of the platform age is neither a source of meaning nor a center of agency; it is itself the product of networked construction (Braidotti, 2013, p. 103). In this logic, otherness is no longer the recognition of the Other as radical alterity; it becomes an interface function of difference, integrated into the structure of digital commodity circulation. We are moving from otherness as challenge to otherness as algorithmic effect, from the Other to a posthuman construction of difference. It is precisely here that the concept of the *metasimulacrum* of otherness becomes an essential analytical tool: the issue is no longer the simulation of the image of the Other in Baudrillard's sense (where the absence of a referent is concealed) but the production of the very architecture of perceiving alterity as an algorithmically managed phenomenon. The metasimulacrum creates an interface of difference subordinated to the logic of clicks, likes, and viral success. And if Debord viewed the spectacle as the alienation of reality, the *metasimulacrum* of otherness is the production of managed alterity as a pseudo-event—an event that seems to manifest but in reality constitutes an act of programmed repetition. Platform culture thus does not merely inherit the colonial matrix of power; it radicalizes it, extending control not merely over territories and bodies but over the very possibility of being perceived as otherness.

Can the Other Once Again Become an Event Rather than a Function?

The platform renders otherness visible, but within a logic that neutralizes it as a challenge. Today, otherness emerges not as an event, not as the unsettling irruption of difference, but as a streaming attraction. In this world of clips and endless feeds, a video of street food in Delhi, a recording of an ethnic dance, or a queer performance is severed from its specific contexts, traditions, pains, and struggles. They become pure surfaces, instantly consumed by the gaze. Already in the 1990s, bell hooks described the transformation of otherness into a "spice"—a temptation to consume the Other as a means of revitalizing a tired white culture (hooks, 2010, p. 366). Yet the platform radicalizes this transformation: it is no longer merely a culinary metaphor of difference but the complete sterilization of context. Street food in India is presented not as a practice rooted in histories of famine, colonial oppression, and local economies but as "vivid exoticism" compressed into one minute of visual consumption. The tribal dance becomes

a movement detached from ritual; the queer performance becomes a stylish visual flash, stripped of its political sharpness.

The algorithm amplifies precisely the forms of otherness that excite but do not demand understanding. It programs short bursts of affective stimulation—delight, surprise, amusement—while blocking the pathways to cognitive work and ethical encounters with the Other. Spectacle triumphs over reality; style eclipses substance. We do not see otherness; we scroll through it.

Anne Anlin Cheng, analyzing the phenomenon of the ornamental body, notes how the body of the Other is turned into decoration (Cheng, 2019, p. 56). Yet whereas in her account ornament still bears the trace of trauma, on the platform even this trace disappears: the body loses not only its political pain but also the residue of resistance. It becomes an interface of pleasure: smooth, convenient, clickable. Thus, the platform restructures the very ontology of otherness. Difference is admitted, but only in a sterilized form compatible with the economy of attention: it must be brief, vivid, toothless, and shallow. It must arouse without demanding; it must delight without unsettling.

Whereas in earlier colonial regimes the Other was a threat to be expelled or dominated, within the logic of algorithmic publicity, otherness is admitted under the condition of complete political and affective neutralization. The Other circulates endlessly through the feed—not as a subject, but as a flavor. And the flavor must leave no aftertaste.

Algorithmic culture admits otherness but only under the condition of castration. It welcomes difference not as a challenge but as a decorative accessory for the viral economy of attention. Here, otherness is stripped of language, of pain, of density. It must touch but not affect; it must please but not wound.

When Safiya Noble speaks of "algorithms of oppression," she points to a deeper process: algorithms do not merely reflect social prejudices; they produce conditions of visibility in which otherness ceases to pose a threat (Noble, 2018, p. 150–151). In classical coloniality, otherness was a battleground; in digital coloniality, it becomes raw material for brief affective excitation. As Paola Ricaurte astutely observes, algorithmic infrastructures do not merely process data; they impose a new epistemological regime in which possible worlds are reduced to streams of managed circulation (Ricaurte, 2019, p. 350–351).

This logic manifests especially clearly in contemporary cases of platform aesthetics. Consider, for instance, the phenomenon of the *clean girl aesthetic* on TikTok and Instagram*: a minimalist, tightly controlled visuality in which bodies of minority women are folded into a narrative of "universal cleanliness." In this aesthetic, there is no space for histories of colonialism, racial violence, or trauma—only glowing skin, sleek hair, and serene smiles. Or consider the format of viral *healing journeys*, where personal tragedies are repackaged into montages of beautiful imagery set to the sounds of nature. Pain is packaged as inspiration; trauma is transfigured into a likeable aesthetic. If a Black girl appears, or if it is

a queer story, it is not a challenge to the status quo but a new variation on the theme of individualized self-overcoming without social critique.

Similarly, the phenomenon of *street interviews* featuring Black or Latino youth: the algorithms amplify lighthearted, digestible answers, in which urban experiences are reduced to amusing anecdotes. Subjectivity becomes a fleeting flash rather than an act of political testimony.

It is crucial to recognize how illusory the liberal hope in the "expansion of visibility" as a self-evident good proves to be. Today, it is precisely the abundance of visibility that becomes a mechanism of suppression: the more the Other appears in the feed, the less the Other exists in reality. The Other is omnipresent but in a form that forecloses the possibility of political action. The liberal myth proclaims: show more difference, and there will be more justice. Platform reality responds: show more difference, and there will be more clicks.

Here, otherness does not threaten the order; on the contrary, it guarantees its stability by dissolving into the ornamentality of consumption. The Other exists only so long as they smile, dance, inspire—but do not make demands. This is the logic of algorithmic castration: the Other is represented but immobilized; given a face but stripped of a voice; visible but inaudible.

In this sense, the platform reproduces the Other as a convenient difference: beautiful, fleeting, safe. It constructs a world in which any difference must be as palatable as a trend and as quickly forgotten as a story. If once the castration of the Other was an act of violence, today it is an act of self-optimization: seeking to be seen, the Other voluntarily adjusts their body, their speech, and their affectivity to the demands of the algorithm. Thus occurs the final capitulation of difference: its voluntary standardization.

As a result, genuine alterity—the kind that does not fit into algorithmic comfort—disappears. That which refuses to be liked no longer deserves to be seen.

Yet alterity does not vanish from the digital field. On the contrary, it becomes increasingly omnipresent. But this presence does not restore otherness as event, encounter, or challenge. It is formatted by the algorithm: pre-coded, smoothed, reduced to a shape that admits otherness as an element of spectacular circulation but not as a subject of action. Instead of excluding otherness, the platform offers it as spectacle: a visual image, a dance, a trope that briefly animates the frame and then disappears without leaving a trace. Otherness becomes a reheated product, a fleeting scene of admiration or cuteness—but not a site of relation, not a site of responsibility. We do not see the Other; we see the Other's role in the digital theater of recurring differences.

Byung-Chul Han notes that in the society of transparency, not only the depth of action but even the possibility of delay, hesitation, and resistance disappears (Han, 2015, p. 5). In this context, otherness cannot establish itself as an experience of difference; it is structured to immediately pass into the next frame, the next wave

of clicks. The algorithm cannot tolerate density, eventfulness, or slow perception. It demands flashes, afterglows, instant excitations without durable bonds.

In this way, otherness undergoes a new form of exile: not exile from visibility, but exile of subjectivity from within visibility itself. Otherness is admitted only as style, as the effect of difference—but not as a political gesture, not as an epistemological rupture. No weight of history, no pain of the body, no threat to the dominant discourse. Only encoded difference. In the endless chain of representations, the Other loses selfhood: their function is reduced to sustaining the dynamics of engagement. They must be noticed, but not heard; seen, but not understood; seen—and immediately replaced by another image, another gesture, another trick.

The *metasimulacrum* of otherness functions here as an invisible interface through which difference is admitted into perception. We do not see the Other. We see the structure into which the Other is inserted: a visual pattern that must be instantly legible and just as instantly forgettable. Otherness ceases to be a subject of experience; it becomes a function of the algorithmic world. Its task is to decorate, not to rupture the fabric of digital everyday life, but to guarantee its smooth, uninterrupted glide.

This is how a new phase of post-symbolic coloniality manifests itself: governance not directly over people but over the signs of their difference. Control is exercised not through prohibition but through the programming of perceptual formats. The Other becomes a fragment of the streaming world, a managed element within the endless gloss of differences without distinction.

Difference is admitted not as a threat to order but as its embellishment. Its visibility becomes a new form of invisibility. Such is the logic of digital coloniality: domesticated alterity, managed through centralized architectures of data. Walter Mignolo is right to insist that coloniality is an epistemological project that outlives physical empires (Mignolo, 2011, p. 161–162). Yet he may not be radical enough on one crucial point: today, power not only structures what we know—it structures what we see and how we see it. Within the platform environment, attention has become a new territory, and difference a new raw material.

When Ramon Amaro analyzes how machine learning technologies reduce the Black body to an "object of technical processing" (Amaro, 2022), he exposes a deeper truth of the digital epoch: the Other is presented but deprived of subjectivity—not through violence or expulsion, but through the programmatic reduction of difference into aesthetic code.

In the algorithmic regime, alterity becomes an element of the interface economy: image replaces voice, style replaces experience, clickability replaces will. Protests are transfigured into flash mobs, and the bitterness of historical pain is recoded into joyful dances set to TikTok music. The body of the Other itself becomes a transparent structure, formatted according to the parameters of platform virality: positive, vibrant, safe for liking.

Today's coloniality is the governance of regimes of representation. It operates not by expelling otherness but by symbolically castrating it—by stripping it of the capacity to act, to disrupt, to insist on its own presence. Within this digital metasimulacrum, the Other exists only in order not to exist.

And if Mignolo rightly calls for the decolonization of Western epistemology (Mignolo, 2011), we must go further: the task today is not only to shift the content of knowledge but to dismantle the very platform architectures of visibility in which difference is turned into décor. It is not enough to build "alternative modernities"; it is necessary to radically transform the architectures of perception themselves—so that the Other might once again become an event rather than a function.

Discussion: How Can We Liberate the Other from the Regime of Interface Virality?

In digital space, visibility is no longer synonymous with presence. On the contrary, it is at the moment when otherness becomes maximally accessible that it loses its capacity to be a subject. Digital culture constructs horizons of otherness as manageable, predictable objects, fit for circulation within the algorithmic economy of attention. Sara Ahmed aptly notes that emotions structure not only perception but the very fabric of collective bodies: bodies are formed at the surface of contacts, through "touches" that already code the Other as the source of a particular affect (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10). Yet where, for Ahmed, emotions retain the potential to redistribute sensibility and unsettle social bonds, in the algorithmic field emotions no longer function as acts of genuine contact but as acts of adhesion within preformatted circuits. The algorithm does not allow us to be truly "moved" by the Other; it preprograms which emotions are permitted and in what forms. Love for otherness? Yes, but in the form of a like, not in the form of political recognition. Interest? Yes, but interest as content consumption, not as an encounter with a subject.

bell hooks captured this process when she described the "consumption" of otherness within mass culture: the Other becomes a spice in the dish of white cultural production (hooks, 2010, p. 366). The visibility of difference is sold as a new pleasure—but precisely as a pleasure of consumption, not as an ethical disruption. Difference becomes a commodity, and in its commodified form it loses its subjective density. Yet even as hooks registers this transformation of otherness into "seasoning," she still maintains hope for resistance through the erotic and political dimensions of the desire for the Other. In the platform architectures of today, this hope is radically diminished: the algorithm not only commercializes difference, it structures the very possibility of perceiving it. Desire for the Other? Fine—but only in a form compatible with the politics of the feed.

The digital image of the Other becomes not a window but a boundary. It is a one-way window: it permits the seeing of "difference" without hearing the voice. Algorithms show bodies but sever them from their histories and wills.

The more the Other is made visible, the less they are able to speak. This is the paradox of digital openness: accessibility of otherness does not liberate it—it paralyzes it. The Other becomes maximally proximate and maximally impermeable. Their real presence dissolves into the endless circulation of signs, where difference is just one among millions of stimuli for affective excitation. The feed does not build relationships; it manages excitations. And the more we are "touched" by otherness in this regime, the less we truly enter into an ethical encounter with the Other.

Thus, the politics of digital visibility does not constitute liberation but a new form of epistemological control: attention is managed, difference is processed, but the subjectivity of the Other remains out of reach.

Habermas still believed in the possibility of a space where opinions meet, arguments are weighed, and consensus is reached through the force of the better argument (Habermas, 1991). But in the logic of digital platforms, argument vanishes behind affect, and attention supersedes rationality. Platforms do not create the conditions for a public sphere in the Habermasian sense; they create architectures of attention, where communication exists only insofar as it can trigger bursts of emotional activity, be noticed, processed, and forgotten. As Zizi Papacharissi emphasizes, digital space produces a *public place* rather than a *public sphere*: it permits opinion exchange but does not obligate mutual understanding (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 127). This produces a new form of alienation: the Other exists not as a voice demanding response, but as a visual stimulus. Otherness becomes fuel for algorithms that sort not truth from falsehood but weak from strong affective responses.

Thus, following Shoshana Zuboff (2019), we can claim: the algorithmic environment replaces communication with architectures of attention control, where success is measured not by truth but by the number of clicks.

In this world, even action—Arendt's fundamental category of political life—loses its true content. For Arendt, political action emerges only where people meet freely, in plurality, recognizing the Other as an equal participant in the shared world (Arendt, 1998). Yet on platforms, action is simulated: flash mobs, challenges, digital protests are all reduced to performances for an anonymous gaze. Paolo Gerbaudo aptly shows how digital activism submits to this logic (Gerbaudo, 2019, p. 5): political parties morph into startups, and acts of citizenship are reconstituted as branding units. Protest ceases to be an event of change; it becomes an episode in the feed. Flash mobs replace assemblies, likes replace consent, and clicks replace promises.

Yet it is important to emphasize: the issue is not the betrayal of original ideals but the transformation of the very environment. As Zizi Papacharissi rightly notes, it was not digital technologies that failed the public sphere (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 127–128)—the Habermasian model of publicity itself was incompatible with the new organization of attention structured by algorithmic modalities . What we

are witnessing is not so much the collapse of rationality as its displacement by emotional-affective regimes of belonging.

This leads to the central challenge: is it still possible to speak of political action in the Arendtian sense—as the interaction of free and equal individuals—within a medium where actions dissolve into the endless play of representations, and the Other becomes merely another visual stimulus? The platform offers echoes but not answers, performances but not actions, networked noise but not publicity.

Within the logic of the *metasimulacrum*, otherness is no longer permitted the right to silence. It must be formatted, captured, filtered, and incorporated into the circulation of signs. Silence in the platform environment is perceived not as a sign of dignity but as a coding error; disappearance from the networked field is not understood as an act of sovereignty but as a malfunction that the algorithm seeks to correct. Otherness must appear in the shop window; otherwise, it forfeits its right to exist.

It is precisely here that the need for a new ethics of otherness emerges—an ethics that refuses the imperative of representation. An ethics in which respect for the Other manifests not in the production of ever more images but in the restraint of the desire to see, control, and aestheticize.

Francesca Ferrando, in *Philosophical Posthumanism*, speaks of the need to rethink otherness beyond the human privilege of knowledge and depiction (Ferrando, 2020, p. 58). For her, posthumanist ethics demands respect for that which escapes categorization, objectification, and the object–subject schema. Yet Ferrando still maintains a commitment to the idea of attentive coexistence with the nonhuman, posthuman Other. Her project still places hope in the possibility of a new ethical vision.

I argue for a more radical position: today, the ethics of otherness must not be an ethics of new vision but an ethics of voluntary *non-vision*. In a condition where any gesture of visibility is immediately captured within the circuits of consumption, to be seen is to be disarmed; to be represented is to be scanned by the gaze. Thus, the new act of ethical respect is the refusal of representation—the refusal to demand that the Other become an image for us.

It is an ethics of invisible presence: presence that is sensed but not captured; permitted but not formatted. Unlike the old ethics of recognition, built on the paradigm of "seeing and understanding," the new ethics demands humility before that which does not wish to be seen, does not wish to be understood, does not wish to be translated into content.

Thus arises the aesthetics of the shadow against the aesthetics of the shop window. The shadow is not merely the absence of light; it is a space of freedom, where otherness can remain otherness without being absorbed, formatted, or translated into the shared visual field. The shadow admits the Other as mystery, as incompleteness, as mute potentiality.

The ethics of the shadow is the refusal of the desire to capture the Other through imagery. It is the recognition of the Other's right to exist beyond our interface, beyond our networked economy of attention. It is the restraint of our own impulse to control—even when that control is masked as empathy, positivity, or "cultural diversity." Only in this way can we think of otherness today not as new content, not as a new visual module, but as an emptiness left open for the Other—an Other who cannot and should not be reduced to a sign or translated into the regime of interface virality.

Conclusion

Today's digital culture neither destroys nor hides otherness—it learns to manage it. The platform does not expel difference from visibility; on the contrary, it makes difference a necessary element in the architecture of engagement. Otherness is placed on display, but precisely in a form that strips it of its disruptive force. This is no longer the Other to be understood or encountered in dialogue; it is the Other predictably integrated into the algorithmic circuit of attention.

Philosophical analysis reveals that exoticization within digital space is a systemic mechanism of platform power—a form of post-symbolic coloniality. Here, attention replaces coercion, visibility displaces subjectivity, and the algorithm becomes the new code of domination. Unlike classical coloniality, which required physical conquest, digital coloniality operates more subtly: it programs the conditions of perception, standardizes difference into a decorative signal fit for endless circulation. Otherness does not disappear; it is sterilized.

In place of the political body—marked by trauma, history, and resistance—appears a smooth surface: the effect of difference, carefully prepared for safe consumption. Algorithms do not annihilate the Other; they design the Other so that their difference arouses interest without demanding a response. In this way, the platform transforms alterity into managed aesthetics—a resource for the reproduction of its own power.

The hypothesis of digital exoticization as a form of post-symbolic coloniality is thus confirmed. We are witnessing not the abolition of the colonial order, but its relaunch on new foundations: power no longer requires the expulsion or subjugation of otherness through overt violence. It suffices to channel its visibility into algorithmically convenient forms, where the very act of being seen entails the loss of the capacity to be heard.

Thus, the *metasimulacrum* of otherness emerges as a key operator of digital power. It does not conceal difference but produces it in a managed, aestheticized form. Today, otherness is not the event of an encounter with the Other; it is an algorithmic function of attention, a module embedded within the code of the interface. The platform does not eliminate difference—it excludes its radicality.

Here lies the central paradox of the digital age: the more difference appears on the screen, the less space there is for otherness in lived experience. We dwell

among images of the Other yet lose the possibility of encountering the Other. It is in this imperceptible yet fundamental shift—the transformation of difference into managed visibility—that the new, post-symbolic form of coloniality reveals itself: without violence, without noise, but with a far deeper disarmament of the very possibility of the Other.

The introduced concept of the *metasimulacrum* of otherness enables us to grasp the structural nature of this process. Unlike superficial explanations centered on representation, aestheticization, or trends, the metasimulacrum points to a deeper reconfiguration of the very scene of perception: to the production of conditions under which otherness is preemptively disempowered. Here, visible difference does not resist the order—it serves it.

The architecture of difference-without-difference organizes the circulation of the Other in the form of endlessly refreshed yet always managed variations. Difference no longer disrupts the system; it is incorporated into its autopoietic mechanism, where novelty is mandatory but only within pre-ordained configurations. The Other becomes a function of the platform economy: presented to be admired, consumed, and aestheticized, but not heard. The Other exists as a sign, not as a voice; as a trope, not as speech.

In this logic, alterity is transformed into a pre-aestheticized resource of circulation: its task is to stimulate brief affective reactions, to attract interest without generating political tension. The architecture of platforms ensures that every manifestation of difference is immediately absorbed into the rhythm of scrolling, liking, and viral waves, thereby neutralized through its very exposure.

Here, the radicalism of the platform regime is revealed: not in excluding the Other, but in programmably incorporating the Other. The Other remains within the visible field but loses subjective density. They are present—but only as a managed flow of differences, available for immediate consumption. Their alterity is designed not to challenge boundaries but to produce aesthetic pleasure, to generate fleeting empathy without consequences.

Thus, the platform does not merely transmit the Other; it manages the very possibility of encountering otherness. It calibrates distance, intensity, and duration of contact, ensuring that difference no longer demands the effort of understanding. Perception is preformatted: the Other appears exactly to the extent necessary to sustain the regime of attention—no more. Anything exceeding these boundaries —uncontrolled pain, political insurgency, radical alterity—is filtered out by the architecture of the interface before it can even emerge.

Consequently, the *metasimulacrum* of otherness is not a mask on the face of the Other. It is an operation upon the very fabric of perception. It is not that the image replaces reality; rather, perception itself is reorganized so that reality ceases to demand respect. Otherness persists as an effect but vanishes as an event. We see the Other, but no longer encounter them. We perceive signs of difference, but lose the experience of differentiation.

Digital culture has learned not to suppress but to direct; not to forbid but to stylize; not to expel but to frame. In this new regime, alterity becomes yet another replication within the endless architecture of reproducing differences without difference. In this sense, post-symbolic coloniality is the infinite reproduction of the Other in sterilized form—safe for the system.

It thus becomes clear: the epoch of digital spectacularization of alterity demands not a continuation of old projects of representation but a radical rethinking of the very idea of relation to the Other. Under the conditions of the metasimulacrum, otherness does not require a new wave of visibility. It requires the right to resist visibility.

The philosophy of otherness can no longer be built on the hope of "giving voice," "representing," or "showing," for every act of representation today is immediately absorbed into the algorithmic economy of circulation, packaged into format, disarmed at the very moment of its display. Every "given voice" resounds through the protocols of the interface, becoming an element of platform drama, where even suffering is stylized into accessible emotion.

A new ethical-philosophical framework must emerge not through a positive act of visualization but through an act of respect for refusal. Through respect for the impossibility of complete knowledge of the Other, for their right to remain opaque, for their freedom to be unseen. What we need is not more images of the Other, but more courage to endure their absence—their silence, their inability or unwillingness to be incorporated into the architecture of accessibility.

Where older models of ethics demanded the recognition of the Other through visibility, the new philosophy demands recognition through shadow, through the restraint of the desire to see, to know, to appropriate. Where the old humanist logic sought the truth of alterity in its representation, the new logic insists: the truth of the Other lies in their inaccessibility, in their right to remain outside the field of visibility, beyond the field of predictability. Perhaps the most radical form of respect today is not the gaze, not recognition, not the like, but the humble acceptance that the Other escapes. That they are not available. That they exist not to be seen.

And it is in this humility, in this courageous willingness to withstand absence instead of image, silence instead of voice, emptiness instead of sign, that the possibility of a new ethics opens up. An ethics that, for the first time in a long while, acknowledges alterity not as material for aesthetics, not as a resource for virality, but as that which eludes any interface, any algorithm, any representation.

Then, and only then, will the true event of the Other become possible—not as a viral flash in the feed, not as a new module in the architecture of attention, but as a fissure in the fabric of the world, a radical reminder that not everything that exists is obligated to be seen.

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