

The Indeterminate Social, Sociologies of Ignorance and Ignorances of Sociology

*Lo social indeterminado, sociologías de la ignorancia
e ignorancias de la sociología*

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Key words

Phantasm

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- Indeterminación
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Abstract

According to Castoriadis, behind any instituted order there lies an imaginary that is characterized by its indeterminate nature. This indeterminacy is the true *arkhé* of the social. Heidegger's reflections on nothingness offer greater substance to this affirmation. Characterized by their heterogeneity, instability and indexicality, people are the indeterminate of the social. This has been evidenced by sociology. This has been shown, on the one hand, by research using ignorance as its object, even while concealing and extracting a certain utility from it. On the other hand, it is apparent in sociologies that face and assume limits. An example of this is found in my work on young people, the rural and riders. This article concludes by considering the relations existing between real, imaginary and symbolic registers, and nothingness.

Resumen

Según Castoriadis, lo indeterminado es el auténtico *arkhé* de lo social. Las reflexiones de Heidegger sobre la nada permiten dar más cuerpo a esa afirmación. Sugerimos que lo social indeterminado son las gentes, caracterizadas por su heterogeneidad, inestabilidad e indexicalidad. Además, mostraremos que dicha indeterminación se hace patente en la sociología de dos modos. Por un lado, a través de las investigaciones que toman por objeto la ignorancia, si bien suelen disimularla e incluso extraen de ella cierta utilidad. Por otro lado, con las sociologías que se topan con los límites y lo asumen. Un ejemplo de esto son las investigaciones realizadas por el autor sobre los jóvenes, lo rural y los *riders*. El artículo finaliza resumiendo las conclusiones principales y mostrando las relaciones que los registros real, imaginario y simbólico tienen con lo indeterminado.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Heidegger (2005: 5), the only Greek philosophers concerned with *arkhé*, or the ultimate foundation of reality, were Parmenides, who claimed that the “Being” is the origin of everything; Heraclitus, who referred to a mixture of the Being with the Non-being; and Anaximander, who proposed the *apeiron*, which was limitless and thus, indefinite or boundless (Colli, 2008: 53), thus equating the *arkhé* with nothingness. Subsequent philosophers transformed their certainties into mere metaphysics, upon which calculation and science would be developed.

Like Anaximander, Castoriadis asserted that the principle or foundation of the “social” is not merely the imaginary, as suggested by specialists on his work, but is based on the radically indeterminate nature that he attributed to this register of meaning¹. In his opinion, the ensemblistic-identitary or ensidic logic, responsible for the way of thinking and doing tested by the social instituted in modernity, but which has its origins in a certain Greek legacy, is based on a deeper “magmatic” logic. In *L’Institution imaginaire de la Société*, Castoriadis, stated that:

¹ According to Turner (1988), this indeterminate nature of the social also exists in the “liminal” sociabilities of rites and passage; in the “expense” of the “cursed part”, according to Bataille (1986); in the “death” that short-circuited the “symbolic exchanges”, according to Joas (2012: 35; Bergua, 2024); in the “anomie” of Duvignaud (1990); in the excesses and deviations of the creative self when going “in pursuit of the forces of sociality that constitute and transform it”, according to Joas (2012: 35; Bergua, 2024); in the meaningless and ambivalence of the world that precedes structuring based on ethno-methods and expert systems, according to Giddens (2003); and in the uses of language that violate the assumptions of integrity, truth, rectitude and veracity, upon which communicative consensus is based, according to Habermas (1987).

A magma is that from which set organizations may be extracted (or built) in an indefinite number, but which can never be reconstituted (ideally) by set composition (finite or infinite) of these organizations (1975: 461).

Years later, at a prestigious Cerisy Conference dedicated to the notion of autonomy, Castoriadis (1983) was even more precise, making the following four powerful statements:

- If M is a magma, one can mark, in M, an indefinite number of ensembles.
- If M is a magma, one can mark, in M, magmas other than M.
- If M is a magma, M cannot be partitioned into magmas.
- If M is a magma, every decomposition of M into ensembles leaves a magma as residue.

Therefore, magma (or the indeterminate) is the genesis of all that is determined. On the one hand, it is inexhaustible and has complete creative potentiality. On the other hand, the resulting identities and sets cannot account for the indeterminacy that constitutes them, since they cannot return to their origin.

Although it may appear to be impossible to say anything further in this regard, this is not the case. In his celebrated 1929 lecture entitled “What is Metaphysics?”, Heidegger (1987: 37-58), after taking up the chair of the Philosophy department at the University of Freiburg, performed an analysis of nothingness. This examination bore a certain resemblance to Castoriadis’ analysis of the indeterminate, based on a question previously formulated by Leibniz: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” In response, the German philosopher recalled that the “entity” or the existing is the first thing that we receive and that leads us to think. He suggested that “science has no inherent interest in the abstract concept of nothing”. In our case, society is an entity, an organized, struc-

tured and instituted order in modernity, although it has multiple variants. Sociology is the science that deals with it. According to Heidegger, that which situates us directly (and without mediation) before the meaninglessness and indeterminacy of nothingness is “anguish”, a very specific mood, since it leads to a complete distancing from the entity and leaves no support, thus keeping us in suspense. In other words, anguish reveals the nothingness and collapse of the entire entity, both of which are united in the very essence of the nothingness, which is none other than “annihilation”: “a rejecting reference to the sinking entity”. This suggests that “existing” refers to merely “being sustained within the nothingness”. It implies being out of place, in “transcendence” towards the sinking entity.

The essence of nothingness and its relationship with the entity are concealed beyond the anguish. One way of dissimulating is denial, which does not refer to a specific characteristic, property or part of the entity, but actually comes from the very annihilation caused by the nothingness. This negation leads to ignorance, and thus it is the means by which the entity conceals the anguish of nothingness, concealing itself from it. In any case, annihilation is more evident and abysmal in the “crudity of the violation”, the “sourness of the execration”, the “pain of failure” and the “harshness of deprivation”.

With respect to the social, it is evident that anguish is characteristic of science and politics when the order that they help to sustain through their reflection and praxis collapses. The “crudity of the violation” and the “sourness of the execration” may also arise with this collapse. Certain groups may also suffer from anxiety when they experience the collapse of the fictions governing society, revealing their subordinate position. In this case, the “pain of failure” and the “harshness

of deprivation” may also appear. All of this clearly occurs in situations of change, conflict and crisis. However, when homogeneity, stability and abstraction work well, annihilation becomes latent.

I propose that ultimately, *the nothingness emerging from changes, conflicts and crises or remaining latent in stable situations, is merely people*. It tends to be the consequence of the assumptions and restraints, respectively, of science and politics, which confine it to the instituted order or society, turning it into its foundation. These domesticated people are referred to as the “population” or “citizens”, entities that facilitate the settlement (while receiving the influence) of a nation or state. However, this order is never perfect, and the annihilation of people always remains, sometimes latently and other times patently, through anguish, denial, contravention, execration, failure and deprivation. In all of these cases, there is both subtraction and excess with respect to the society as an entity in the sinking process.

Distinct perspectives agree that people are the source of society’s annihilation or indeterminacy. First, some authors (Hardt and Negri, 2002; Virno, 2003) have suggested that the authentic agent of value production in the capitalist society and the channeler of the desire for social change is not the class, but rather, the “multitude”. This multitude refers to a heterogeneous group of subjects in which it is impossible to obtain a minimum common denominator. It is a hegemony or an empty signifier. Second, the impolitic theorists of the community (Nancy, 2000; Esposito, 2003) claim that this should not be considered a stable agency anchored in tradition (Tönnies, 1979). To the contrary, the characteristics of the community involve sharing a certain *munus* or exchange, resulting in incessant movements of objects, messages and subjects. Thus, the fundamental aspect of

this agency is its dynamism and instability. It is impossible to find anything stable to support it. And thirdly, the term “people” is the means by which García Calvo (1991) characterized the population. It is a depository of “common reason” running through the language from one part to another, giving rise to the world “in” which they speak, as opposed to the world “of” which they speak. The former is made up of the deictic power of language and constantly refers meaning to contexts. On the other hand, the world “of” which it speaks refers to the abstract meanings established by the institutions entrusted with overseeing good speech.

In short, *the main properties of people include heterogeneity, instability and indexicality*. Their indeterminate nature is a result of their lack of sufficient homogeneity, stability and abstraction in order for said people to be determined. The notions of population and citizens, as well as those of nation, class, etc., participate in these other properties. Therefore, they are determined and do not relate to the people. However, since the very origins of Western civilization, the indeterminate people, origin and foundation of anything social has generated such anguish that it has resulted in denial and concealment (Bergua, 2015, 2021).

SOCIOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE

If the foundation or origin of the social is the indeterminate or nothingness, the social sciences in general and society in particular, which are fundamental parts of the order created in modernity, can do only one of two things. On the one hand, they may deny the foundation and create a wall of ignorance to keep anxiety at bay. On the other hand, they may disguise the denial by paying attention to ignorance, even if it is euphemized and incapable of

generating anxiety. This latter is precisely what the social sciences have been doing for some time now (Burke, 2023).

In 1991, R. Proctor (2022: 53) coined the term “agnotology” to designate a new science that studies and explains the causes of the ignorance and lack of knowledge that is part of our collective life and even constitutes it. Indeed, knowledge and information, so important in today’s society, do not eliminate ignorance, but rather, they displace or even amplify it, as occurs in the so-called “risk society” (Ravetz, 2015; Duclow, 2006; Michael, 2015). The “precautionary principle” arises in response to the unknown. It has formed part of international law since 1980, appears in the World Charter for Nature, was adopted by the United Nations in 1982, is included in the Rio Declaration on the Environment of 1992 and was endorsed by the European Union in 2000 (Magnus, 2022). However, some religions have used the precautionary principle to attack advances that offend their beliefs. Therefore, the United States and the World Trade Organization have rejected it.

As demonstrated by the issue of risks, our societies are made up of *homo ignorans* (Galán Machío, 2019), similar to the *homo tragicus* (Ramos, 2018: 72-78), characterized by an unintelligible future. The matter becomes more complex when this ignorance is the result of a “will to ignore”, whose existence has been amply proven experimentally (Bruttel *et al.*, 2020). The 2008 crisis, for example, was caused, among other things, by the fact that no one apparently wished to understand the risks facing the financial sector. After the crisis, although some requested that economic knowledge be expanded and intensified to prevent further ignorance in the future, there were also demands for a milder rationalism to enable society to better deal with the errors and complexities of the economic sys-

tem. Amongst those defending this latter position were those believing that ignorance itself is a productive force. This is the case with neoliberal theorists such as Hayek and the experts involved in the financial crisis. In short, in the economic field, ignorance is both a product or good as well as an alibi for financial stakeholders and researchers (McGoey, 2014). In all of these, the will to ignore appears to prevail.

For these reasons, many economists have begun to study the importance of decision-making in situations of ignorance (Prentice, 2015; Kessler, 2015), since, as Michaels (2022: 132) confessed, “doubt is our product”. In fact, Roberts (2015) and Stewart (2015) suggested that ignorance should not be negated but rather, elevated as an ideal of *management*. Indeed, strategic ignorance has already been successfully tested (McGoey, 2019), since modern liberal societies thrive not only by accumulating information, but also by cultivating strategic ignorance, an important resource for those in positions of power or subject to the same. For example, “knowing as little as possible is often the most important resource for dealing with risks and avoiding the consequences of catastrophic events”. This was demonstrated by the management of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti (McGoey, 2014: 3).

Deliberate ignorance is also found in double-blind testing, in the political and commercial barriers constraining research, and in certain tacit assumptions imposed by researchers on themselves (Haas and Vogt, 2015; Franke, 2015; Ridge, 2007). The relationship and differences between the instrumental value of ignorance and other forms of partial or limited knowledge, such as organizational ambiguity and economic uncertainty or the ethical imperative to remain ignorant about a specific disease or its poten-

tial treatment due to its impact on private life, have also been investigated (Kerwin, 2015). We should also consider defensive ignorance in other areas such as the legal (Justice is represented with blindfolded eyes) or the commercial (Marder, 2015; Gaudet, 2015). On the other hand, what happens when, contrary to the spirit of the Enlightenment, people and leaders do not want to know? (Somin, 2013, 2015). For example, when they decide not to see the existence of certain things such as climate change, the pandemic or rare illnesses, and thus, they leave certain groups or society as a whole in a vulnerable situation.

Ignorance also occurs in the administration of secrecy, so important in the medical, therapeutic or religious fields (Chua, 2015), as with confession or confidentiality, as well as in the bureaucratic means of managing the world that characterizes modern societies (Rappert and Balmer, 2015). Therefore, organizations may be defined by what they choose to ignore (Broncano, 2020: 285). One type of political practice associated with bureaucracy is *offshoring* (Urry, 2014), an invisibility strategy applied to the movement of wealth, people, energy, waste, weapons, etc. It is often accompanied by transparency strategies that are as celebrated and publicized as they are innocuous. But the best example of ignorance within the bureaucratic orders is the major importance of state secrets (Galison, 2022). In the US, the Library of Congress stores 1.5 billion pages of texts that may be consulted by half a million teachers. However, its classified or secret information totals one trillion pages, which can be accessed by some 4 million experts with their respective authorizations. This closed and opaque world is some five to ten times larger than the open one, and the work of classification is some five times greater.

If we agree that societies are filled with distinct types of domination, then ignorance becomes an essential notion (Hess, 2015; Medina, 2011). Indeed, our world results from the exclusion of other worlds, and from the elimination of knowledge that contradicts this operation. Order maintains this “uncomfortable knowledge” at bay, through denial, dismissal, diversion and displacement (Rayner, 2014). Similarly, postcolonial feminism (Sullivan and Tuana, 2007) refers to the “lost knowledge”. This has occurred, not only with regard to female sexuality in general, but also with respect to plant and herbal remedies that have been passed down from generation to generation by women, and which botanists have chosen to deliberately neglect (Tuana, 2022: 185). Beyond the gender perspective, Native Americans had fossils and explanations that paleontologists failed to consider (Mayor, 2022). Something similar occurred in the ancient world, with the fossils documented by non-Greco-Latin sources. As Wylie (2022: 237) recognized, “there is nothing in the archaeological accounts of the past but layered silences”. This results in a “social anosognosia”, a “meta blindness” or a “screen of opacity” (Broncano, 2020: 291).

On the other hand, for some time now, there has been talk of “white ignorance” (Mills, 2015), embedded in systems of ideas and myths. It was used by the European colonizers to construct a reality that was responsible for undertaking and disguising the domination of their colonies. More recently, a growing number of researchers have used lenses of willful ignorance to deny, justify or simply ignore past and present atrocities, from the genocides of the Canadian Aboriginal people to the Armenian genocide perpetrated by Türkiye (Samson, 2013; Göçek, 2014). The “racial contract” (Mills, 1997) is also of great relevance. Its two main “clauses”

are the acceptance and propagation of erroneous notions regarding racial supremacy and the denial of the atrocities that accompanied the colonial expansion. “Pluralist ignorance” is also important (Thiel and South, 2015). It is defined as the tendency of groups to unconsciously reinforce their incomprehension of the situation of others, increasing their levels of deviance and crime. Given these and many other cases, it is no surprise that studies on vulnerability (Khulicke, 2015) have been created with little reference to works on ignorance. This is the case because the powers in general and the epistemic elitism underpinning it are a “factory producing ignorance” (Broncano, 2020: 264).

Ignorance, in short, is not something minor in comparison to knowledge, but rather, it is an equally important phenomenon that hybridizes with its theoretical opposite in almost all areas of society, at both micro and macro levels. This implies that science has abandoned the classic position of wishing to know nothing about nothing. However, since there is no reference to ignorance in Spanish and European research, development, and innovation plans, Heidegger’s denunciation appears to continue to be valid. Moreover, research on ignorance makes little use of this notion, failing to fully recognize it in its projects. No study has made any declarations about the anguish that is blocked by ignorance. Therefore, the sciences that do consider it only serve to conceal ignorance which, in turn, hides the anguish produced by the indeterminate.

IGNORANCES OF SOCIOLOGY

The current order has been organized by denying the ontological indeterminacy of the social, sometimes leaving ignorance aside and other times disguising it by giv-

ing it a very mild meaning and uncovering its utility. However, some scientific contributions have been less blind or cynical in this regard. They have taken on this foundational nothingness, respecting and facing it without making any claims or adding anything to its presence. As proof of this, three studies conducted by this author will be examined: one on young people, another on the rural world and a third one on riders who deliver food to homes.

Youth

Regarding youth (Bergua, 1999a, 1999b, 2003 and 2004), some sociologists have suggested that, in addition to belonging to a specific age interval², this collective is characterized by an absolute or relative lack of its own residence, affiliation, stable partner and sufficient or regular income. Thus, these individuals are considered irresponsible with respect to two emblematic institutions of our social order: family and work. According to the established order, these responsibilities are acquired with the passage to adulthood, suggesting that youth is merely an empty or “waiting” time (Gil Calvo, 1985). Therefore, conventional sociology of youth coincides with the order established in creating and denying people, in this case, through their youth. Since this takes place from an adult perspective, the creation-denial of youth is merely a specific way in which this order affirms itself through adults. In addition to this structural denial, other superstructural forms may add further information on the reasons.

On the other hand, young people are a constant source of danger for adults and

the social order in which they are centrally inscribed, threatening the overall security of the same. Therefore, in 1961, the Youth Institute was created, continuing a previous US initiative, in response to the “wave of youth disorder” initiating several years previously. Its purpose was to determine, not only what young people are like, but also, and above all, how to treat them (Sáez Marín, 1995). This disorder consists of execrations and political, cultural and moral violations displayed by young people and feared by the established order, as filtered by adults. However, this fear does not refer specifically to young people, but rather, it relates to the indeterminacy of humankind, manifested through youth. Young people are an ideal propagated by the society of the spectacle, imitated by adults to ward off the degrading passage of time and the ultimate fear of death.

The two imaginary representations of youth separate and obscure what it may actually be. If we are to add the previous structural denial to this, then young people may be clearly considered an indeterminate social category of the established order, even when it refuses to recognize this. This category refers to people. Driven by curiosity and a desire for knowledge, and sensing discomfort in the face of this ignorance, some sociologists have examined what young people are and do during this period of waiting, aside from hoping to become adults by acquiring the four previously mentioned responsibilities. For example, sociologists may consider their forms of entertainment. This is precisely what I did in 1991.

Between 1991 and 1992, while working as a waiter, I observed the recreational acts undertaken by youth and adults in a Madrid nightclub (But) and party hall (Pasapoga). I found that, while adults reproduced the essential characteristics of the external established or-

² Initially considered between 16 and 24 years of age. In 1984, the Youth Institute extended the age range to include those between 16 and 29. Currently, it tends to include those from 16 to 34 years of age.

der in their acts, the young people created other styles of sociability. Indeed, while adults contained their aggression through civility and good manners, the young people dramatized their violence in a manner that was similar to that of non-human animals. On the other hand, while adults reproduced sexual dimorphism and classic logic with their aesthetics, young people differentiated themselves tribally. Furthermore, while adults ritualized sexual encounters to the point of delirium, young people reduced them almost completely. Finally, while adults resisted the alteration of consciousness with a very limited number of drugs, young people tended to abandon their consciousness to a much greater degree, using more of these substances.

Once these data were obtained, however, although it was quite easy to interpret the content of adult entertainment using conventional sociology, it was more difficult to interpret the meaning and direction of the youth entertainment, given the lack of consistent theoretical frameworks. Indeed, the importance of class, sexual dimorphism, the sublimation of aggression or sexuality, and the affirmation of the self as displayed by the adults are all issues that have received much more attention by the research community. They have been more thoroughly studied and explained by conventional sociology and have been more frequently considered by the established order than tribalism, sexual fluidity, the less adulterated expression of aggression, and transpersonal consciousness. Therefore, this type of sociology that attempts to determine what young people attempt to be, outside of the established order, needs to recognize its failure to do so. This is already taking place in conventional sociology. However, while the former suffers from negative ignorance, since it is unaware of

what it does not know, the latter is aware of its lack of knowledge, making its ignorance positive. In both cases, the indeterminate prevails as a source of ignorance, but the way of intellectually positioning oneself in response to this nothingness is quite different.

The rural world

If we move on to the situation in rural settings, similar occurrences are found. In conflict situations resulting from plans such as the construction of reservoirs that flood villages or the introduction of new species that disrupt the local way of life³, we find that people in these areas rely on codes and grammars that differ from institutional ones, placing them in defenseless situations. Upon analyzing the differences, we find that the institutional framework interprets collective existence coming from the cities, with respect to both the consideration of the subjects, as well as the social aggregates in which they operate and their individual and collective relationship with the natural environment. Unfortunately, because the established order has been established mainly in cities, towns have become largely indeterminate, both with respect to the political elite, responsible for managing conflicts, and the scientists themselves, responsible for studying them (Bergua, 2011b).

³ These are three ethnographic studies. One deals with the social construction of risk generated by three regulation projects for the Esera River (Huesca) which took place from the 1970s to the 1990s (Bergua, 1998 and 2000). Another referred to the conflict caused during the second decade of the 21st century, due to the introduction of bears in the northern slopes of the Pyrenees, but having similar effects to the south (Bergua, 2011a and 2017). Another study on the identity of the Somontano region of Huesca is also considered, using the notion of landscape (Bergua, 2009).

In general, cities have converted the towns into objects of exploitation or unequal exchange⁴, since their subjects, goods and information are less valuable than those from the city, based on the measuring stick imposed by this latter environment. The towns have also been converted into objects of ideological inspiration, since that which academics call “popular culture” is the raw material facilitating the invention of these political artefacts that are nations. Finally, towns have been converted into the subject of vacations or aesthetic enjoyment, thanks to the presence of museums or interpretation centers, natural parks and other similar attractions. Ultimately, this will lead to their depletion and conversion into a network of simulations. Behind this simulated reality, nothing will make sense to the urban gaze.

Just as there is only one indeterminacy underlying the ideas of those designing the cities, the informal relationship established between towns and cities are also indeterminate, since they differ from those imposed by the cities based on exploitation and simulation (Moyano, 2000; Camarero and Oliva, 2024). Thus, they are incomprehensible and intractable. This second-order indeterminacy is mediated by subjects living in the town and working in the city (or vice versa), those who came to stay, those who left and returned or will come back for vacation or weekends but continue their habits in the destination cities that merge into this sea of radical indeterminacy which, ultimately, are the cities. In any case, there is a hybrid (urban-rural) agency that challenges the urban/rural distinction. It is fundamental to the established order, both regarding the policies responsible for building society and

the sciences responsible for explaining it. Thus, the original indetermination of the towns is reproduced and expands with the urban-rural indetermination. These indeterminacies, which refract traditional sociological categories, are arranged by the indefinite people. In conflicts such as those mentioned above, it is precisely this unknown urban-rural background from which practices and discourses emerge in confrontation to the general urban/rural order.

In short, towns are the object, not only of a structural denial by cities, but also of a dissimulation which, appealing to the rural in an empty and heteronomous way, will create networks of simulations beyond which the purest indeterminacy will exist. Denial will create distress and deprivation in the towns, while dissimulation will give rise to policies and sciences that will help support the urban/rural order based on negative ignorance. The indistinct relates to the rural and the urban-rural. It emerges in conflicts such as those mentioned above, where people experience a certain self-esteem mixed with indignation that extends into the indefinite urban life. This demonstrates that the distinction between one setting and another is not completely accurate. Policies and sciences are clearly able to know that they do not know, since the categories in which they tend to work (for example, the urban/rural distinction and the separation of the urban/rural from the urban-rural) are ineffective. From this position, they can accept their finitude, not only with respect to the rural areas but also in relation to people in general. This opportunity is provided by conflicts. However, it is normal that the established order fails to take advantage of this opportunity, since its reason for being is to institute itself against its own indeterminate foundation, which is none other than the people.

⁴ See, for example, Williams (2002: 80), Lefebvre (2000), Bourdieu (2002) and Ibáñez (1991).

Riders and algorithms

Finally, another example of ignorance confronted by sociology may be seen with riders, food delivery workers, who inhabit the world of platform capitalism (Alberti Joyce, 2023; Allen, 2016; Baylos, 2022; Moral Martín, Pac and Minguijón, 2023; Morales and Abad, 2020; Sanz *et al.*, 2023; Srnicek, 2017). Faced with inscrutable and opaque algorithms that regulate their work through enormous amounts of data, the riders use tricks and schemes in an attempt to fool the algorithm. This includes renting out other accounts, taking advantage of geolocation blind spots to rest without risking dismissal (or “disconnection”), using clandestine *bots* to predict the algorithm’s selection of times and orders, exploiting errors in Google Maps to make their routes more profitable, using fake verification photos to disguise account rental, etc. (Bergua, Montañés and Báez, 2023⁵; Díez Prat and Ranz Martínez, 2020). Thus, the riders become as indeterminate for the algorithm as the algorithm is for them. But this intersection of opacities and sources of uncertainty should also include tricks used by customers to avoid paying for delivery, as well as tricks used by the platform companies to circumvent labor regulations and the 2021 Rider Law. The result is the creation of a large space of indetermination in which the participants do not know each other, although they insist and fantasize that they do. This space of indeterminacy, constantly negotiated and filled with misunderstandings, is anarchic in nature.

Unlike hierarchy, anarchy is based on the consistently failed nature of prediction with respect to others and the consequent impossibility of obeying orders (Bergua, 2011b: 193-205). Although it may appear that sociability would be impossible, in fact, anarchy is another means of interpreting the coexistence in which the indeterminate occupies a central position. In fact, given that they are more sensitive to their own internal determinations, the stakeholders do not perceive an independent external reality, including the other stakeholders. Instead, they invent it. The fortuitous couplings of inventions that may occur suggest the existence of a solid reality, as opposed to nothing. Ultimately, the capitalism of the platforms is associated with an indeterminacy that all of the stakeholders continue to dissimulate (since they believe that they are tricking the others but are unsure if this is actually the case) and disguise (since they believe that they know of the others but are unsure if this is actually the case). In other words, everyone attempts to become unpredictable while trying to predict others, without actually knowing if they have succeeded in doing so. In this context, both obedience and its contrary are only apparent.

This massive production of ignorance, which reproduces and extends the indeterminacy inherent to society, is accompanied by an experience of anguish amongst the riders, given the lack of information. There is also a constant threat of an inability to receive orders (with the corresponding income) that are “sorted” by the algorithm, as well as a feeling of *deprivation*, since this group faces precarious working conditions that have not been corrected by the 2021 Rider Law. Observers of this complex situation share in the ignorance of his informant and must accept the finiteness and limitations of participant organization. All of this makes his conclusions highly relative, forcing him to recognize the indeter-

⁵ For this article, we use information obtained by one of us while working as a rider for Glovo in a medium-sized city in Spain’s Levante (eastern coast) region (Bergua, Montañés and Báez 2023). This work was included in the research “Emerging cultures of precarity in the Gig Economy digital: a case study on the food delivery sector in Spain” (Ref. PID2020-115170RB-I00 SOC).

minate nature of the social, as well as his own constitutive indeterminacy.

To conclude

In all of the cases mentioned, structural ignorance regarding nothingness and efforts made to conceal it operate not only at the level of reality constructed by political elites, civil servants and management, but also at the level of observation and analysis of this reality as carried out by the social sciences. By attempting to reduce the indeterminacy, they only reproduce and expand it. If they are unaware of this, they will be prey to negative ignorance (not knowing what they do not know). On the other hand, if they are aware of this, they may acquire the clairvoyance of positive ignorance (knowing that they do not know).

In any case, what is important is the general indeterminacy to which ignorance does justice, in one way or another. This indeterminacy lies in the people, although, as the previous cases reveal, it extends beyond them. Indeed, it affects algorithms and technology in general, if we are to consider the work of the riders; the relationship with nature, if considering the rural/urban conflict; and music, clothing, speech patterns, drugs, etc., if considering young people. Therefore, when coming into contact with “non-human” agencies, we suggest that the specific stakeholders of “human” indeterminacy find their own sources of indeterminacy and recreate the general indeterminacy or nothingness which, according to Heidegger, constitutes a “reality” and forms part of “society”.

EXODUCTION

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, nothingness is real and the lack that con-

stitutes the subject is, in fact, constituted⁶. It stems from motor discordance and the resulting lack of completeness of newborn humans. The experience of this agonizing constitutive is retrospectively covered up in an imaginary way⁷, with phantasm (García del Moral, 2022).

In the social realm, nothingness refers to people, characterized by their radical heterogeneity, permanent instability, and absolutely situated nature, all of which renders them indeterminate. In this case, the retrospective phantasm is constituted by scenes that threaten a social plenitude that never existed. The individual responsible for this failure is a leader, chief, or king, all predecessors of what would later become the State. Like a father on an individual level, he is powerless to establish (as is his duty) an “us” that is inseparable from the invention of “others” which sustains society (Schmitt, 1991).

The experience of nothingness takes place through anguish, but primarily through the lack of wanting to know anything about science, which highlights one’s own ignorance. Not wanting to know anything about nothingness is also characteristic of the established order. However, that which is ignored and ignorance itself are often concealed. One kind of dissimulation refers to paying attention to ignorance, but only superficially. As previously mentioned, this occurs in a wide range of sociologies of ignorance.

A better way of understanding the indeterminate is to uncover sociology’s ignorance of the phenomena or objects that it pays attention to. We have done this when considering prior research on young people, the rural world and the relation-

⁶ For more on the real, the death drive and jouissance, notions referring to nothingness and fundamental to the latest period of the French psychoanalyst, see Lacan (1988: 86 *et seq.*, 2006: 135) and Miller (2013).

⁷ For more on the imaginary, see Lacan (1988: 99-105).

ships of the riders with the algorithms that attempt to control their work. In all of these cases, the indeterminate is presented, making it difficult or impossible to analyze or make reflections.

We believe that the indeterminate social is the real and that it is concealed by phantasm, the manifestation of the imaginary. In the social realm, this phantasm is the state or any similar organism that unsuccessfully attempts to institute a “we”, since that is its purpose. Young people, towns, the urban-rural and the work of the riders are the ever-illusory inner alterities that collide with the orders commanded by adults, the urban or urban/rural world, and platform capitalism, respectively, which the State has made its own.

But the imaginary register does not only contain phantasms. It also includes fantasies. In our case, these refer to youth as a source of insecurity or a cure for the fear of death. They also refer to rural areas, initially as a source of barbarism, and then, a place of nationalist and environmentalist inspiration, or aesthetic or vacation enjoyment. And they may also refer to work, as a demon threatening the hegemony of capital or as a mode of personal and collective fulfillment.

Finally, in addition to the imaginary at its two levels, we should also consider the symbolic (Lacan, 1988: 227-310). This other register of meaning refers to the sets, identities, and logics that articulate the established order. Although they receive plausibility and affect from the ideo-affective complexes or fantasies underlying them, they also function autonomously, based on certain relations of “equivalence” and the “hegemony” established by a certain “empty signifier” (with an ambiguous and imprecise meaning) among the set of elements or signifiers. This conveys the impression that there

is no other “reality” than this one (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987)⁸.

Conventional sociology operates on a symbolic plane, with notions resembling “hegemony” and “empty signifiers”. A more interesting sociology considers the fantasies upon which this “reality” is built. With this other sociology, it may be possible to question this constructed reality and liberate or imagine another one. A sociology that confronts the terror generated by phantasms would be riskier. However, it would be even more so if it were capable of passing through them, vanishing and merging with the nothingness. Eastern wisdom suggests the dissolving of one’s ego to be reborn (Heisig, 2002). No similar proposal exists for society.

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⁸ Any political system swings between the stability of the empty signifiers and the metastability of the floating signifiers (see Laclau, 2005). The indefinite is closer to this second type of reality than to the first.

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