

SPEAKERS

Embodied Audience

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KEYWORDS

Digital disconnection

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work-life balance

remote work

digital detox

generative AI

political disconnection

leisure vs. work

algorithmic dynamics

quiet quitting

great resignation

digital nomads

platformization

micro-practices.

GUESTS

Alessandro Gandini

00:00 MICHAEL DIETER

Welcome!

00:01 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Welcome. Are we live?

00:02 MICHAEL DIETER

We are.

00:03 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

We are! And how do you know it? It's not written anywhere, but you sense it, okay, you sense it.

00:11 KEITH BLOOMFIELD

Just trust me, it's fine.

00:12 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Okay, okay, now I know I'm live. Okay, good. So we are live.

00:20 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

There is a buffer.

00:21 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

There's a technical problem. Problem solved. Amazing, huh? This is how life should be. The utopia of problem solving in the digital society, digital society, or digital culture or digital ideology, is a lot about solving problems, but in most cases, this

really doesn't work. And also now, I mean the problem is recurring, there's the recursivity of problems. Anyways, while our stunning équipe of technicians and media wizards are solving the problems, let me welcome everybody in the room and in the rooms all over the world, because we have such a global audience Gandini you should know, of course, you must have heard about our global audience, haven't you? Yes, and we are here for the CDI-TV stream episode. Michael Dieter, yours truly, co-directors of the Centre for Digital Inquiry at the University of Warwick. And today we are going to talk about digital disconnection. So, you know I'm a huge fan of oversharing in contexts in which you shouldn't overshare, so I'm gonna overshare right now. This, for me, is a little bit of a dream, because Gandini and I are like academic siblings.

00:45 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

True.

00:46 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Not because we are very similar, in fact, we are kind of different, but we grew up together intellectually and academically, and we have the same sort of academic equivalent of family traumas. You know, those events that really mark your way of thinking. But, in another life, Gandini and I would have been MTV VJs. Do you remember MTV?

02:19 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

02:19 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

We have the right age range here, haven't we? So I think we've always had this sort of more or less implicit dream of, yes, academia is cool. I mean, it's good for us, because otherwise

what could have we done, but being VJs would be much better. And also Gandini used to play in a band.

02:43 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

True.

02:43 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

And I'm totally not a player, neither a singer. I'm completely out of tune. But I could have been the producer, or maybe the ragazza imagine, how do you say it, like the one that is there because of the look, you know, I want to be remembered because of the way I look. We also, at some point, had an idea of setting up an indie band, which was The Immaterial Labor, and that would have been such a good idea, such a missed opportunity. So here is the closest we are getting to The Immaterial Labor. Perhaps you're not going to sing, perhaps you're not going to play, but we are going to mess around - with what? With the idea of digital disconnection, which is Alessandro Gandini's new project. Now you have to know Alessandro is one... You are a little bit of a rising star of academia. He's one of those over achievers that,

02:43 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

03:52 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah, no, it's true. Like he wins the grants. You know, he's the one that wins the grant. It's difficult to be your friend in this respect.

03:54 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Same!

03:54 MICHAEL DIETER

[Laughs]

03:54 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Like it would be very easy to hate you. Like, he got this ERC starting grant, the billions, trillions, but he's also super cool, so you cannot really hate him. So I mean, yeah, it's not, it's not easy, but it's one of the greatest things that happened in my adult life.

04:43 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Aw. Same, you know that.

04:15 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah, no, no, this is all gonna be about us exchanging love. Fortunately there's Michael and maybe at some point you can, you know, intrude and bring us back to the rail, however curvy rail of today. So, digital disconnection. What is that? I don't know anything about these ideas. But you said it is not a new project.

04:46 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Not yet, let's say. First of all, thank you for embarrassing me. I love you.

04:51 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

You were ready.

04:52 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

All of what you said is true, and as you say, as the saying goes, never trust your friends in a public place.

04:59 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Never ever.

05:00 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

And this makes it, of course, very sweet to be here. Thank you for having me. Yeah, it's not yet a project. It's something that has grown into the project that I'm working on, into the projects that I'm working on, as you also mentioned, as an interest also by way of a number of meetings throughout those years, with colleagues who are very engaged with this topic and this type of research, which looks at the different ways in which, especially after the pandemic, we are seeking to somehow take a distance from digital technology in their burdening presence, which is quite a thing now, especially following a period of our lives where we have just been online, basically. So digital disconnection research comes out of this as something that was already there but probably found a proper audience and space and field, so to speak, following the pandemic. And for me, it taps into a number of different things that relate to work, which has been the long term object of my study - digital media, digital technologies and cultures of work; it's what I do for the most part.

06:15 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

For a living.

06:18 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

For a living, exactly. And that's something that has been able to explain some of the things that I was seeing while studying work, and helped me to make sense of a more, sort of, longer term trajectory, although it's not long meaning we're talking about the last decade or so, in several practices in the so called new forms of work. So drawing a few lines of connection among different phenomena that were on my radar with a term that wasn't.

06:50 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Okay. So what I understood is that-

06:53 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

But you want the definition, I guess, or something along those lines?

06:56 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

No, no, no, not necessarily. No, no, no. I totally don't want a definition, but more of a description. So you're saying there was a pandemic, there was a moment in which we were all online, kind of this compulsory onlineness of Covid and from there has been maybe a reaction-

07:17 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

A backlash!

07:17 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Or a backlash.

07:17 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

That's the word that the literature on this topic actually uses.

07:18 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Okay, as a backlash.

07:20 MICHAEL DIETER

Techlash!

07:24 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Exactly! Because tomorrow we are going to speak about a techlash. So today we're going to speak about backlash. So this should say something about us. Anyhow, so as a backlash, what you're saying is that there is a growing or rising, or whatever, tendency towards saying, 'Okay, let me disconnect. I want to opt out of this.'

07:49 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

A set of micro practices that point, if you see them all together, into this direction.

07:54 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

So things that people do and that sort of go counter [to] the kind of default assumption that today's life is online, there's no way of being not online.

08:06 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yes, correct.

08:07 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

And so now, of course, my question is, what are these things? And you said that you noticed them as part of your research on work. So your research on neo-craft work?^[1]

08:17 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

In general, on work as a long term research interest, as you know, of mine for a few years now. In relation to the sort of specific, smaller, let's say, topic of digital disconnection, I'm referring to practices like setting one's limits to access social media, or news avoidance, resisting different forms of datafication, which occurs in a number of ways in the context of, also, privacy related conversations, increasingly so for younger generations as well, which are much more mindful than we are, also millennials, in relation to these topics. You might remember, I guess, the time we went on Facebook and we used to post, I don't know, 73 pictures of our Saturday night on the Sunday morning. Nobody really wanted that, but we did that.

09:12 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I always remember when I joined Facebook, and I wasn't an early adopter at all, and the platform asked you, 'What are you thinking?' And at the beginning, I was actually writing down what I was thinking, like for real.

09:29 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I used to do that in songs.

09:33 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I didn't have that, same, yeah-

09:35 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Thinking about a song or some lyrics-

09:37 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Now it would be totally cringe to do that.

09:41 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Millennial, probably.

09:42 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Millennial. I mean, yeah, we are millennial, but we are not-

09:45 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

That's what we are, after all.

09:47 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

What were you doing in the first social media? You were more tech savvy than us, I think? What was your way of [inaudible]

09:56 MICHAEL DIETER

Oh, not necessarily. I mean, I never really took strongly to social media. But I did quit Facebook on the first 'Quit Facebook' day, which was I think sometime in May 2010, so I was a kind of early digital disconnecter. And, you know, disconnection, I guess, it has a kind of history that always accompanied the stronger ideology of connection. Part of that, I think, was originally a more technical understanding of the digital divide, so the people that were disconnected were... it was like a problem that had to be sort of solved through design or technology. And then I think there was a kind of hipster idea of 'the disconnecter', which was also accompanied by a political idea of disconnection. But you're suggesting that, I think, with the pandemic, this kind of history changes a bit.

11:08 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

It has, I guess, from my sort of small observatory, it has made many people, and especially the younger generations, again I have mentioned this, think about how much they've been online, and to an extent try to find a better balance between their everyday intake of different types of social media, which also has a significant impact on social lives, like very everyday practices, from solving an argument to going out for a drink, up to, you know, completely different settings and practices. And that's when work comes into the picture for me, because the ideology of connectivity, as you described it, in the context of work, becomes the ideology of productivity, and the ways in which, also throughout the pandemic, the impression of digital technologies in datafying and monitoring work has increased, despite - or perhaps in parallel with - the rise of remote work, which has produced also a bit of a breakdown in the ways in which people think about how can they be productive at work, which doesn't necessarily mean going to an actual workplace. For us academics, it's probably

easier to understand, because that's what academic work has always been. But outside our sort of bubble, there are a lot of people who had to show up at work every morning and didn't really like that.

12:45 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah, but I think also for us it was kind of a thing, at least when Covid arrived... Well, as an hypochondriac, and as someone who is very pessimistic,

12:59 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Something we also share.

13:01 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Something we also share. I wasn't happy at all. I mean, I was one of those that really took it seriously from day minus one. But the only thing that at some point felt appealing for me was that, okay, maybe I can be a digital nomad. Maybe I can finally work only remotely and travel the world, like the people that some of us would study back in the days. And that sounded like an appealing thing. And then a few months into the pandemic, I was like, no, this is a total nightmare. Like, I totally don't want to be a digital nomad, because it was the less- Well, of course, during the pandemic, the nomadism was much restricted. But the whole thing of feeling, like I really did feel completely wired and I missed coming here, and I used to hate taking that Avanti train and getting to Warwick and I was dreaming of a canal and teaching everything online forever. And after the pandemic, I must admit, I still kind of strongly dislike it, getting on the train, etc. But also I do kind of value it more.

14:22 MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, it's a funny thing: in some ways, the origins of CDI-TV, what we're doing now, lie also in the pandemic, because CDI was set up in 2020 - at that time, it was directed by Nathaniel Tkacz who's...

14:40 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Nate.

14:40 MICHAEL DIETER

...Nate, yeah, who's now at Goldsmiths - and almost immediately after CDI was founded the pandemic happened and things went online. Carolina, you did a great series of streams...

14:44 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

The Summer of Love.

14:51 MICHAEL DIETER

Summer of Love, yeah. And Nate did some streams as well. And then after Nate left, when we were looking at what CDI had done, we were like, "yeah, maybe we should sort of return to the livestream." But I have to admit, there was almost, for me, anyway, a slight element of trauma where I'm like, 'Oh man, I don't know whether I want to go back to livestreaming'. And what made it interesting was going hybrid, like this, and also sort of accepting the fact that we *choose* to do this, and that we sort of had left the medium of the livestream a bit unexplored, in a way, because we'd been forced into it the first time. And it was, of course, you know, Zoom and Teams with the talking heads and this kind of, you know, flattened experience of space. So, yeah, but there was still a little bit of a traumatic moment, I think, going back.

15:55 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Which is perhaps a very sort of similar story of remote work, again, which some latitudes, Italy being one of them, has never really been experimented, has been imposed upon people for the period of the pandemic. [2] And then people found that there were some sort of negotiation space between what the companies imposed upon them and what they wanted to do, and they struggled, of course - I guess perhaps more than us here, we still enjoy some freedom in what we do more than other jobs - many [still] struggled with locating this negotiation space, and where to draw the line between, 'Oh, this is something that I want to do remotely, this is something that I have to do remotely'. And the other way around. This is something for which I have to go back to the job, or I like going back to the job, or, or just sort of continue being on a remote work organization.

16:57 MICHAEL DIETER

Can I ask you more [about] how then you're thinking about it? Because I also bring this example up because I think early in this moment of like, okay, I'm choosing to disconnect. I remember when I would tell people about quitting Facebook, sometimes I would be greeted with hostility, actually.

17:20 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

What year was it?

17:21 MICHAEL DIETER

2010.

17:22 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

You were a hipster(!)

17:23 MICHAEL DIETER

Well, unfortunately, you know, it could be read that way. I mean, there certainly was the argument like: *who has the privilege to quit?* And that was very legitimate, I think, arguments around who can disconnect and who can't, especially when it's related to labour. But I think there was also, of course, people who would be confused: *what exactly are you doing?* And honestly, I didn't always necessarily want to get into a lecture mode about the problems with the platform, etc, because sometimes it was like we're at a party, we're at a bar, but people would be like, *why can't I connect with you on Facebook?* But anyway, I think in that moment, there was this idea that disconnection was kind of somehow a final gesture. It was somehow decisive. It was somehow a clean break. But I think what you're describing, and also something about even this experiment of going hybrid, it's more about choosing to connect and disconnect in specific ways. And I just wonder, can you expand a bit on how you see disconnection now? Like, let's say post-pandemic or in these labour contexts, how is it different from that earlier moment where you're either online or you're offline?

18:53 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yeah, there's, I think, a big difference talking about our everyday lives, let's say. I guess I'll start by saying this. One of the key articles in that particular emergent field of research actually brings forward a counterintuitive argument. It's Stine Lomborg's article, and her title is 'Disconnection is Futile'.^[3] This is, I think, 2020 or something along those lines, but very early in this conversation. And this is interesting because when you did this particular move, there was a sense that this was - I joked before saying this was a hipster move, because people still saw the good side, or primarily, predominantly saw the good side of this particular connection, which also reflected how platforms, how

digital platforms, social media in particular, came to us, social network sites, so networking, connecting was the thing - and now we are on the other side of this conversation, where they are more platforms than social stuff. So the platformization process has brought us to a point where these are instruments of some kind of social organizing, be it work or otherwise.

20:18 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Which is also what we are going to discuss tomorrow, in tomorrow's episode, right?

20:23 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

So we are in a very different place, because your move, if I can use that particular anecdote to finish my point, was in a setting where we didn't accept, or somehow come to terms with, the idea that disconnection is futile. You were running against the grain of a narrative that promoted social media as a good thing for the world. I guess we've passed beyond, well past that. And today, the people who do these kinds of things - from everyday practices up to work, which is sort of subset of this conversation, let's say - they do it upon the principle that disconnection is futile, and therefore you have to find a way to live within this hyper connected world, that you don't suffocate within.

21:16 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Okay, so I'm thinking various things, and one of these is that I should probably arrange this beanbag in a different way.

21:31 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I am also falling backwards.

21:32 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

So let me do it, and in the meantime-

21:35 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

So we can move, actually. I thought I was sort of like a statue, freezing on this- Okay, because I am on the floor, actually. Oh, okay, let's try a new one.

21:49 MICHAEL DIETER

While you're resetting, I was thinking. Oh, are you ready?

21:53 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

No, yeah, I'm ready. I want to ask you. Not the best position to be on screen, but anyways.

22:04 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

This is before, now it's after.

22:06 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah, yeah, exactly. But. So disconnection, when you're talking about disconnection, I can see you mean different things. It's like disconnection is a spectrum.

22:21 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

A constellation of practices.

22:24 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Ah, of course it's a constellation of practices(!), sorry if I didn't get it before.

22:33 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I should have said this before.

22:27 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

No, of course it's a constellation of practices. I think constellation is a word that is getting momentum, so I like it.

22:33 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I am also into Co-Star, and all this particular-

22:35 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Into?

22:36 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Co-Star and horoscope apps and all of that. We'll talk about it later.

22:39 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I don't know what you're talking about. But a constellation of practices amongst which I can see this limiting [of] social media use. So there is a growing awareness... We see it also with our students, our undergraduate students, that they would say, 'Okay, I want to monitor my time on social media, on Instagram', there's an awareness of it, and also some functionalities of the smartphone. They give you daily reports, etc. And I think it's also part of the Quantified Self, or any way calculating and quantifying everything, but there is this sense.

There is also a sense of what should we post and what we should not post, so what material gets connected and what material should remain disconnected. Probably the most evident phenomenon of this is the double sort of Instagram or Tiktok profile, like-

23:39 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Finstas.

23:40 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

The finstas, exactly that was the name. And then there is something else, which is the 'Okay, I quit a specific online platform space', like you quit Facebook, like recently you quit X, right, or I quit X. And the whole kind of movement of quitting a platform as a way to boycott the politics of the platform. Obviously, the case with X was quite evident, the reasons why and the whole debate, right. Okay, but this is futile. I mean, who cares? You know, like these people that were saying, like some no-ones like me, saying, 'Hey, I quit X!' And they're like, yeah, and now, you know? But then, on the other hand, maintaining a sense of intellectual honesty, so monitoring and being aware of the time you are on a platform. Opting out of a platform or a specific online space. Differentiating between what is connected and what is not, what is online and what is not. And then, also, I think I kind of sense that within this constellation of practice - already quoted, Gandini, 2025.

25:00 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

This counts as a reference.

25:03 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

This counts as a reference. There is also something that at least I kind of connect with the quiet quitting thing, with the whole

phenomenon, or another constellation. And now I'm gonna say constellation all the time, you know, you can start counting.

25:25 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

You like the word!

25:26 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Totally, I love it, because I love horoscopes, as you know.

25:30 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Of course.

25:31 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

So the quiet quitting, la grande dimissioni, how do you say?

25:33 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

The great resignation.

25:37 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Those ones. And also I'm thinking of your research, Cecilia. There's Cecilia Ghidotti there, a colleague here at the Centre for Cultural and Media Policy Studies, that you did research on quitting the creative industries. So there's something about disconnecting that is not only about disconnecting within, or in relation to, the internet, but disconnecting to a wider system.

26:04 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

As a social practice. Yes, I agree with that.

26:08 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Did I get it right?

26:09 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Correct. And that's, I think, more clearly visible when it comes to work again, which also interestingly for me, is not simply something related to the pandemic. Now, of course-

26:23 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

[Inaudible, laughs]

26:24 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Disconnecting a little bit. Of course! Unplug.

26:28 MICHAEL DIETER

[Laughs]

26:29 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

It's not related to the pandemic, or it is related to the pandemic, but it's not simply the byproduct of the pandemic. It was there before, and there were things that were there before, that were already going into that direction only we couldn't draw the lines. You mentioned digital nomads. It's a form of disconnection from a certain type of work, one might argue. There are other types of work. The one that I have studied, again, neocraft work, potentially can be seen as a form of disconnection from certain types of highly

intensive knowledge work, which becomes hyper-datatified and very productivity-oriented with a significant level of digital intrusion. But then again, the pandemic has made this visible in plain sight. The great resignation, quiet quitting, are the ways in which you cope with these things, and remote work as well has become a sort of negotiating chip, let's say. The interviews we've done in another project in Italy were clearly demonstrating that many who have been forced to go back to work in person left their job at some point because they didn't like the idea of not choosing. And therefore, I think, something to connect to your broader, higher point, let's say, is about the possibility to be afforded to choose, which is also a matter of inequality, which goes in the direction of society at large. Who can and cannot quit social media is also a question. Who can and cannot quit digital technologies, or some forms of work, or highly intensive knowledge work, is also a matter of people who can or cannot afford doing that.

28:26 MICHAEL DIETER

I want to ask a question about this 'futility' baseline that you point to. Do you understand that as a kind of, like, what you would call 'the vibes'? Is that the structure of feeling around digital connection today? That it's futile, but somehow I do it anyway, or... Because I think to push things onto the more critical, theoretical side, how are you thinking about it? Is there agency here? And I guess, coming from the Italian tradition, is there a politics of exodus, or not? How do you make sense of these messy practices of a futile disconnection?

29:22 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I think I see a bit of all of this into the mix. Certainly, it's some kind of form that is pointed at reclaiming agency

by users or workers, or- who can tell the difference now, who is a user, who is a worker? We are all the same. Also that particular literature that you mentioned, at the start, tended to distinguish between the two. I think it's not necessary anymore. A user is a worker and a worker is a user at the same time, without necessarily going into, you know, the digital labour debate. But because we are so plugged into a number of different technologies and platforms is really sort of factual now, hence futile. But also it may be seen as something that, again, is the acknowledgement of a state of things that wasn't there before, and that comes on top also of the realization that platforms have changed over the years. They're not simply there for fun or connection or telling other people what are you thinking right now, which is kind of scary. You can use Chat-GPT for that to an extent. But it's the realization that these are instruments of capitalism, and as a result, you know, they do something with our social relations that we have to somehow locate in our own scheme of things without necessarily being overcome by it, or hopefully not being overcome by it. Did I answer your question?

31:03 MICHAEL DIETER

Well, I'm still just dwelling on this 'futile' thing, because we had Valentina Tanni recently on CDI-TV. And I think her argument might actually be the opposite, where she was suggesting that if you look at internet aesthetics and the vernacular memes and so on that people produce around the experience of connectivity, a lot of it is that connectivity is futile, that the promise of connectivity - what we were promised in either cyberspace or immersion or some kind of sci-fi, Silicon Valley future - often the experience of that is quite a bit less than what we've been promised. So, yeah, I just wonder...

31:57 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

That's true, I agree with that.

31:59 MICHAEL DIETER

...about this, using this 'disconnection is futile' as a way to understand what digital disconnection practices might look like today. I don't know whether that...

32:14 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I agree with Valentina's point here, although the way I understand it is, this is a slight variation of what I said before. So that promise we were sold, it's gone. There are some-

32:30 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

The promise that being connected, being on the social media, the promise of cyber democracy, the electronic public sphere, that sort of thing? That is gone? Okay.

32:42 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yeah. Sorry for the apocalyptic tone, but you should have expected that if you invited me.

32:46 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

No, no, no, I knew. I mean, I was informed that-

32:49 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

This could have been possible.

32:51 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah that the Habermasian public sphere, Alberto told me.

32:54 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yeah, no, I know.

32:55 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah, yeah, I know. I was told that. So that is gone. And you said disconnecting is related to that-

33:06 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

To an extent.

33:07 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

-in a way to an awareness that, okay, you sold us like a fake promise, so-

33:14 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Not necessarily. I wouldn't see or qualify this as a sort of counter movement

33:19 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Okay.

33:20 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

But more as the realization that it's over.

33:23 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

The realization that it's over.

33:24 MICHAEL DIETER

That's like postdigital.

33:25 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Postdigital.

33:26 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Somehow, yeah, I like that word as well. This is very related to the disconnection debate too, the condition of our understanding that the digital is part of our everyday lives. Thank you for raising that. It's a point I usually make in these kinds of conversation that I missed doing before. So postdigital being the realization that our digitally hyper-connected lives are a structural condition of our social existence, which have problems that we need to work within, that might potentially be solved or not, we'll see. And hence, the simplified version for me is disconnection is futile, because you can't really just unplug from all of this. Well, you can, but, I mean, it's really radical/impossible.

34:12 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Sorry Alex, because-

34:13 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Of course.

34:15 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

-there's a link that I'm not able to make. So you're saying there is this constellation of practices of disconnection, which ultimately they are futile, because there is not-

34:27 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

No, the micro-practices of disconnection are not futile.

34:32 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Okay.

34:33 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Disconnection, as the idea of being unplugged by a society that is increasingly digital in the way in which we socialize, is futile.

34:42 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

So the disconnection as an absolute thing, like 'full disconnection' is futile-

34:49 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yes.

34:49 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

-also as in utopic-

34:51 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yeah.

34:51 CAROLINA BANDINELLI
and unrealizable-

34:53 ALESSANDRO GANDINI
Yeah.

34:54 CAROLINA BANDINELLI
-unattainable. However, the micro-practices of disconnection are not futile in themselves, they can be tactic, to use a-

35:03 ALESSANDRO GANDINI
Yes. To use a [Tiziano] Bonini and [Emiliano] Treré concept.^[4]

35:05 CAROLINA BANDINELLI
Exactly. They can be like a tactical move. Now I want to go back to, I mean, to stay in the meaning of these connections. Because from what you told before, from the micro-practices that we named, I see different aspects. Because there's one that also has to do - I hesitate to use the word self-branding, because perhaps it's not correct; a matter of habitus, who knows - but a way of signalling one's personality, or a way of positioning, or a way of signalling belonging to a certain cultural milieu or political atmosphere. So I quit X because I'm not a technofascist asshole, no? And that's the thing. So I don't think that I'm gonna change the world. Of course, I don't think that I will necessarily feel better myself. I don't think that, but I do it as sort of, yes, this 'signalling of the self' in a way.

Then there are perhaps moves like disconnecting from an uber-productivity expectation, which I think also has that sort of political côté, as in a contemporary form of micro-striking, or individual striking, perhaps one could say. But I mean, there is a relationship with those more in power, or with capital, capital versus labour, if you want to go Marxist. So I see this aspect. I suppose one of my questions is, what is the politics of disconnection, if we can start thinking in that direction? And also there's something else, especially when it comes to the monitoring, to the other examples that we made about monitoring, setting limits on social media, that I see more through a Foucauldian notion of the care of the self. Like, somehow I disconnect, because that's something that is bad for me. So I'm not doing [it] because I'm cooler. I'm not doing [it] because there is an underpinning political set of values. But I'm doing [it] because I'm getting fucking burnout and I feel bad with myself.

37:36 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yes.

37:36 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

So I would like you to explore more about the disconnection and its significance for the subject, and its social and potentially political significance.

37:53 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I [will] start from the second answer-

37:55 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

And then I go back [laughs].

37:56 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Then you go back. I start from the second aspect: there is a lot of that. One of the things related to the digital disconnection work-related interviews that we've done in Italy that is taking a straight line directly to some of the experiences that, for instance, my Gen Z students tell me in class when we talk about these topics, is the idea of being 'tired' of this.

38:24 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Tired.

38:24 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Tiredness. So it's-

38:26 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

An affect, an emotion.

38:28 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

The idea of the 'self care' in that aspect is absolutely spot on.

38:34 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Mm.

38:34 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Moving it into a politics of something. It's a whole different discussion.

38:34 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Mm, I suspected it.

38:40 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

And it still is, to make it very simplified, an individual response to a collective issue. So these are micro-practices that are still, for the most part, largely individualized. In work, we have two examples but this has not necessarily been only that. The example of the great resignation was a pseudo-collective sort of point, at some point, that people wanted to make...

39:10 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Can you- So perhaps everybody knows what is this great or big resignation, but maybe you can say a couple of sentences so that we appreciate- we are on the same page about this political potential.

39:26 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yes, the great resignation is a term that encompasses...

39:31 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

...a constellation of practice.

39:32 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

39:32 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

One practice, in this case. Quitting. Quitting one's job-

39:38 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

The planet.

39:40 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Well, that's Elon's idea. But the idea of quitting that became an option, started to become an appealing option, in the height of the pandemic, when many people, especially in two countries - the US and Italy, for some reason - many workers were laid off because of the global pandemic, and they started to reconsider their relationship with work. And so this has been difficult to actually record in numbers across different countries, but there are clear data that, at least in these two settings, something has happened in that particular period of time, and it's probably now also been reabsorbed into the wider social... but it was a pseudo- - I use this expression; Francesca Coin used this expression ^[5] - a sort of pseudo-social movement, when it comes to- there was a logic of contagion somehow. When other people saw that people were quitting and thought, 'well, I'm going to do the same'. It wasn't only individualized. And quiet quitting, to an extent, it was the same - being a social media trend. With a pinch of salt, discounting the fact that it was a TikTok trend. So it started out as something that people also did for perhaps a wider set of reasons, than just sort of quitting or quietly quitting, but it became something that people did with a sort of logic of contagion that points into this particular direction.

When it comes to the more micro practices, it's still very individualized, I think.

41:33 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Questions from the audience! Have you quit something?

41:42 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

It's Lent.

41:42 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Huh?

41:42 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

It's the first day of Lent.

41:45 MICHAEL DIETER

First day of Lent.

41:46 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Il primo giorno di quaresima [*The first day of Lent*]

41:48 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Ah! Well, while you think whether you... Oh! There's a question.

42:07 MICHAEL DIETER

Also, do you want to introduce yourself?

42:05 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

Oh, hi. I'm visiting scholar Dr Guy Healy. Wonderful to be here. So impressed with your use of YouTube and the hybridity with academia. It's wonderful, most impressive. You mentioned the constellation of practices. That's such a lovely term. Empirically, what does that look like? What makes up the constellation? I think you mentioned it a couple of times, but if we could elaborate on that some more, thanks.

42:41 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

For the empirical side of this particular discussion, the data I have are related to work, and what we've seen is that it's never a radical thing. It's never some sort of radical thing. It's something you, at some point, sort of make sense and find your own recipe to do. Even when it comes to the ultimate decision, so 'I'm gonna quit my job' and, you know, start a sourdough bakery or something like that.

43:16 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Which is another job.

43:18 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Another job, but a different one, which is something that gives you back some certain types of autonomy, but it's perhaps a different conversation.

43:27 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

We will talk about it more tomorrow.

43:29 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

We'll talk about it tomorrow. But it's never black and white, on and off. It's something that at some point you start making sense, that there are these different practices, and they come on top of the realization - and I'll use a term that I hope you're liking as much as constellation of practices - it comes on top of the realization that many people have had throughout the pandemic, many people who we have interviewed in these few years that their relationship with work is a toxic relationship.

44:01 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah, I kind of love it. Also, the Britney Spears song.

44:04 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Of course. Britney Spears is a Marxist, as we know.

44:09 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

A feminist Marxist!

44:10 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Absolutely.

44:11 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yes. I'm just standing up in case someone wants to ask a question from the lovely, embodied, disconnected audience.

But also, of course, there can be some- if there are questions online, Cecilia...

44:26 CECILIA GHIDOTTI

There was a comment about how much disconnection is futile sounds like capitalist realism, so perhaps you want to comment on that connection.

44:38 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

What can I say?

44:40 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Sorry, yeah, that's my bad.

44:42 MICHAEL DIETER

It's on the stream.

44:43 CECILIA GHIDOTTI

Yeah, we need more mics. So there was a comment about how much this claim that disconnection is futile resembles the notion of capitalist realism. So perhaps you want to comment on that.

44:56 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

What can I say? Touché.

45:00 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

45:00 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yeah, clearly, for me, at least the way I read that particular debate. There is a lot of that in the way I approach and make sense of that particular conversation.

45:12 MICHAEL DIETER

...but do you see also within these micro-practices, a possibility to go utopian? Is it possible for us to start imagining a shared horizon that we can move towards that's not just postdigital, that's not just futile? There are many more calls, for example, for a publicly-led democratic stack. And I think the conditions that we're living through at the moment with, let's say, the kind of technofeudalist Trump alliance, certainly, I think, foregrounds the significance of thinking this way, at least in Europe.

45:57 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

That's a very... I'm not sure if I'm the right person to answer this.

46:00 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

No, come on Gandini. Pretend you think you know the way out of this.

46:05 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

No, I don't!

46:06 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Give us the solution, Gandini!

46:08 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

...and it generally ends up in a sort of apocalyptic kind of tone, which - I mean the room is light here, I don't want to make any apocalyptic sort of... - but I guess the serious answer to your question is there are ways in which we already have, potentially, a way out of this, as you were saying, which starts from the exact opposite of what is happening now when it comes to - as you described, this sort of technofeudalist turn that we're seeing in places like the US, but more generally speaking - the way in which a very limited number of tech companies get into the fabric of society in the same way that different other types of institutions in industrial capitalism have done, in a way that they organize everybody's ways of living. Thinking about the role of consumption, for instance, in both the 20th and the 21st century.

So how do we get out of that? I don't know, but certainly, one thing that I keep coming back to when I'm asked these kinds of questions is the idea that we have become unable to think about the future without thinking about technology. So the vision of the future is embedded in something that must be technological, while perhaps something that we can learn from this debate is that technology is not the end goal. It's a given. So what we construct, what we build upon a technologically-wired world, it's for us to decide not for technology overlords.

47:48 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I think you did amazing.

47:52 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Applause]

47:52 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Thank you.

47:52 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I love how you got around it.

47:53 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

47:53 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I love how you started, like saying, yeah, it's just totally the opposite of what we are doing now.

48:02 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

You're all so partisan.

48:03 MICHAEL DIETER

I mean, to be fair, it wasn't much of a question.

48:06 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

It was more of a comment.

48:07 MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, I think I just gave you a statement.

48:09 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

[Laughs]

48:09 MICHAEL DIETER

Maybe a manifesto statement.

48:11 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah, no, but it was good, and... Here, just because it's easier for me.

48:11 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I think you want to say something.

48:11 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

Okay [laughs] pressure on me.

48:21 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

Yes, I'm Greta. Hi. I'm just a doctoral student here at Warwick. And my question is maybe a bit going beyond work. But what I was thinking about - especially when there was a discussion about being simultaneously on and off and never really disconnecting - it made me think about this idea of connecting to, with, for, what? And usually we think about humans, right? We're connecting with humans. But I teach a generative-AI module, and I had a super interesting conversation about students connecting or forming relationships with

AI personas. And that's kind of connecting, being online, for what we could call maybe a chatbot, a bot, right? And it just really- I don't have a particular question, I guess. I just think how we can think about in relation to work, because there are various apps that, you know, allow you to train your interview skills with an artificial hiring agent, let's put it this way, and it kind of changes, reconfigures our social relations and practices of how we think of doing that kind of work and labour. But also maybe you can talk about emotional connection that perhaps might be more absent or perhaps more artificial. I don't know, just some thoughts perhaps about that.

49:57 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

That's a very complicated one. Do you want to say something about it?

50:04 MICHAEL DIETER

No, but I think I would love to hear what you think.

50:08 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

50:09 MICHAEL DIETER

But I would just add that Greta is making me think about what this connection looks like in relation to AI. And if you think about the vast reservoirs of data that have fed these generative-AI systems - and of course, in some cases, that is open data, and as we know, in many cases, it isn't - how do we think about disconnection in that context of datafication, extractionism, and then also, of course, our personal practices, and then maybe the larger social picture? Of

course, that's a lot, but is this a part of your research, going into the AI question?

51:02 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Well, I'm not there yet, so at some point in the next year, I guess, I'll wrap up the more work-related component, and then the idea would be to expand on things like the ones that you've just described, and more, again, a lot more on the micro-practices, and try to find more sort of theoretical connections and locate them more in a discussion around the social in the present day and age, with all these sort of platformization dimensions.

And to get to the point of generative AI, I guess my instinctive reaction would be that we now have generative AI, but generative AI is not the first nonhuman interaction and social exchange that we've created. We've come a long way in our relationships with algorithms now that is very humanized for many people, and we've done research a few years ago where it was pretty clear that the anthropomorphic algorithmic dimension is something that people do all the time, and you talk to your algorithm, and the algorithm doesn't understand you, and all of these sorts of things are a sort of proto-relationship of what you described. So we have some basic coordinates around which to build these new connections with generative AI that you were talking about. And there are also some other aspects that are pretty concerning, I think, which also relate to the idea of how we use technology as a general problem fixer more than a general intellect, where you have generative AI doing all kinds of things that supplement other things that should be there for pretty much everybody, let's say, but then they sort of become ingrained.

And, I don't know one thing that strikes me all the time is the use of generative AI as therapy, that many people who cannot afford therapy, and younger people in particular, have started doing, and the interaction the sort of psychological and therapy-related advice that they get from Chat-GPT and creating a psychoanalyst persona from a generative-AI application. That's already there, right? So it's very new, and I don't know what to think, other than we have some coordinates to that, but we have to find our own space of negotiation within them.

53:42 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

And this also goes back to - now I'll give you the mic, Chris - but this also goes back to what Valentina said during our seminar, which was - sorry, I come a little closer - but basically she was saying, 'Look, it's not a new thing that we have a relationship, like humans-machine relationship'. And she was talking about the history of art, but I think it can be - No, no I love doing that, I love going around. - And she was saying this, but I think it also applies outside of the history of art. Like, you know how people have this on-and-off relationship with the apps, especially with dating apps, to go back to my research. 'Just to go back to my research' [laughs]. But that was really something that came across, like the algorithm as a libidinal object. And I think it's super interesting, this idea of that ChatGPT becomes not only a companion, but something more than a companion, perhaps even a therapist. I just want to be on camera.

54:56 MICHAEL DIETER

I knew it.

54:56 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah. And I think this is not that weird, like if you go back - well, 'go back' - if you think about how Lacan describes the figure of the analyst, or a certain transfer that you have, which is the 'subject supposed to know'. And in a way algorithms, even well before - or technology, or digital technology - even well before AI or Chat-GPT, occupied that function. That position, sorry. As in, we know something about you. We, as in algorithms, interfaces, or whatever set of technologies. There's something about you that you don't know, but we do. Like even Spotify that tells you, look, we know that you like this song, but you don't know it yet. So I think that it was really already there and I find it quite interesting. And also, in the module that we run for the Masters, we did a creative media project, it was on artificial intimacy, so sex, love, AI, etc. And quite a few students they worked on using AI as a sex educator.

54:57 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Wow.

54:57 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

You know? And this is something that I didn't necessarily expect. But then the moment you think about it, like, 'Oh, okay.' And I think it's super interesting looking at the position that technologies take.

56:33 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yeah, I agree. I don't know what to add here.

56:36 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

No, just that you agree and I'm very clever. That is all I want.

56:41 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

56:41 MICHAEL DIETER

I think it's a whole other kind of unexplored genealogy to the disconnection debate, which is the libidinal side of things.

56:52 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah.

56:52 MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, exactly, yeah. So maybe-

56:55 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

So I am very clever, that's good!

56:57 MICHAEL DIETER

Maybe this is your grant! [Laughs]

56:58 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

This is my grant. My grant.

57:01 MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, so this will be your forthcoming proposal...

57:03 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah. If there's someone connected that wants to give me, I don't know, 100k, 200k, I can work on that. But now Professor Chris Bilton, tell us also something about you. I know you're very famous, but just in case someone doesn't know you yet, you're famous because you're co-hosting the Media Whatever podcast, yeah.

57:23 CHRIS BILTON

So I am the co-host of the Media Whatever podcast, that's my main famous thing, with Carolina Bandinelli. And we talk about media, and we're going to have Alessandro as one of our guests on the podcast very soon...

My question is: the digital disconnection you're talking about is in relation to work, but for a lot of people, it's more about leisure, isn't it? And that leisure becomes work. And so there's a blurring between work and leisure, and digital media is right at the heart of it. So you're kind of doing things that are supposed to be fun, but they become like work. So my kids, when they're updating their profiles or responding to messages, it's work, it's labour, but it's supposedly fun. And flipping that around, you also have musicians and writers who have to spend a lot of compulsory time updating their social media accounts, which for everybody else is maybe a social thing [but] for them it is 'of the job'. It's more of the job than the writing. So my experience of digital media is something that is neither work nor leisure, not very pleasurable, and very time-consuming,

but addictive, and I can't stop doing it, and I still put up videos of my cats, which the students like, and then I feel better about myself for about 15 seconds, and then I feel worse, right?

58:53 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

58:53 CHRIS BILTON

Yeah, thank you. Thank you. Yeah, you're all in this space. So digital disconnection, for me, is sort of almost about a clarification of boundaries between things, and my Covid experience was like: *am I at work? Am I not at work?* I don't know. Everything just became this soup of sitting in front of a screen for 16, 17 hours with breaks and not really achieving anything. But maybe that's just life in general.

59:20 MICHAEL DIETER

What's changed?

59:21 CHRIS BILTON

Well, yeah, nothing. I mean, yeah, that's true. So what can change? I suppose we're back to the big question is how do we switch? How do we change? And can we? And is it utopian and futile?

59:39 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

There's two things that this beautiful point actually makes me want to say, if I can. I'll try to be brief. The first one is that I totally agree with the leisure/labor discussion that you just laid out. I would add that the way we've conceived, also academically, of leisure and labour, is something that pertains to industrial capitalism. Probably that's a concept we should ditch. It's over.

1:00:15 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Oh, it's over, guys. Amongst the other things that are over.

1:00:19 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Perhaps something from consumer research, like the idea of 'lifestyle', is something more useful, where you locate all these different practices into an idea of what you do as a living human being. I'm not there yet, I'm not settled already on this particular idea, but I think it works much better than just trying to figure out a boundary between leisure and labour, which is moving constantly and for individual people can mean very different things. The other aspect, also somewhat related to this, is when we talk about digital disconnection, we should not forget that - probably I should have said this before as well, in another set of the conversation - we should not forget that digital disconnection is also actively sought after by capitalism to make us work more. Thinking about mindfulness retreat[s], digital detox practices, are also practices that are there for us to do, as workers, so that we can come back to work more productive. I

think we are not past a Radiohead song from 1997,
'Fitter, happier, more productive'-

1:01:34 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

No, totally we aren't there!

1:01:35 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Which is not even a song, it's just a computer blabbing words about how fitter, happier and more productive we will be in the age of computers. That was 1997, it was *OK Computer*, it's still here.

1:01:48 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I've been listening to that album these days. Yeah, I'm glad you just mentioned Radiohead. However, I'm not entirely convinced about ditching the leisure/work, because-

1:01:54 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

It was a provocation, of course.

1:02:01 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Yeah, I know, I know. But also I was at Lyon to visit the lifestyle research people, so we had this sort of conversation. I mean, maybe it's a bit of a basic comment, but I still tend to think about work as that thing that pays me a salary or with which I pay my bills. And I think that ditching this part, however, you know, maybe too much of a basic Marxist thing. It's still sort of dangerous.

1:02:39 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Well, do you want to be 'the Marxist'?

1:02:42 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

1:02:42 MICHAEL DIETER

No, just a comment, it seems like we are lacking the right vocabulary. Especially if we talk about a constellation of practices. I mean, we're really just...

1:03:02 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

[Laughs] Which we definitely are talking about.

1:03:03 MICHAEL DIETER

Part of me is not at all even opposed to thinking dialectically, at times. But it seems like it would be more productive in this conjuncture for us to have a wider vocabulary, beyond just work, leisure; you know, to describe different kinds of experience that mix those two. And I think of the example of posting your cat to your students: *what kind of experience is that?* And then just other experiences of conviviality, you know, a certain kind of sociality that is not reducible to a leisure moment or a labour moment, but probably is quite important for us to re-energize or become inspired in some way, or even maybe work towards. This is always a tricky point I think that Carolina raises, are we just engaging in technologies of the self and to what extent is this just the optimization industry? But it does seem related in the way that we can work on ourselves so as not just to tread water, I would think maybe make some kind of progress... I don't know.

And we have a question here.

1:04:38 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I agree.

1:04:39 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

My name is Dion, and I'm a PhD student just at the end of the first year. PhD is in Cultural Policy - don't know whether that's relevant, but that's why I'm in here. So a little while back, I was just thinking about those three reasons that you gave for disconnecting, and the strongest reason I've ever disconnected is political value. And the frustrating thing is that initially, when I disconnect, it's been misinterpreted or ignored. So as a political statement, futile is perhaps the right word. And then with an awareness of AI models and systems - scraping, learning, whatever they're doing - there's almost a social responsibility to respond and connect actively, as activism, kind of, but that's in contraposition to the professional conduct in your work environment. So those boundaries that someone else talked about, they're actually quite important as a professional. As a researcher, of integrity and reliability, can I make the comments that I want to make to counter what's out there? And when I see other people doing so, I just do so. I just go ahead and risk future employable opportunities, because I want to put them on the right platforms where those potential employers are. So that's my sticking point.

1:06:24 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yeah, wow, that's a difficult one.

1:06:26 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Heh heh.

1:05:07 MICHAEL DIETER

But I think super relevant. Because, I think that, well, certainly for myself, I self-censor in a particular way. That's putting it very strongly, but there's maybe some idea of disconnection there: for instance, I don't feel like I want to endlessly be on social media, making known all of my objections to things that I see going on in the world, for many reasons, and I wonder about that sometimes. But then I also wonder about people who really seem to be out there doing that all the time. And I think that there's some kind of very complicated situation we're in regarding the judgment of disconnection and engagement, the politics of engagement. Yeah, it's very, very complex. And that's also labour that we're constantly going through, assessing: *do I engage or not engage? Should I say something or not say something?*

1:07:36 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yeah, it's quite difficult, and to an extent also personal, I guess, the way in which one would relate to this particular boundary that you were talking about. One thing we have as academics still, probably the only thing that we have left, is expertise. So that is also something that we might ourselves value more, because the rest of the world doesn't much. So we know that some of the things we say are not simply, should I engage? Should I not engage? But may come from a perspective that is not necessarily opinion-based, but it's based on-

1:08:16 MICHAEL DIETER

It's not just reactive.

1:08:17 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

It's not just reactive to a particular situation where you can make a political point, but also you can make a political point based on expertise and, let's put it in a way that I don't necessarily like, evidence-based research that carries some weight, at least.

1:08:38 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

So 'Should I engage or should I not?' can be the new song of The Immaterial Labor, potentially. And of course, you're welcome to join as a 'feat.' for that. Okay, we have another couple of questions. If you all agree, we are gonna stay another few minutes. Tell me again your name, because I don't know how to pronounce it. Otherwise I would introduce you.

1:09:06 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

It's okay. I also don't have a fancy PhD, so it's fine.

1:09:09 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

No, but you are our real Gen Z. You know how we talk about all these young people, these undergrads, our students, hey, we have a real one. You know, Nanni Moretti. Do you remember Nanni Moretti? Giovanni. This is a reference only for the Italians, but hey. Okay, but thank you.

1:09:28 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

My name is João. J, O, A, O. I feel sort of embarrassed because I think my last two interventions, I mentioned [Marshall] McLuhan, but

because Chris mentioned the difference between leisure and work. And I've got to say, from the chapter on 'Automation' in *Understanding Media* - I think I'm quoting exactly here - he states that in the electric age leisure looks more like work and work looks more like leisure.^[6] He has pages on that. But what was I going to say? In the chat, they mentioned capitalist realism, and if it is indeed easier to see the end of the world than the end of the internet. You sort of mentioned this political dimension - and in your question, [you] also mentioned the political dimension - because nowadays, a true political movement must have some algorithmic dynamic, you know? But how do you even have an algorithmic dynamic of disconnectivity, or of you disconnecting, if that's the air we breathe, the digital. During the pandemic, there was an explosion in off-grid stuff, like that type of content, like I moved to the woods, or I quit my job, etc, and I now lead this very non-online lifestyle even while I am an online influencer with millions of views and hours and hours. Another sign of this is these critical video essays of modern capitalist life that are like three hours, and I spend like three hours hearing about all the problems with digital capitalist life. But you know, I'm spending all my time there. It is sort of an ouroboros, because you need an algorithmic capacity to make a movement of disconnecting. But if you're still inside the algorithm, you're still connected.

1:11:48 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Can I just comment on your comment that you said you don't have a fancy PhD? I can give you one ad honorem. I think this question is totally worth it and if you ever want to do a PhD, you

know my email. So thank you for the question. And when you mentioned McLuhan, in that way, it was a totally mic drop, you know, it was like, ah, perfect.

1:12:10 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

He didn't read McLuhan [out]. I like that.

1:12:12 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

Exactly. [Drops mic] I did it, I did it for you.

1:12:17 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Laughs]

1:12:20 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

What can I say? There's a lot here. I guess the short version might be that this is not necessarily new either. It's always been like that, right? How do you fight capitalism - outside of it or within it? Right? It's the same old question. How do you reconcile the existence, which is perhaps the newest iteration, what we are talking about today, but that's always been there before as well, like different waves of refusal of work in a setting where work is still very significant in defining who people are and what worth is their life. So I see, and I totally agree, this particular circular, so to speak, kind of dynamic, which is sort of inherent, I think, to the idea of how you as, again, a political person, not necessarily in relation to party politics, but as somebody interested in the common good, position yourself in relation to these discussions.

1:13:36 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

I like that we are getting deeper and deeper. And to finish it off the very last strike. Cecilia is our colleague here. Cecilia Ghidotti, and you also did a PhD on quitting the creative industries. So when it comes to quitting...

1:13:53 CECILIA GHIDOTTI

Maybe I should say that it is not completely about quitting, but quite a lot of it. I cannot guarantee any depth at this point, so perhaps we just reached the top. I was thinking about vocabulary. So having done some research on quitting, especially in the Italian context, and we were speaking about vocabulary, my question is about, how do you engage or react with the temptation of reading contemporary practice of quitting in relations to the tradition of post-operaismo, operaista Marxism, because this is something that I've been playing with quite a lot, and I was always undecided whether to use that framework and in what dimension it could be useful or not. Especially considering, yes, the social movements of the 70s were very much social movements. However, workers refusing their work back then, they were not so politicized under many accounts, so more broadly, I was thinking we should perhaps [be] trying to look at histories of disconnection before the digital or even going back, like [the] Luddites, but how it is productive to open these avenues, or it is just simply too much in the effort that we are making of making sense of connection and disconnection and contemporary work.

1:15:31 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

This was the perfect last strike, I think.

1:15:34 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I can recommend a book at this point. Nobody has done that yet, so I think it's appropriate, I guess. *Breaking Things at Work* by Gavin Mueller is a go-to read for this particular question. ^[7] Personally, I think it's useful to go back to these histories. I think it's important that we don't simply do that, so that it doesn't just become a self explanatory device. 'Oh, you know, this is like the 70s.' No, the field has changed. The rules of the game have changed. We can learn something from that particular framework and take, of course, the things that we need from it, but we'll have to adapt to a context that is indeed very different, because that particular framework comes out of a transition from industrial capitalism to post-Fordism, whatever term you like to describe that particular setting, that works for that particular setting, but not necessarily does in sort of a carbon copy with what we're living [through] right now.

1:16:40 MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, I really love the idea of a media archeology of disconnection beyond even the Luddites. And sort of extracting - extracting is the wrong word - but tracing these histories and maybe some of them we don't even really know very well.

And just a couple of other comments that I'm thinking of. I think that with the disconnection debate, at least early when I was following it, other than the fact that it was painted in a very stark binary, there was, I think, a problem with not being able to think

about effects that could be long-term or medium-term, rather than just short-term. This whole thing of like: *What's the point of what you're doing? What do you think you'll achieve?* It kind of reminds me of how people talk about strikes, sometimes. Like, 'Oh, you have a strike, but the legislation goes through', or 'those people are still in power', and it's like, well, actually, the purpose of the strike is to subjectify. Subjectification. And we don't know the effects of it right away... 10 years from now, 15 years from now. It's transformative. I think with disconnection, it might be useful to think in those broader terms. And then another thing is investing in alternatives, so that when the moment of disconnection comes, there's somewhere to go to. I think, for instance, of the whole Fediverse. There are many critiques that are very legitimate about it, but it's been a long-term experiment, and it still sort of gains traction at times. I think those investments in alternatives also feel important within the politics of disconnection.

1:18:40 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

I really like the-

1:18:41 EMBODIED AUDIENCE

[Applause]

1:18:42 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yes, please. I really like the metaphor of the strike here, but I would add one point to it. Another function of the strike, another goal of the strike, is to disrupt. So in order of doing what you've just envisaged, we should find a way for this particular set of constellation of practices, sorry, to become disruptive. At the moment, they're not. They are individualized, sort of self-coping strategies, for the most part, but they don't raise to the level of a disruption, especially when it comes to a disruption of, you know, social media platforms that

are so global and giant that it feels also difficult to think about how to disrupt them. And there have been attempts, as we know, but they didn't really work out in the way that we should envisage.

1:19:40 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

But it is also what you were saying before, like we don't know in 10, 15, years.

1:19:45 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Yes.

1:19:45 CAROLINA BANDINELLI

We tend to be kind of short-sighted in this regard. This is just because I wanted to finish up on a surprisingly positive note. I think we've almost nailed it, guys. Disconnect! Subjectify! Disrupt! CDI-TV stream! Alessandro Gandini, Michael Dieter, Carolina Bandinelli!

1:20:11 ALESSANDRO GANDINI

Thank you everybody.

FOOTNOTES

1. Alessandro Gandini and Alessandro Gerosa, 'What Is "Neo-Craft" Work, and Why It Matters.' *Organization Studies* 46.4 (2025): 577-95. ↑
2. Alessandro Gandini, 'Disconnection or Hyperconnectivity? Remote Work and the Case of Italian South Working,' in Albris, Kristoffer, Karin Fast, Faltin Karlsen, Anne Kaun, Stine Lomborg, and trine syvertsen (eds) *The Digital Backlash and the Paradoxes of Disconnection*, University of Gothenburg: Nordicom, 2024, pp. 215-232. ↑
3. Stine Lomborg, 'Disconnection Is Futile: Theorizing Resistance and Human Flourishing in an Age of Datafication,' *European Journal of Communication* 35.3 (2020): 301-5. ↑
4. See Tiziano Bonini and Emiliano Treré, *Algorithms of Resistance: The Everyday Fight against Platform Power*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2024. ↑
5. Francesca Coin, *The Great Resignation: The New Refusal of Work*. London: Bloomsbury, 2025. ↑
6. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964/2002. ↑
7. Gavin Mueller, *Breaking Things at Work: The Luddites Are Right about Why You Hate Your Job*. London: Verso, 2021. ↑