

With the beginning of the Digital Revolution people developed a complete dependence on the Internet that is accompanied by a deep mistrust. In order to understand and explain this ambiguous feeling of need and mistrust, I will borrow from anthropology the concept of Mana. Indeed, if we consider the term Mana as Codrington taught us – namely as an indeterminate “force” that greatly increases who gets it but that, at the same time, is extremely dangerous to manage – we can easily imagine that the Internet has become the Mana of contemporary society. Despite the way that extending the term Mana to contemporary society could sound misleading, the research of Hubert and Mauss proves that the concept of Mana reveals a general and universal predisposition of human beings. Following their research, Levi-Strauss shows that Mana can be used either as a noun, an adjective, or a verb but it is the product of a universal and permanent thought. For this reason, Levi-Strauss identified the Mana as a floating signifier, namely a word that doesn’t point to any actual object or meaning but that transmits a general structure of thought. What better term than floating signifier can be used to approach the extremely variable and particularly fast virtual universe that characterizes the Internet and its relation with human beings? As I want to argue, the Internet is not simply considered evil, otherwise it would be condemned and persecuted. On the contrary, the Internet has become the essential “force” for the life of almost everyone in the world and people cannot avoid – and do not want to stop – making use of it. What I want to show is that this conscious use is paid with an unconscious fear that, as anthropology shows, accompanies all societies that handle the strange empowerment of the Mana. Furthermore, using a floating signifier like Mana helps to dismantle the easy opinion that the Internet is just an object between our hands. It is a mistake to reduce the Internet to a simple object because it leads to the belief that our relationship with the Internet is utilitarian and remains limited to itself. Indeed, in the form of a personal computer, smartphone or tablet – which are different forms of the same thing – the Internet is not simply our typewriter, book, dictionary, camera, map, clock, calculator, post office, shop, bank, radio, television, etc., it is also the virtual place within which we express and experience our feelings. Social, dating and pornographic websites are just some examples of a general universalization of virtual reality which incorporates the “real” world of discussion, friendship, fun, sex, and love. Believing that there is an ontological distinction between the real and the virtual since the subject cannot physically follow its virtual extension does not consider the fact that the virtual is already part of our reality since it is the medium of all kinds of relationships and, in the end, prevents a rigorous critique of the use of the internet itself.