

The Road to Hell is Paved with Instagram Posts

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I am not sure when I became a product myself. I do not recall the exact moment I joined the fast-flowing tide, the moment I dipped my feet in the devil's water. I do remember the feeling of being left behind. "Everybody has one". These words had pounded in my head many times but they had failed to make an impression on me whatsoever – being like the rest was not a personal ambition. "Only old people use Facebook now". My ego was shattered – the evil is known for seeping through the cracks in one's self-confidence – yet with age comes stubbornness, so it was not enough to make me change my old ways. And then, the seemingly innocent comment that elicited the final conversion: "you don't have to like it; you just have to use it as a working tool". That was all it took to make me create an Instagram account.

I was reaching my thirties and I was unemployed. I had spent my early twenties studying drama, and now I was a graduated actress working as a bartender. Things were not working out as I had expected, and I would have sold my soul to get, what everyone calls, my "breakthrough". In my free time I attended every casting I could get my hands on. As time went by, I realized that producers - Satan's helpers - preferred artists with a prolific social media presence. At the beginning this was subtle, but the demand for artists with a certain number of followers and sharing attractive content in social networks has been increasing steeply. As if the gates of hell were calling my name, the words echoed in my head, "you don't have to like it; you just have to use it as a working tool". The Devil's book was signed.

It is obvious to me now that not all that glitters is gold, but I did not possess such clarity then. So, I joined the masses of artists trying to sell themselves in social media, trying to attract directors and producers with their posts. I made my humble contribution to the endless cascade of sexy photos, profound literary quotes – I went as far as expressing my inner feelings in limited characters – and random videos demonstrating remarkable acting skills. I worked day and night to enlarge my number of followers and to make an "influencer" out of myself. When one speaks Beelzebub's tongue his assistants answer the call. I soon saw my efforts recognized and I was selected for some minor roles, yet in time, I realised the devilish pact I had made.

As leeches suck blood from their victims, producers derive economic benefit from artists with a prolific social media presence. It is a fact that attracting a large number of people takes time, work and money. Every post made in which we can appreciate a minimum artistic content is the result of a process involving careful planning, pondering, decision-making and production. Building a large community of followers is directly related to the quality of these posts - the better they are, the more people they will appeal to. In this new unholy and unspoken pact between artists and producers, the hard work of stablishing a sort of "customer loyalty" is mainly done by artists

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without producers' investment. Needless to say, producers benefit from this previous "advertising job": in general, a film, a series or a play is better received by the public if the cast is well-known. Besides, by carrying out this work in social media, artists provide producers with new market niches. Yet fairness is not a common feature among demons, so the salary given to artists does not take into account this previous labour, resulting in many unpaid working hours. In other words, producers get part of the publicity done for free.

These monsters in producers clothing not only save money, but they are also exempt from the nuisance of recognizing artists their labour rights. Most of the job done through social media is carried out by artists under no formal working contract, which means that producers have zero legal obligations. If artists get sick or injured while creating content for social media and before being officially employed, they have to afford the treatment at their own expenses and no one, except artists themselves, will take responsibility for the working hours and the money lost. Clearly, it is a one-way relationship as the benefits and economic gains from their labour are indeed shared with producers and investors. We can imagine that if these basic notions of the employer-employee agreement are not respected, more "ambitious" rights, such as paid holidays or paid extra working hours, are completely out of the question as far as wicked producers are concerned.

What started as a promising opportunity to get my longed-for "breakthrough" became a lousy deal; partly due to the unrecognised work done, but mainly because I saw myself transformed into a product. Along with this unexpected – yet inevitable – metamorphosis required by social media dynamics came many adverse impacts on my mind and on my emotions. I entered a constant state of stress. Having a job is a primary necessity in this world, and I felt that the only way to get one was by showing – and proving – on social media what I was capable of. I grew an unhealthy need to validate my art in the eyes of strangers. And not only my art, but my looks and my personality as well. I felt observed and judged. I dedicated endless hours to revising every photo, every video, every comment in the search for a mistake or for something that my followers could dislike. It was exhausting to be under this heavy cloak of self-consciousness, worrying about my appearance and about everything I did or said on social media. It did not take long for me to enter a whirl of self-deprecation and negative thoughts. A whirl I was only able to escape from when I decided to put an end to it all and close my Instagram account.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. I am positively sure that those who developed social networks have put their hopes and dreams for a better, more connected world in their ill-conceived creation - so did Dr. Frankenstein, and we are all familiar with the unpleasant result. And as with Frankenstein's creature, the one to be held responsible for the subsequent catastrophe is not the monster itself. In the end, it is us who give new technologies their purpose. It is us who choose how to interact in social networks and what to use them for. Certainly, producers are red little devils lingering on artists' shoulders, bewitching them with their nasty words to lead them on a path contrary to their own benefit. They are Satan's helpers

after all, and as such they are in charge of building a hell-like system. Artists let themselves be convinced that the old ways are gone, that the future is now, and that it craves for prosumers, entrepreneurs and influencers, without realizing that this system only needs low-cost workers and low-cost products. Is there anything better than having both concepts embodied in one person? We are the products. We manufacture ourselves and then we are placed by our own hands on the virtual stand of social networks... for free. Because we believe it is cool; because we believe it is better; because we believe we have no other choice. Thus, little by little, we set another stone in this one-way path: the deepening of an exploitative system which hides behind a social façade.