

POPULAR  

---

INQUIRY

The Journal of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture

Volume 1 / 2021

**“I, MYSELF AM THE MEDIA.”  
THE *AESTHETICS OF THE SELF*  
AND ITS NARRATIVE MODES  
IN THE *ECHO-SPHERE***

**Maria Teresa Russo**

Roma Tre University, Department of Educational Sciences, Italy

# “I, MYSELF AM THE MEDIA.” THE *AESTHETICS OF THE SELF* AND ITS NARRATIVE MODES IN THE *ECHO-SPHERE*

Maria Teresa Russo

## Abstract

The hyper-narrativity typical of our society might be conceived as a manifestation of the “Expressivist Turn,”<sup>1</sup> previously considered a feature of modernity, now one of postmodernity “Aesthetics of the Self.”<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon is related with a double shift: one occurring at institutional level, moving from information to communication; at individual level, from communication to expression. This paper focuses on the transformation of the concept of experience, as an effect of the social media. No longer merely reflected and narrated, experience is currently and intimately connective and immersive performance, a setting built for everyone and for every kind of event (a holiday, even a pandemic or a funeral). In this context, subject’s autonomy is limited to the ability to manage the game of mirrors among individual expressions, where the immediacy of emotions reigns and the stories are transformed into serial fragmentary, visual, spectacularised fiction, lacking a structured plot. In my view such a world can no longer be seen as an *Infosphere*,<sup>3</sup> but as an *Echo-sphere*: a social forum, where narratives cross and collide, and concern for the objective reference to the truth of the story disappears and mutual trust declines.

## Keywords

Communication Ethics, Foucault Michel, Habermas Jürgen, Intimacy, Hyper-narrativity, Social Media



## 1. Introduction

The prefix "hyper" often recurs in the verbal characterization of the properties of today's culture. For example, "Hyper-connection", "hyper-activity" and "hyper-functioning" are some of the distinctive elements of a hyper-modern<sup>4</sup> society, in which individuals live their lives suspended between the public and intimate domains, often referred to online and offline, respectively. As early as 1962,<sup>5</sup> Habermas had already identified the early symptoms of these transformations. First, the decline of the boundary between the public and private spheres, meaning that private life was being made public, while the public dimension was assuming forms of intimacy. Second, the permeability of the boundaries between information, entertainment, publication, which according to Habermas led to the replacement of the notion of truth as adequacy with reality, with usability.

The myth of transparency and the proliferation of intimate narratives on the social networks has transformed our daily life into a "communicative environment", even into a global "message" which is reflected in multiple spheres, no matter they are real or virtual. In this paper, I examine the consequences of these changes at institutional level, and then analyse the characteristics of the overexposure of intimacy in the social media at individual level. Finally, I try to identify the philosophical roots of the phenomenon.

## 2. Institutional communication: from *infodemic* to *showdemic*

Most sociological investigators consider reflexivity,<sup>6</sup> together with hyper-narrativity, not only at the individual but also at institutional level, a striking feature of our age favoured by the development of new technology.

Therefore, not only the rules and the narrative modes of communication have changed, but it's very content too. Such change had a total impact on the sphere of political discourse. As Habermas pointed out, if a discussion in parliament is broadcast on TV or radio, the speakers' direct interlocutors are not only the other deputies but the citizens too, and communication assumes a plebiscitary characteristic. This way, it abdicates its specific role because it loses its critical in favour of its demonstrative function. The political debate is thus turned into a public show and consensus concerning the veracity of the content becomes more and more superfluous than the mode of discussion. On the other hand, the public sphere provides the audience with the mere appearance of participation, as it mainly searches for universal consent, the processes of the exercise and balance of power remaining impenetrable to the large majority of citizens. Even admitting that justice is somehow related to a sort of spectacularisation, e.g., the live transmission of trials, the risk is to model justice on criteria that pertain more to showbusiness and entertainment.

Habermas would have never imagined the forms that the processes he diagnosed almost sixty years ago are currently assuming. In particular, his thorough analysis of the notion of "public

sphere" and "public opinion", could not have included the profound transformations produced by current social media. For Habermas, the public sphere originated when private citizens began to come together to openly and rationally debate the political and social issues of the day. It was a communicative space where the exchange of information and opinions constituted a cooperative attempt to reach an understanding on matters of common concern, forming public opinion, as a critical instance of the political power.<sup>7</sup> Traditional media (radio, tv, newspapers) undoubtedly helped to expand the dissemination of information, but subsequently produced structural changes, progressively eroding the independence and critical function of the public sphere with respect to political power, fostering passivity and conformity on the part of citizens.

More recently, Habermas due to the development of new media, has highlighted the need for precise premises capable of providing truly mediated political communication. He wonders, however, if the two conditions he hopes for - a) "a self - regulating media system independent of its social environments"; b) "anonymous audiences who provide feedback between an informed elitist discourse and a responsive civil society"<sup>8</sup> - are possible in this new communicative context. Many studies actually reveal that the inclusion of increasing numbers of citizens within flows of mass communication not only appear to fail to increase involvement in politics but, on the contrary, seem to give rise to a phenomenon moving in the opposite direction<sup>9</sup>. Those who avail themselves of the electronic media more extensively and consider it an important source of information denote a lower level of confidence in politics and are more likely to assume attitudes of helplessness, apathy and indifference. According to Habermas the cause is not to be found in the condition of civil society but in the content and format of a certain type of political communication which is progressively degenerating. A civil society is inclusive when empowers citizens to participate in a public discourse that, in turn, must not degenerate into a colonizing mode of communication: "the colonization of the public sphere by market imperatives leads to a peculiar paralysis of civil society."<sup>10</sup>

Habermas's diagnosis hits the mark: relying on the media and the social networks, the institutions identify more and more with their protagonists, producing what is known as *leaderism*, that is subjects who communicate more and more, though they inform less and less. "News" replaces "data", which, furthermore, are frequently emphasised and manipulated to gain consensus or induce certain patterns of behaviour. More than of *infodemic* we should speak about *showdemic*, a phenomenon governed by the same laws as those of entertainment and marketing. As Postman observed in 1985, in this new way of communication the form excludes the content, meaning that a particular medium can only sustain a particular level of ideas<sup>11</sup>. Postman was referring above all to television but his reflection also applies perfectly to the new media which alter "the meaning of 'being informed' by creating a species of information that

might properly be called disinformation — misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented or superficial information that creates the illusion of knowing something but which in fact leads one away from knowing.”<sup>12</sup> Today, the scenario is made even more complex by the multiplication of technological systems and devices which induce us to evaluate the message no longer according to criteria of truth, or to say it with Habermas, “the public use of reason”, but on the basis of quantitative parameters, like speed of transmission and range of diffusion. The more widespread a datum is, the more it is allegedly true.

An outcome of this pervasiveness of media is trivialisation of the public discourse: real facts have been replaced by news and now from news we pass on to so-called “bullshits.”<sup>13</sup> which marks the decline of “fake news” and is far more harmful. “Fake news” continues, in fact, to refer to a solid concept of truth which it contradicts. Bullshit, on the other hand, expresses total disregard for truth, so that it is impossible to debunk it, that is, to prove its groundlessness. Trying to arguing against it might look like excessive pedantry, disproportionate to the quantity of bullshit circulating and the brevity of its circulation life on the web. Facts, theories, judgments, opinions, fantasies, jokes, lies all circulate indiscriminately on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. Dean notes that in the digital world all messages are communicatively equal all the others and no opinion or judgment is worth more than any other because “messages are contributions to circulating content, not actions that elicit responses. It’s like a shift from the primacy of a message’s use value to the primacy of its exchange value, that is, to its capacity to circulate, to be forwarded, counted. Unlike a message, which needs to be understood, a contribution is just to be added.”<sup>14</sup> What matters is not what is said but that something is said and fresh comments simply increase the circulatory flow of opinions. To ensure democracy the absence of censorship would not suffice, the critical function of truthful screening of information would also be mandatory.

One might object that the possibility of faster and more extensive communication acts as a barrier to the authoritarian exercise of power and as an incentive to the process of democratisation, making the phenomena of popular uprisings possible as in the case of the “*Gilets jaunes*” demonstrations in France or the “*Révolution des Jasmins*” in Tunisia. This is true, but the opposite is true as well. As Rosanvallon observed, the mobilisation of protest, favoured by the Internet and social media, is an expression of non-institutionalised popular sovereignty, a phenomenon structurally necessary for democracy because it complements the mechanisms of electoral representation. It is a question of “*contre-démocratie*” which assigns the function of judge and guardian of democracy to the people as an expression of mistrust in the establishment. However, this dynamic is not devoid of risks. If the properties of control and resistance of civil society are radicalised, the public debate ends up turning into an accusatory process often fuelled by theories of conspiracy, thus playing into the hands of populism and anti-politics.<sup>15</sup>

### **3. From Infosphere to Echo-sphere and Ego-sphere: “I, myself am the media.”**

At individual level, the phenomenon of hyper-narrativity of social media, while appearing to be the answer to the need for relationships, satisfies it only apparently because it often exacerbates, even contradicts it. I analyse its characteristics and then try to identify and trace the roots of this continuous flow of narratives to the source.

The culture of the “show-and-tell”, of the “always-on”<sup>16</sup> of “connectivity”<sup>17</sup> has now become an integral feature of daily life. Many scholars have indicated the smartphone as the cardinal element in the production the “tethered-self” or “networked self,”<sup>18</sup> characterised by a link of an emotive kind with the device, considered practically an intimate object. The “Internet framework” is declined according to the *three E* model: *embedded*, inseparably integrated with ourselves; *embodied*, no longer external but at one with our bodies; *everyday*, extended to cover all areas of daily practice.<sup>19</sup> Everyday life has been turned into a perpetual set, with ourselves as directors, actors and, to some extent, public, due to the reflective effect our performances produce. The habit of *self-disclosure* involves, among other things, profound transformation. On the one hand, the concept of intimacy is distorted, on the other, the boundary between the playful and the serious vanishes, with the emotionalization of experience and the slip-sliding of everyday life into *divertissement*.

Habermas had already highlighted the decline of the distinction between the public and the private, whenever the public assumed the language and contents typical of the intimate sphere. Foessel went even further and made a distinction between the private and intimate spheres, defining the latter as a relational notion, not an inaccessible area, but a world we intend to share only with those who know how to safeguard its secrecy and whom we authorise to participate in the definition of our identity. The private sphere, on the other hand, is a property that I can deal with as the object of a contract and that can be exchanged, ceded.<sup>20</sup> In short “*le privé nous appartient quand l'intime nous concerne.*” The hyper-narrativity of the social media reduces the intimate to the condition of the private, because it involves a display of the self that cancels all protection, risking expropriation of the intimate which can also become an object of control.<sup>21</sup>

The other change concerns the transformation of experience according to the instantisation/aestheticisation binomial. The spread of psychological culture and of the psychoanalytical method has contributed undoubtedly to enhancing emotional life, but it has also helped create a communicative model where emotions, both positive and negative, are externalised and made public through a “narrative of recognition”, containing the request to have one’s needs and desires recognised and legitimised by others and the promise to do the same for them. This narrative of acknowledgement combines one’s need for self-realisation with claims to emotional suffering and, unlike a novel or a short story, has a beginning but can continue indefinitely. This narrative of recognition combines the aspiration to self-realisation with the claim to emotional

suffering though, like the novel or short story it has a beginning, unlike them, however, it may continue indefinitely.<sup>22</sup>

These are processes which create bipolarity between the offline and the online dimensions, an interpenetration between these two universes, so that what is experienced in one cannot but readjust the axiology upon which the evaluation of the other universe rests. Joshua Meyrowitz, as early as 1985, analysed the changes regarding experience and behavioural patterns produced by digital interaction, especially in relation to "who knows what about whom" and "who knows what compared to whom". In his opinion, these changes could be summed up in a reversal of roles consisting in a conventional kind of staging featuring more adultlike children and more childlike adults; more career-oriented women and more family-oriented men; leaders who try to act more like the "man next door" and real neighbours claiming a greater say in local, national, and international affairs.<sup>23</sup>

One example of this is the construction of personal "profiles" on the social media. Most users to describe themselves use expressions, adjectives, images aimed at presenting a desirable personality type. Moreover, they often resort to standardised, uniform expressions, albeit with the illusion of being original and authentic. Even if one does not use deception or falsification to provide one's identity, the selection and organisation of the narratives and photos are, nonetheless, the result of choices aimed at exposing something and hiding something else. This is a practice which, on the other hand, is taken for granted and conventionally shared: "you and I know it's not entirely true, but it doesn't matter".

From living "with" the media, we begin to live "in" the media, to then move on to a third phase where the media are us. This may be intended in two ways. Not only does the tool govern those who use it (the medium modifies the user), but also those who use it are assimilated with it (the user becomes the medium). Digital disintermediation, that is, the elimination of intermediary links between the user and goods, information or services, has not only changed people's habits regarding purchase and consumption, but it has also placed the user-ego at the centre of the system, making it producer, as well as user of the contents of communication. This way, sharing prevails over the right to privacy and the disclosure of the digital self becomes common practice. "Broadcast yourself!" exclaims the YouTube pay-off. The individual is reflected in the media (he/she is its content) created by the individual him/herself (she/he is also the producer): "I, myself am the media".

The outcome of all this social interaction does not seem to be the intensification of strong ties, but, rather, the extension of weak ones, although some scholars claim the opposite. There are, for example, those who argue that the new technological media are rewriting the rules of relationships, not by causing a decline in trust, but by creating a new paradigm based on "distributed trust",

more horizontal than vertical. This trend seems to induce younger people, in particular, to share and interact confidently with strangers, as proven by the online use of credit cards, the renting of accommodation through the Airbnb platform, the various forms of sharing<sup>24</sup> that people choose. However, one may wonder if it is really a question of trust or whether it is not the result of rational choices made following careful reconnaissance, mediated by consumer and market needs.

Other scholars speak of the positive possibility of building up solidarity between equals, but this too has a flip side to its coin, that is the creation of "gated communities" or, worse still, "filter bubbles"<sup>25</sup> or "echo-chambers", which isolate and exclude those outside of the group and can give rise to manifestations of intolerance. There are also those who claim that, by observing a norm of non-intrusiveness, avoiding asking and revealing excessively personal data, it may be possible to preserve some degree of individual privacy while participating in an intimate or personal space shared with others. So, it would be possible, it seems, to be able to build a "public privacy", that is, a third dimension somewhere between purely individual privacy and indiscriminate publicization. This third space would be characterised, from a point of view of public debate, by an attitude of "subactivism", as a form of "mundane citizenship", a type of empowerment rooted in individual and small group interests. However, for Bakardjieva, this would not be politically irrelevant and could turn response to events of decisive importance for society into public activism.<sup>26</sup>

Others still believe that some of the social media like Facebook have created opportunities for self-expression that did not exist before and which constitute a mirror where people can better observe and analyse their own behaviour while developing a sort of "media self-awareness."<sup>27</sup> However, it is important to note that in northern Asia, in countries like Japan, Thailand and China, change seems to have moved away from a culture that emphasised community bonds, also with regard to self-esteem and the social function of honour. This new trend, with the spread of the social media, has helped create, especially among young people, a greater degree of sensitivity towards individual rights, shifting the emphasis from oriental collectivity to more Western-like privacy.<sup>28</sup> Obviously, this phenomenon has its dark side too. While in China this process of strengthening the self has produced movements demanding greater individual freedom, in countries like Japan and Korea it has helped create generations of *hikkikomori*, mainly young people imprisoned and socially isolated in their online bubbles.

One thing is certain. As Luciano Floridi argues, as we have entered the *onlife era* and we constantly experience the fusion between the digital and the analogue, it no longer makes sense to ask ourselves whether we are online or offline. We simply need to ask ourselves whether we are sufficiently trained and skilled to remain abreast of all that new technology provides us with<sup>29</sup>. This means that rather than in an *Infosphere*, we dwell within an *Echo-sphere*, continuously closer to finding ourselves in an *Ego-sphere*.



#### 4. Philosophical contextualization of today's hyper-narrative self

To what may we attribute this rampant tendency to expose ourselves and hyper-narrate on the web? How did we come to the conception of this "I-confessional" which considers the sharing of one's private life almost as a moral duty? It is a complex and constantly changing phenomenon, although some of the elements that contribute to contextualizing it philosophically and historically can be indicated.

Without claiming complete thoroughness, the "Expressivist Turn" theorised by Taylor converges at the root of this phenomenon characteristic of modernity and outlined in Foucault's postmodern "aesthetic of the self", with Nietzschean theory of the "fabulation of the world". According to Taylor, it is starting from Romanticism - Herder is an example - that we find, in polemic against the Enlightenment idea of disengaged, instrumental reason, the notion of the self-definition of the I through artistic creation, and a new idea of art no longer as *mimesis* - imitation of reality- but as creation. From this stance we all need to discover how to be ourselves, but we can only do so by inventing an original way to express ourselves through language and action as a mark of our authenticity. Self-discovery and artistic creation go hand in hand, therefore, making everyone the creator of him/herself.<sup>30</sup> "Expressivism" is the basis upon which to found a new conception of the single individual endowed with a very personal way of living and the almost moral obligation to live up to their particular originality. His/her lives will be modelled according to their artistic expression in terms of both content and methods. "What is new in the post-expressivist era - Taylor observes- is that the domain is within, that is, it is open only to a mode of exploration which involves the first-person perspective, meaning what it requires to define the voice or impulse as 'inner'."<sup>31</sup> This gives rise to a centrality of sentiment and imagination and the ability to articulate one's "inner depths" as narrative.

Successive transformations of this kind of expressivism would lead, in the nineteenth century, to the identification of human fulfilment with aesthetic values. For Schiller, as we can see from his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, the aesthetic dimension becomes the expression of the integrity and authenticity of the self, while its development makes us spontaneously moral. Nietzsche goes even further. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, he believes the whole of reality to be art, "only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified."<sup>32</sup> But his thinking already contains the new connotation that the "inward turn" assumes in the 1900s. It is no longer a question of orientation towards a unitary self, meaning something that needs to be given voice through the narrative, where reason, instinct and creativity are perfectly integrated, but the discovery of a split identity devoid of cohesion, whose fragmented experience can only be expressed in an incoherent and episodic flow. As a result of this, the correspondence of the narrated with reality does not matter, nor does concern with the truth.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, even the psychoanalytic narrative model consists in bringing the chaotic magma of our urgings to the surface, because the spontaneity and immediacy of the experiences matter, not the will to construct a coherent kind of exposition.<sup>34</sup>

The "aesthetics of existence" or "aesthetics of the self" find a new declension in Foucault, this time without drawing on the romantic, but on the classical Greek tradition. Claiming that the ego is not a substance, but a plurality of forms, the French philosopher considers it ethically imperative to create oneself as a work of art. The type of relationship that we all have with ourselves needs to be considered a creative activity whereby true "care of the self" consisted in making ours a beautiful existence<sup>35</sup>. The problem lay in the fact that this revival of the classical tradition cannot take place in keeping with the aesthetic conception itself. For the Greeks the beautiful, the good and the true coincided, while at Foucault's time beauty is an essentially emotional and sensorial experience perceived by the subject which needed to construct itself. The techniques of self-care - or self-governance - that Foucault proposes are, therefore, a way of subjectivizing oneself, as a reaction against the objectification produced by science, medical practice and power, procedures for deciphering one's own identity and fixing it.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, in the absence of an objective truth to adhere to, everyone is free to find their own way and style, the freedom to invent new and different modes of existence, their own way of expressing a fragmented experience and narrating it. Although the philosopher does not identify self-care with romantic "self-worship", with the "self-seeking" bend of modern humanists, or with the self-realisation of postmodern individualism, nevertheless, his proposal fluctuates in a contradictory way between an invitation to asceticism and encouragement to enjoy pleasure, between self-governance and the urge to indulge in limitless recklessness. One thing is certain: for Foucault the self has no ontological consistency and needs to constitute itself as a subject, but since there are no pathways to follow, people need to plot them for themselves. Quite an arduous undertaking.

It might seem rather forced to seek to bring contemporary hyper-narrativity back into the context outlined above. Yet, the social networks and digital technologies have done nothing but unwittingly assume its elements and amplify them: the quest for an original way of expressing oneself, pushed to the point of exhibitionism, the exasperated reflexivity, the loss of the boundary between true and false, the construction of the self through a narration that often takes on the characteristics of psychoanalytic confidence, the need for recognition that almost means "putting oneself into the world in order to exist."

All this is expressed not through articulated language, but more often than not through commercials and images, transmitted to groups which seem best able to acknowledge us, and favour our self-realisation, to those with interests and lifestyles similar to ours, although, in actual fact, we actually make what we narrate available to everyone. This excess of communicative exchanges, from blog posts to Instagram and Tweet messages, also responds to the need to cadence our daily experience, without, however, taking those pauses of reflection necessary to order and structure it, without engaging in confrontation with a horizon of objectively real meaning, so that our narrated lives remain

fragmentary and, ultimately, indecipherable. Identity risks turning into a part to be played, making one the actor of oneself, divided between the real and the imaginary, which, nevertheless, urges us to affirm, “I exist, I am here, I am an image, look, look!”<sup>37</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

From the above, two neuralgic points of the hypernarrative nature of our society have emerged: the problematic feature of the public sphere, with the decline of the notion of truth, and the illusion that the exhibition of intimacy through social media constitutes a way to freely express oneself and build bonds. A redefinition of the categories of truth and identity would therefore be necessary to properly manage a process that is now underway and therefore unstoppable. It is evident that it is not possible to silence the chatter of the social media, nor impose bans or limits on compulsive exchanges of messages, also because the digital media possess undeniable positive aspects, like the possibility of communicating with people at a distance, something particularly appreciated during the Covid- 19 pandemic.

At the institutional level, the shift from information to communication and the colonization of the public sphere by the market has not produced the homologation hypothesized by Adorno, in referring to the mass media of the 1950s<sup>38</sup>. Instead, it has given rise to a chaotic agglomeration of contrasting opinions, the effect of the disappearance of mediation. At the political level, a horizontality prevails, where participation is understood as the simple right to access that legitimates any point of view: public opinion is thus transformed into a public of opinion makers.

For this reason, it is necessary to develop a new kind of awareness. We need to understand that technology shapes us as humans and we need to be aware that it is also possible for us humans to critically shape technology. A computer and an I-phone are not simple tools that enhance our skills, they are ontologising devices because they create communicative environments that are always updated and have a performative power that modifies users’ behaviour inducing them to change constantly.

This is why it is so difficult to propose a filter or an antidote: the diagnosis is rather easy, but the therapy is extremely complex. Formulating a new paradigm for “homo digitalis” is perhaps too ambitious, like the proposal to “build the raft while swimming”<sup>39</sup> or develop responses to problems as they crop up from time to time. To avoid becoming an audience of opinion makers or the actors of a permanent show, it is important not only to know the rules of the game and know how to govern the processes, it is also necessary to cultivate the twofold ability of knowing how to wait and pay attention. The considerable acceleration in the transmission and dissemination of news, typical of the digital platforms, makes us increasingly impatient and intolerant of delay in our effort to absorb as many data as possible without having time to evaluate them properly from a

truthful and ethical point of view. We are growing accustomed to cognitive simplicity, so that every piece of information we receive needs to be simple and quick to process; if not, it is too complex and difficult to understand. This perceptual degradation makes us unable to distinguish the real from the virtual, risking an overlap between different planes of reality. It is fundamental that we learn how to deal efficiently with times of reception and reaction.

Alongside this, it is also necessary to cultivate attention. We can distance the false from the true only if we are able to reason by making distinctions, that is, by perceiving differences; this operation, as opposed to distraction, requires, as is the case with everything we focus on, time.<sup>40</sup> At the individual level, we have to consider that identity can be adequately expressed only in a real context, where the dialogical relationship with others is not structured according to the mediatic logic of a storytelling. First, an authentic encounter needs real corporeality: gaze, tone of voice, gestures. Second, self-narration is not the instantaneous communication of emotions and actions, but it needs reflection and re-elaboration that allows the experience to be structured.

Moreover, the encounter is always risky, because it is also exposure to the other. In social communities, on the other hand, transparency and authenticity are only apparent: we show what we consider positive and useful, in a certain sense "choosing" which identity to exhibit. For this reason, social communities are not real communities. A real community is cohesive and supportive, requires mutual listening, trust and dialogue, based on the responsible use of language. Social communities remain simply groups of individuals who recognize one another through common interests or concerns characterized by weak bonds. Moreover, in the *social web*, identity is often based on opposition to people outside the group: we define ourselves starting with what divides us rather than with what unites us, giving rise to suspicion and to prejudice (ethnic, sexual, religious, political). In this way, what ought to be an opportunity to promote encounter with others, a window on the world becomes a showcase for exhibiting personal narcissism, often with the effect of isolating us from those closest to us.

The challenge, addressed especially to the younger generations, is to promote real relational places, where identity is discovered and matures thanks to trusting relationships with the other, and to confrontation of values and meanings. Only a strongly rooted kind of identity will be able to protect itself from overexposure during communicative exchanges on the social media and protect others by means of a pact of confidentiality based on mutual relations of profound trust.

To be authentically oneself, one need ultimately to remain human.

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: The making of modern identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in Hubert Dreyfus, Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 229-252;

- Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the self", in *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds , Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: Univ. Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-49.
- <sup>3</sup> Floridi, Luciano. *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- <sup>4</sup> Cfr. Nicole Aubert, *L'individu ypermoderne* (Toulouse: Erès, 2004); Marc Augé, *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).
- <sup>5</sup> Cfr. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).
- <sup>6</sup> Cfr. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- <sup>7</sup> Habermas: 246.
- <sup>8</sup> Cfr. Jürgen Habermas, "Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research". *Communication Theory* 16, no. 4 (2006): 411-426.
- <sup>9</sup> Michael X. Delli Carpini, "Mediating democratic engagement: The impact of communications on citizens' involvement in political and civic life", in *Handbook of political communication research*, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid (London: LEA, 2004), 395-434. Bruce E. Pinkleton and Erica Weintraub Austin, "Individual Motivations, Perceived Media Importance, and Political Disaffection," *Political Communication* 18 (July-September 2001): 321-34; James M. Avery, "Videomalaise or Virtuous Circle? The Influence of the News Media on Political Trust," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 14 (October 2009): 410-33.
- <sup>10</sup> Habermas (2006): 421-422.
- <sup>11</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. (Methuen: Viking Penguin, 1985).
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.
- <sup>13</sup> Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); James Ball, *Post-truth: How bullshit conquered the world* (London: Biteback, 2017).
- <sup>14</sup> Jodi Dean, 2019. "Communicative capitalism: this is what democracy looks like". *Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens Journal of Communication and Languages*, 51: 33-49. Also: Dean, Jodi. 2010. *Blog theory*. London: Polity Press.
- <sup>15</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon, *La Contre-Démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance* (Paris: Seuil, 2006). Byun-Chul uses the derogative term "shitstorm" to define the phenomenon of the flux of digital messages sent impulsively by indignant individuals to others equally indignant persons, both unable, however, to formulate constructive proposals for the future, obsessed as they are with the present. Byun-Chul, Han. *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2017).
- <sup>16</sup> Naomi Baron, *Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- <sup>17</sup> Jose Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- <sup>18</sup> Sherry Turkle, "Always-On/Always-On-You: The Tethered Self", in *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies*, ed. James E. Katz (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2008), 121-137.
- <sup>19</sup> Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
- <sup>20</sup> "Il faut distinguer les frontières de l'intime de barrières qui enfermeraient l'individu dans une solitude vulnérable. L'intime est une notion relationnelle qui s'applique à tous les liens que nous entendons développer à l'abri du jugement social". Michaël Foessel, 2011. "L'intime". *Études* 10, no. 415 (2011): 371-380.
- <sup>21</sup> Michaël Foessel, *La privation de l'intime* (Paris : Seuil, 2008).
- <sup>22</sup> Eva Illouz, *Cold intimacies. The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).
- <sup>23</sup> Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- <sup>24</sup> Rachel Botsman, *Who can you trust? How Technology Brought Us Together and Why It Might Drive Us Apart* (London: Penguin Books, 2017).
- <sup>25</sup> Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You* (New York: Penguin, 2012).
- <sup>26</sup> Maria Bakardjeva, "Subactivism: Lifeworld and politics in the age of the internet". *The Information Society*, no. 25 (2009): 91-104.
- <sup>27</sup> "Facebook is a virtual place where you discover who you are by seeing a visible objectification of yourself". Daniel Miller, *Tales from Facebook* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011). See also: Alex Lambert, *Intimacy and Friendship in Facebook* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).
- <sup>28</sup> Yan Yunxiang, "The Chinese path to individualization". *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 3 (2010): 489-512.
- <sup>29</sup> Luciano Floridi (2014). See also: Luciano Floridi (ed.), *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era* (London: Springer, 2015).
- <sup>30</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: The making of modern identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 371-390.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.
- <sup>32</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18.
- <sup>33</sup> "Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins". Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense", in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 46-47.
- <sup>34</sup> Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).
- <sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault (1983), 245, 251.
- <sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault (1988), 16-49.
- <sup>37</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. Bernard Schütze, Caroline Schütze (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1988), 22.
- <sup>38</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott F. N. (London: Verso, 1974).

<sup>39</sup> Luciano Floridi (ed.), *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> James Williams, *Stand Out of Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

## Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott F. N. London: Verso, 1974.
- Aubert, Nicole. *L'individu ypermoderne*. Toulouse: Erès, 2004.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. Paris: Seuil, 1992.
- Avery, James M. "Videomalaise or Virtuous Circle? The Influence of the News Media on Political Trust". *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 14 (October 2009): 410-33.
- Bakardjieva, Maria. "Subactivism: Lifeworld and politics in the age of the internet". *The Information Society*. 25 (2009): 91-104.
- Baron, Naomi. *Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy of Communication*. Translated by Bernard Schütze and Caroline Schütze. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1988.
- Beck, Ulrich, Giddens Anthony, and Scott Lash. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Botsman, Rachel. *Who can you trust? How Technology Brought Us Together and Why It Might Drive Us Apart*. London: Penguin Books, 2017.
- Byun-Chul, Han. *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2017.
- Byun-Chul, Han. *The Transparency Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Dean, Jodi. "Communicative capitalism: this is what democracy looks like". *Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens Journal of Communication and Languages*, no. 51 (2019): 33-49. Also: Dean, Jodi. *Blog theory*. London: Polity Press, 2010.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X. "Mediating democratic engagement: The impact of communications on citizens' involvement in political and civic life". In *Handbook of political communication research*, edited by Lee Kaid, Lynda (London: LEA, 2004), 395-434.
- Floridi, Luciano (ed.). *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*, London: Springer, 2015.
- Floridi, Luciano. *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Foessel, Michaël. "L'intime." *Études* 10, no. 415 (2011): 371-380.
- Foessel, Michaël. *La privation de l'intime*. Paris: Seuil, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress". In Dreyfus, Hubert, Rabinow, Paul. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983: 229-252.
- Foucault, Michel. "Technologies of the self". In *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*, edited by Martin, Luther H., Gutman Huck, and Patrick H. Hutton, 16-49. Amherst: Univ. Massachusetts Press, 1988.
- Frankfurt, Harry. *On Bullshit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Ball, James. *Post-truth: How bullshit conquered the world*. London: Biteback, 2017.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research". *Communication Theory* 16, no. 4 (2006): 411-426.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger, Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity, 1989.
- Hine, Christine. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- Illouz, Eva. *Cold intimacies. The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.
- Lambert, Alex. *Intimacy and Friendship in Facebook*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.
- Meyrowitz, Joshua. *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Miller, Daniel. *Tales from Facebook*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense". In *The Portable Nietzsche*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, 42-47. New York: Viking Press, 1976.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. New York: Penguin, 2012.
- Pinkleton, Bruce E. and Erica Weintraub Austin, "Individual Motivations, Perceived Media Importance, and Political Disaffection". *Political Communication* 18 (July-September 2001): 321-34;
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. Methuen (UK): Viking Penguin, 1985.
- Rieff, Philip. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.
- Rosanvallon, Pierre. *La Contre-Démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance*. Paris: Seuil, 2006.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the self: The making of modern identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Turkle, Sherry. "Always-On/Always-On-You: The Tethered Self". In *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies*, edited by James E. Katz, 121-137. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2008.
- Van Dijck, Jose. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Williams, James. *Stand Out of Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Yunxiang, Yan. "The Chinese path to individualization". *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 3 (2010): 489-512.