

Post academy and digital no wall temples of knowledge

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Opinion

The class is quite. It is now 25 minutes to end the lesson. I am speaking of Harun Farocky's films and reflections. I can hardly see the faces of two or three of the students at class, the most of them remain hidden behind their computers screens. Some of them seem to be writing, probably taking down notes from my speech. I could not assure what the rest are doing. Are they searching for some Farocky's biographic data to complement my explanations? Are they watching Farocky's footages? Perhaps they have found some in You Tube. Or perhaps they have been irretrievably drawn by others video movies. Word Stream^a has reported that more than 500 million hours of video are watched on You Tube each day, so someone must be watching it. Why not my students?

Students come to class at university, seeking what? Speeches, words, books... perhaps experiences.

When twenty century was nearly over, an emerging new conception of economy and society entered a phase of consolidation: the experience society. This cultural paradigm was placing the focus on the experience dimension of human desires so previous factors having been considered the economy axes (commodities, goods and services) became to be superseded. An increasing number of services started containing a targeted experiential dimension since then. We don't have to deliver messages, we have to facilitate people living experiences—the marketing directors enthusiastically shouted everywhere. This experiential turn implied adopting a postmodern guidance where emotions are considered leading factor in decision making and, as such, in learning process, community-building, establishment of alliances or construction of identity, among others.

Soon after that shift, the media wall was invaded by the greatest global iconic convulsion thus far: American Airlines Flight 11 crashing into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:45 a.m on 11th September 2001 and American Airlines Flight 175 hitting the South Tower 17 minutes later. As noticed by Chéroux this was the most photographed event in history so far. The world was *experiencing* the first great global emotion shaped by media and internationally spread by a narrowed image market resulted from the “overwhelming importance that large news dissemination agencies such as Reuters, Agence France-Presse and especially the Associated Press have gained in the past few years, particularly in moments of crisis”.¹

Given those circumstances, the visual representation of this event not only caused a great convulsion but marked a point of no return, a new era in the visual configuration of collective memory. The post 9/11 brought along the post-truth doctrine^{2,3} with all its corollaries: post truth politics, post truth era, post truth reality, and so on. This new branch of analytical categories cooperates in allowing us to discriminate some ascendant style of public environment where feelings were replacing facts as basis for social discursive interaction.

^aWorld Stream in 8th December 2017.

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Emotions once again. Due to its prevalence in the public sphere, Oxford Dictionaries declared *post-truth* the word of the year 2016^b, defining the term as follows: “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” All that meant the definitive consecration of the post truth concept. Only three years before, the word selected by Oxford dictionaries had been *selfie*. And just *selfie* was as well the term that the Spanish professor Carlos Elías chose for the title of his thought provoking essay on the relations between the cyber-reality based on computer algorithms and socio political structures in real world. *The Galileo's selfie* was the title, and this was the argument to it: “It (*selfie*) is the best epitome of how science evolution and technology render social implications” (2015:11).

Digital images synthesizing history; digital images conveying our identity. Digital memory, digital (self) consciousness. This let us connect with one of the most consolidated perspective in sociological studies of reality, symbolic interactionism. One of its key principles states: people make sense of themselves and their society through communicative interactions.^{4,6} Thereby, this study tradition has revealed us that reality is constructed. And not only constructed, besides it is collective, or collectively constructed. And even something more: it is symbolic in nature; it consists on interchanging signs that circulate meanings. In brief, reality is imaginary socially constructed.

This is what supports the importance of representations in our society: representations shape our understanding of the world and therefore the basis for our behavior and social practices. Accordingly with the exposed arguments so far, we assume that we have entered the society of emotions, where pattern interactions from where sense is derived are on one hand predetermined by mathematic pre-configurations, and on the other hand overwhelmingly conveyed in visual or audiovisual format. More video content is uploaded in 30 days that the major US television networks have created in 30 years. One-third of online activity is spent watching video. 72 hour of video are uploaded to You Tube every 60 seconds. These are the statistics updated by Mary Lister for *Word Stream* in September 2017.^c *Ooyala Video Index* predicates that “the world content is exploding” due to the “seemingly insatiable appetite of today's video consumers who want

^b<https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/press/news/2016/12/11/WOTY-16>

^cTaken from World Stream in <http://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/03/08/video-marketing-statistics> 8th December 2017.

content when, where and on any device they choose” (*Ooyala Video Index Q2 2017:4*).

We can notice that, in parallel to the emergency of post truth philosophy, cultural practices linked to the modes of world representation and the modes of world representation consumption are registering a drastic conversion. Digitalization, technology convergence and new mobile devices intense escalation are progressively transforming the media ecology resulting in an overloaded media sphere where images are reaching a never before thought level of production and circulation. Due to this, as pointed by some authors, the seminal Gilbert Cohem-Séat’s concept of iconsphere has been exceeded to such a degree that we are now involved in some kind of image pollution^{7,8} where the iconsphere intense densification is causing a paradoxical issue, according with Roman Gubern: “iconsphere is so dense and so lavish that, it frequently makes images invisible, becoming it necessary to shout loud to let your voice be heard”.⁹ Each technology always determines one particular standard of relationship between people and the objects managed by that technology.^{10,d} In respect of audiovisual sector and stemming from technological innovation, that traditional theatrical movie-going is being supplanted by other modes of engaging with cinema. These modes have all been prompted by digital and internet convergence: “There are roughly 100 SVOD services in the United States and thousands more around the world. Double that if you want to add in ad supported platforms, not to mention the content being provided by broadcast TV, cable nets and virtual MVPDS” (*Ooyala Video Index Q2 2017:4*). And, as Claire Atkinson claimed in *New York Post* in April 2016, “Hollywood has a problem with millennials” because they are not buying tickets as much, in accordance with industry data.^e Undoubtedly, we have reached a Post-Movi-Going Age.¹¹ Moreover, production designing, financing promotion and even authoring are getting morphing by digital logic impact. In 2015 we distinguished ten different patterns through which movies production were problematising the classic conception of authoring linked to the idea of one creator subject provided with uncommon sensitivity who reflects himself in the product and becomes copyright owner.¹² One of the most radical of those variables ending up in dissolving the author institution is the *software cinema* (or the cyborg-author) consisting of a software that can search, select, combine and modify a varied of images parameters in an unending process of editing that renders multiples versions of the movie.^f As a result, the meaning of every single image or footage is both continuously constructed and deconstructed and so doing serves to highlight the elusive liquidity of sense.

This evanescent nature of movies as document has been pivotal discussion issues since the early days of film theory. In this regard Jean Louis Comolli has written pretty relevant pages illustrating the paradoxical effect by which more fiction means higher documentary value. In *Document and Spectacle*¹³ refers some films, like *Desert Victory* (1943) that required fiction footages produced in cinematographic studios to complete and make it coherent the result of editing direct cinema footages taken on the field. Lacking this fiction footages, the films referred could never been able

^d1934 refers to the original edition. For this work it has been consulted one 1997 edition.

^eClaire Atkinson (2017): “Millennials are killing the movie business” in April 15, 2016 | 10:05pm

<https://nypost.com/2016/04/15/millennials-are-killing-the-movie-business/> April 15, 2016 | 10:05pm

^fIn that book chapter Mateos and Sedeño refer the project Neokinoktv (2014) conceived by videoartist Daniel Miracle.

to conform any understandable storyline. So, since the need of coherence, continuity and cause-effect relationship is required to build a narrative, documentary film aiming to make comprehensible facts, events or processes of reality cannot afford to give up applying fiction strategies. Finally, *fictionalizing* comes to be essential. Aligned with Comolli¹⁴ argumentations on such documentary film fragility, Chéroux observes a changing sense of reading triggered by one press photograph depending on the rest of photos used in the same page of the paper to illustrate any news. This contagion effect or sense transfers is what Chéroux calls *intericonicity*, a feature that can be defined as one discourse technique to evoke one particular interpretation of one photo linking its reading to another one. That feature can be understood both as negative or positive semiotic potential of images. On one hand it seems to be proven that images need certain rhetoric input to support their documentary capacity, but on the other hand we must admit that iconic signs unfold kind of plastic versatility open to deploy a variety of meanings. This potentiality has further been multiplied with digitalization. Lev Manovich, to whom we owe the first conceptual systematization of digital media language, refers that cited potentiality as the *principle of modularity* of digital language.¹⁵

A general rule is confirmed as consistent finding across a varied range of studies on reproductive media¹⁶ each communication tools imposes its particular representation patterns, with—as noticed by Crary^{17,18} the consequent variations in the organization of the visible. That is because each representation technique implies its own code, or, in other words, as defended by John Berger in that television series for BBC in the seventies, titled *Ways of Seeing*: the visible does not exist, it is created by the observer. All in all, a whole family saga of *post entities* has landed and settled in the conceptual texture with which we are shaping the understanding of the emerging cultural configurations. The *post* hint is colonizing the social communication epistemic landscape meanwhile emotion and experience is reaching a renewed status as means of knowledge. We are facing research objects as Postphotography,⁷ Postcinema,¹⁹ Postmedia, Post-political Cities,²⁰ Postcontinuity²¹ assuming a certain new category which implies some kind of overshoot regarding traditional or pre digital conceptualization of media, tools, genres, formats, discourse types, cultural practices or even institutions as understood by Castroradiadis²² in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975).

In this context, nothing has been said about any supposed post effect in Academy. Let us return to the starting point of this text, to the title. We have not even mentioned the promised post-academy concept; Students come to class to attend lessons. That is the way it has been traditionally. And that has been in such way because Academy has been conceived as a place, one of physical nature, temples of knowledge -we have said. Why should we keep on getting together physically for academic events in the post reality age?

Here is the fairest and promptest answer that could be given: because there is a Post Academy experience to live. If we are entering a Post-Movi-Going Age, couldn’t we similarly initiate a Post-Academy-Going-Age too? Students still keep coming to class, but they don’t come alone, computers, tablets, smart phones and 500 million hours video come with them. But despite this, Academy keeps entrenched in its stony routine of sanctuaries of knowledge. Meanwhile, a new economy of the attention is raining out there.

The aim of this short essay was to open the view that we need to provide new rationale for maintaining and updating the social practice of going to university, to class, to seminars, to conferences... The social practice of Academy needs to be conceptually refurbished.

This needed refounding of Academy would be really socially transformative if addressed from one Kantian perspective, that one emphasized by Herbert Marcuse in the sixties. Referring to the President Johnson proposed Great Society deal, Marcuse remembered Kant pointing: “Kant marked as major education objective that children were educated not accordingly with the present but with a future condition, a better one, of human species, that is accordingly with *humanitas* conception. This objective still implies the present human condition subversion”.²³

Consequently, given the whole ongoing paradoxical process above described, why not expect, or even seek, the correspondent renewing dynamic in the way in which society performs its production of knowledge relations and institutions? The first academic institution that we hear about is the Platonic Academy, founded in ancient Greece in the IV century BC by Plato. Plato had been pupil of Socrates, who used to perform his distinctive teaching tactic at the Forum, a public space at city centre for gathering, market and political debates. Thus, Socrates with his pre-academic open and dialectic method of inquiry provides us with some initial reference frameworks to start posing the Post-Academy. With that in mind and following the Kantian caution, here we rise seven initial principles for a subversion logic to shape the Post-Academy: Opening the classes to listen. Not explaining the world at class, but inviting the world (society) to come to class to express themselves, to be heard and known. Acting in society. Not going to society to teach what to do, but acting collectively in society constructing ways to do. Enabling the future.²⁴ Not teaching to reproduce what we just know, but streaking and trying out unexplored alternatives. Breaking down the walls realizing radical transparency. Digital technology allows total transparency in real time for the whole academic process management. Technological means are available, only political will is missing to make it accessible and traceable public funds management, decision making processes, research projects evaluation Blurring differences and status enabling commons labs. Projects and research groups developed following pro-commons governance model. Putting knowledge to work in experiences incubators. Not delivering instructions but providing the means and ensuring the context to develop experiences. From transmission to sharing; from statement to outlining; from predicting to triggering; from standard-setting to inverting principles; from teaching rules, to spreading questions.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare there is no conflicts of interest.

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