The Avatars of Knowledge: Mediatization

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The relation of human beings with reality and the issue of knowledge is based on two realms of the lived culture: the realm of experimented significances and the one of mediated ones. The first promotes a subjective reality, that organizes and confirms our self-consciousness, our direct contact with the elements of reality, determining a correspondence in substance between the knower and the object to be known. In the mediated knowledge, our interaction with the objective reality is achieved by translation of mediated significances into experienced significances; in other words, the mediated significances replace our relation with reality, they assume for themselves the necessity of direct contact, apparently simplifying and at the same time expanding the process of knowing.

Despite philosophical divergences within the classical knowledge, the generally shared feeling was that reality is identifiable, and hope was also nurtured that one day it would be possible to hold it down in a definition. Mediated knowledge bestows on us a realization that things do not exist in themselves or by virtue of their belonging to any superior reality, and neither by their intrinsic values; they exist only to that extent in which they are part of the process of communication. Through their mediated significances, reality is produced and reproduced, frontiers lose their fixity, they interfere and infuse with each other. The objects of reality and their defining concepts become elastic and multiply ad infinitum, producing the same number of composition patterns, as the number of existing techniques.

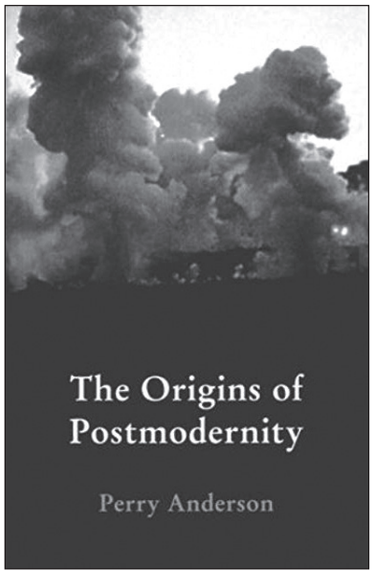
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The problem of knowledge exceeds the field of humanistics like philosophy, sociology or psychology, since it derives from the entirety of human existence in its facets most obscure and most difficult to comprise within patterns of treaded certainty.

Finding itself in a place between necessity and inner impulse, knowledge has represented the main manner of action for human beings in relation with themselves and with others, at a conscience level determining the organization of reality levels.

Being each an individuality, and even in absence of a full awareness of this fact, human beings are structurally marked by the need of defining their inner and outer self. Therefore, in the absence of mindful perception of their own individuality, the reflective subjects emotionally live within their own governing rule, for which reason they desire for affirmation and communication. The subjects' forward positioning towards others requires a number of coherent, perceptible and communicable elements, whose process of acquisition produces the inner tension of knowledge.

The urge to know is the subject of primary experience in human beings, stemming from the existing connection between being, world and self-consciousness, a primary instance of experiencing opposition, that represents the root of every act of taking possession of the world or reality. "Representation



and immediate reflection can not indicate within us anything different than the <so existence> (Sosein) and the <otherwise existence> (Anderssein) of this reality. Reality itself, as <real existence> (Wirklich) of what is real is given to us through a general opposition connected to anguish, that is in form of an instance of experiencing opposition." (Scheler, 2003, 18)

To the theological anthropology, the act of knowledge represents a cosmologic and ontological change, in a sense of a dichotomy perceived at the level of nature and human being; the separation of human from God means also the separation of principles (good – evil, masculine – feminine, light - darkness, etc.) because knowledge requires the existence of duality: the knowing subject and the object of knowledge. The cognizance of alterity and its placement under the unknown is the first impulse of knowledge. Yet, alterity does not signify anything else than a different kind of Me, through which human beings are trying to define themselves. Humans fall from the Paradise of unity into the Universe of alterity, where all that surrounds them becomes another: the physical environment, the world of objects, the human environment (biological and social), the Divinity and His attributes, and even one's own persona. The Universe of alterity stirs inside humans two contrary reactions, that will define two ways of knowing: one of visceral rejection towards everything that is not like me, therefore opposite, and a similarly uncontrollable reaction of attraction, seemingly coming from the depths of a being once unitary, completed and omnipotent. The first type of reaction requires knowledge through which the world is seen as an experience stemming from the opposition Me – the Oher, where the Other is perceived as an object outside myself, that I wish to bring closer, at the same time wishing to impose my own patterns of existence, or a conventional system of definition; this represents in essence the relational formula of knowledge that is the root of sciences and by virtue of which the Universe is divided into Me – the one who knows the world, and the world to be known or the world given to me for apprehending it; thus, a relation of force is installed, in which the knowing subject will have a tendency to control, subordinate and even suppress the object of knowledge. Contrary to this is the movement of the second relation: the alterity appears now not as something given to me, but as something placed inside the relation of mutualness with me, as unity and intrinsic value. This represents the ideal relation of knowledge, in which the tension between object and the knowing subject is overcome; in this point, it could be said that knowledge is self-annulling, since the other becomes equal but not identical, and, by losing its oppositional attributes, can participate into unity in diversity.

The dive into knowledge entails specific questions and terms: true and false, essence and appearance, limits of knowledge and mystery, universal and particular, transcendence – nature, reason and emotion, as well as a perception of the origin, structure and becoming of reality. These aspects have modeled concepts of knowledge in various stages of human progression, from the revelation-based unaware knowledge of archaic communities, to the first clashes over the relations between matter and idea of Greek philosophy, and then through metaphysical acquiescence and search for the unknowable, an down to the rationality of Enlightenment and the postmodern relativism. The two meta-narratives that have legitimized modernity, freedom through knowledge and progressive unfolding of truth through the power of the spirit will be spoiled of their credibility by the very internal development of sciences having become plays of words, but especially by the "technicization of evidence, in which expensive machinery (...) are reducing the truth to performativity." (Anderson, 2012, 29)

Therefore, the technicization of data from reality, or what we call mediatization, will bring about the most significant transformation in the realm of knowledge. This fact modifies not only the paradigm of knowledge, but also the attributes of the object of knowledge. We can speak of imposing a form of knowledge that tends to universalize itself, without taking into account the ideological currents of the age, by creating its own dialectics and its own system of terms: fact, significance, translation, relation, sign, event, etc.

Despite the philosophical divergences existing at the time, classical knowledge instils the general feeling that reality had an existence, whether visible or invisible, real or apparent, exact or approximate, in other words, that one way or another, reality was identifiable, and hope was nurtured that one day it could be comprised in a definition. It is this very feeling over which a

shadow of doubt is cast through mediatized knowledge. The essential transformation that the paradigm of mediatized knowledge brings is referring to the very structure of things that lose their consistency, cease to exist by themselves, through values intrinsic to them, through their identity or their belonging to a superior entity, and only to the extent in which they are part of the process of communication; therefore, all that is not comprised in the patterns of communication can not be subjected to knowledge, being thus wiped out from existence, the ultimate effect being the human contact with a Procrustean modified reality by the specificity of communication techniques.

"In a general sense, says Derrida, one technical development suspends or casts doubt upon a situation that up to this moment seemed stable. The great moments of technical innovation are moments of suspension. By its development, interrupting one state of things, technology imposes a different one. We are now in such a period, particularly in what relates to image and sound, which become support for most of our convictions. As doubting Thomases, we believe what we see and hear what we perceive with our sense." (Derrida, Stiegler, 2011, 129)

The principle of facticity and the rule of objectivity, the two pillars of mediatized knowledge, represent the base for new and ample discussions. For Wittgenstein (Grayling, 1996, 66-67), the world is a sum of facts and not of things. The philosopher opposes the fact to the thing, because one thing exists in itself while a fact can not be distinguished from its logical, a priori given logical form. The idealist hermeneutics regard things as condensed realities, placed within a space and time context, and that by a most faithful recording, can decipher the meanings of a larger reality. By facts can be understood either phenomena alien to our knowledge, that must be analyzed as small discoveries, or phenomena ascribed to the most intimate and profound convictions, evaluations or habits, the essence of what constitutes the system of our lives. The Heideggerian hermeneutics of facticity mean the very confrontation with the existence's incomprehensibility, by opposing totally to the idealist notion of hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1999, 58). Therefore, knowledge and the desire for knowledge are recognized in their tension towards the fact of reality. The Heideggerian concept of hermeneutics of facticity observes the transience and finiteness of man in the face of the infinite task of knowing the truth.

The mediatized knowledge sees objectivity as a sine-qua-non condition of a correct reference to reality and as close as possible to the truth. This principle would exclude any interaction between the knowledgeable subject and the object of knowledge, any pre-existing idea and any prerequisite. The affirmation of objectivity means nothing else than factual perception,



and it shoves out of the way any pretense of ultimate understanding, while apprehension remains the sole trait of the man-reality relation. Yet, is the mediated knowledge, in the spirit of objectivity, a self-reflected knowledge, offering an identity between the reality to be known and the reality already known (in mediated reflection)? The answer to this question is based on two fundamental presuppositions. The first is represented by the constraint of semiotics, which, along with structuralism, transforms our objects, phenomena or attitudes into signs included in independent discourse, receiving significance by themselves. In 1984, Yuri Lotman was releasing the concept of "semiosphere", by which he understood a manner of describing the semiotic space of a culture at a linguistic, cultural, political or media level. Lotman sees the semiosphere as a condition that precedes any semiotic act or text that it integrates, but which at the same time participates in creation of the semiosphere. The mass-media create and exist at the same time within a semiotic space, that becomes the semiosphere of popular culture, in which all actions, meanings and events of significance are translated (Lotman, 2001). J. Harley even uses the term "mediasphere", which he integrates into the semiosphere and which includes "all the output of the mass-media, both fictional and factual. The mediasphere, in turn, encloses the public sphere and the public sphericules, that seem to have proliferated within it. The idea is that the public sphere is not separated from but enclosed within a wider sphere of cultural meaning, which is itself mediated as it is communicated back and forth from the cultural to the public domain." (Hartley, 2003, 142)

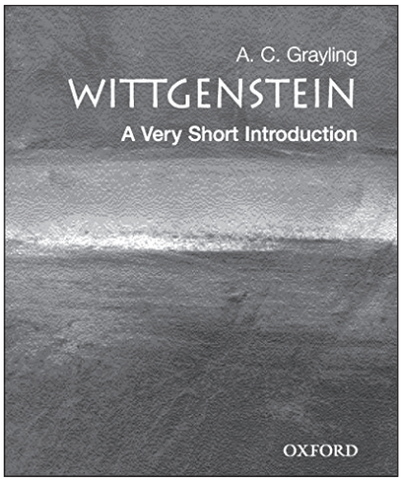
Following a semiotic constraint, the individual does not to know the referential reality any more, but a reality that is semiotically translated into a system of signs bearing the print of the new values of knowledge and communication of the media society: conciseness and abbreviation of meanings, quantitative value of

data accessibility of knowledge, all these contained in routine formulas, by which a dependence of individuals to a familiar and unproblematic type of discourse is assured.

Once arrived to this point, it can be said that the authenticity of media knowledge becomes confused with the authenticity of reflecting reality by signs, the problem of the relation of determination between the semiotic constraint and the deformation of reality by conventionalization remains open.

The second presupposition is constituted by the postulate of 20th century Physics, referring to the lack of evident solidity of what is real. Beginning with the 30's, physicists have studied the nature of reality, taking into consideration the observer's role as well and emphasizing our uncertainty referring to the form and manifestation of exterior matter. According to Niels Bohr, as Paul Davies says (Davies, 1980), "it is useless to consider the atom or any other form of matter from the microcosm as existing really in a certain state before it was observed. The concrete reality appears only in the context of an experiment. Along with the experiment, reality also changes." In other words, the observable reality depends on the way in which it is regarded. If we modify the focal center of our attention, a different reality appears, consisting not of objects, but in relations; this thing shows us that any attempt at knowledge is not based on the very things, but on the relations that we build and that we perceive among them. "The relation between observer and observed receives a certain primacy, becoming the only thing that can be observed. (…) In consequence, the true nature of things can be considered to be grounded not in tings themselves, but in the relations among them." (Hawkes, 1997, 17)

Therefore, the creation of a sense for the media construct is dialog-shaped. Meaning is not only expressed in the relation between signs, according to the law of semiotics, depending equally on the relation between the significations system and the object or its referent, as well as on the relation between emitter and receiver. (listener, viewer or reader). Hence an interactive knowledge in which both receiver and emitter organize their statements by taking into consideration the way in which the message was perceived and understood. It becomes clear that the individual signs remain inert until they are selected and combined within social interaction. Journalists are not neutral and objective observers in the whole sense of the meaning, since their observation of the world does not stand as a mere reflection in the mirror, but is rather determined by the characteristics of reality, more precisely, by the aspects of reality that are obvious. It is exactly what Lippman was noting already in 1922: "…the quality of the news about modern society it's an index of its social organization. The better the institutions, the more all



the interests concerned are formally represented, the more issues are disentangled." (Lippman, 1992, 363). This dialog between the media and society happens therefore within limits of a confirmed pattern, through which the society wishes to maintain a stability of the current formula, and the media aim at creating a satisfactory degree of dependence of the public to their services, by pretending to be an indispensable translator for the data of knowledge on various levels of reality. The ultimate effect of this relation consists in the fact that the media simultaneously create and reflect reality, being equally a creation of the social system they reflect.

George Bataille (Bataille, 1976) and Jean-Luc Nancy (Nancy, 2005) emphasize the double failure of community and communication; the loss of community intimacy leads to a degradation of communicative intimacy. Communication maintains its significance to that extent in which it is an indicator of subjectivity or inter-subjectivity, and as long as it is centered around transmission of message and meaning. The day-to-day praxis demonstrates an illusion of communication, that is, of a clash between two subjectivities: we are rather talking about a clash that becomes postponed through the process of mediation, or the "spectacle", as Guy Debord puts it. "The spectacle is not a potpourri of images, but a social relation between persons, mediated by images." (Debord, 2002, 40). The mediatic instances of discourse double or even triple the direct experimental discourse between people and their immediate reality, finally overlapping or even substituting it. Every possible mise en relation is subordinated to the image. McLuhan identifies this substitution with the myth of Narcissus, who becomes a prisoner of his own image reflected in water, losing his identity and becoming a closed system, incapable of receiving any wave coming from the concrete reality. Just like Narcissus, the people, says McLuhan, "become fascinated by any extensions of themselves in any material other than themselves,"

(McLuhan, 1964, 51-52) the reflected image thus becoming an amputation of one's own conscience, submitted to a too big pressure from reality. The technicization and simulation indicate to a certain extent, the finitude of meaning. Simulation, as a global process, is a mise en scene of void representations of supposition of a complete presence, of a meaning that closes and completes the project, and the field of technology is not merely a prolongation of nature or man, but a replacement, thus reveling that there is neither immanence nor transcendence left. Technology "incessantly de-multiplies, disassembles, disorients a finite closure of a particular meaning" (Nancy, 1990, 47). With all this, technicization does not represent a double of reality, just like writing does not represent a double of speech, since between reality and technology there is rather a transductive relation emerging, within which one is becoming through the other.

The circuits by which we have dialogs with ourselves, with others and with the world, in more vague or more concrete forms, reveal an increasing frailty of the human existence, and its main sign opens itself to understanding in what I have described above in terms of mediation. The impoverishment of experience, the stripping of a subject of his/her experiential faculties, an artificial provocation of experiences, as well as the artificial fabrication of events are affecting, above all, the human capacity to mediate, that capacity that protects the individual from being overwhelmed and swallowed up others and by things.

In the stead of a world that was based on the one hand on the perception of things, on their direct presence and the unique contact with them, and on the other hand on the primacy of the concept of division of distinct objects into ideas and categories, there is an increasing presence of an open arena featuring permanent changes, concepts that are inwardly undefined, or contradictory sequences that elude any attempt at exact interpretation, even more as we are confronted with a scarcity of terms to define them.

The way in which we understand the personal environment and the world is ultimately encompassed in the discourse instances of reality. There is a definition of individuality suggesting that it is nothing else than a shock that intersects contradictory discourses. Within the specificity of this individuality, the fulfillment or failure of a human being through knowledge is reflected. The information models, by its nature, specificity and form, all these elements, bearing the mark of the media model. The change produced through information inside the essence of things influences, as in a vicious cycle, our perception of other data of reality, that is on the alterity discovered within others and inside our own self.

The final failure of knowledge is not the loss of reality, but the loss of the self, because knowledge represents an inner act, an act of intimacy projected over the world. Therefore, both the extreme of knowledge relativization and that of imposing an official version to the world is deforming the act of knowing, that will cease to be understood as an interior unique and individual projection on reality, meant to give the latter the diversity and variation of the knowledgeable subjects.

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