COMMUNICATIONAL TOOLS OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract: *Contemporary Western culture is under the sign of the interest for communication. Internet and mobile telephony place over the world, network-type structures, analogous to those in the Renaissance representation of the world. Internet ensures, through the very technical conditions of its use, the creation of a private space wherein the individual faces himself. The use of the mobile phone favours the replacement of the individual in the network of his personal relations and in his own history. Internet and mobile telephony support self-knowledge.*

Key words: *communication, self-knowledge, Internet.*

1. Introduction

The contemporary West lives under the bombardment of the information and of the various radiations emitted by the means of transmitting them. Referring, for the time being, with a mixture of pride and anxiety, to this bombardment, the Westerner permits meanwhile his own moulding. The current approach aims at emphasizing the implication of using the contemporary communication means, especially the Internet and the mobile phone, in the human process of self-knowledge.

2. The contemporary Westerner's orientation towards communication

In the history of philosophy, the interest in the prime principle is followed by the one in knowledge and then by the one in communication. These shifts of the knowing interest overlap, with a wide tolerance range, the passage from the antique philosophy to the modern and,

respectively, contemporary ones. The information and facts that exist in themselves, that can be known and that can be communicated, succeeding themselves in the core of the philosophical approach, mark its progressive moving away from the issue of the Being, simultaneously with restraining its cognitive field. To it, *it is what it is*, follows *it is what it is known*, and then *it is what can be communicated*. The restriction is apparent since, reorienting its approach, philosophy attaches to its new study objects, the status of reality criteria, consolidating the insertion of anthropology into ontology.

The entrance of philosophy into the communicational paradigm is highlighted by its orientation towards the sign, which is something else than the object and something else than the idea [1].

Analytical philosophy, philosophical hermeneutics and semiology, mainly in its structuralist development, program-matically operate this object shift.

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Consequently, the language and the world coextensively unveil themselves.

Philosophy has always stood, in Western history, as the hallmark discipline of all times. In the orientation of the philosophical discourse, it crystallizes the representative ideas of the time. The orientation of philosophy towards communication highlights, also in the case of contemporaneity, a broader communicational orientation, of the entire epoch.

In a reductionist vision, the information and facts that can be communicated imply accessibility from a technical and juridical standpoint. Under this vision, an idea, a researcher or the results of a research exist if they may be retrieved in the databases accredited by the scientific community. In extending this state of affairs, academic prestige is valued through the number of quotations and participations to conferences and symposia. Under the reductionist vision, there are placed the service providers' battles for a place in *Golden Pages*, a presence which ensures their privileged existence on the market. Under the same auspices, there operates the public persons' affinity for media scandals. In a broad vision, very optimistic from an anthropologic standpoint, the information and facts that can be communicated aim at edifying the individual who communicates himself.

3. Internet and mobile telephony. Communicational particularities

Both in the first and second vision, the internet and mobile telephony underlie communication. As far as they are concerned, mass-media has highlighted variegated disquieting aspects during recent years. Even a superficial search unveils manifold information on the danger of their widespread use.

The aspects highlighted by the media cannot be simply overlooked. It is not difficult to imagine that only one part of the issue, the one on the surface, can be seen. These communication means have been widely accessible and intensively used for a relatively short time. An emerging problem stands for a challenge; and humankind, paying the price more or less honestly, has evolved by facing challenges.

Beyond the effects caused by the widespread use of the internet and mobile telephony on human health, their role unveils itself in outlining the manner specific to the communicational paradigm for finding one's place in the world.

DiMaggio, Hargittai, Newman and Robinson [3] perform a brief presentation of the questions raised for the sociologists by the development of the Internet and of the main answers they have elaborated.

The first question emphasized in the four researchers' study refers to the role of the Internet in reducing or reproducing the social inequalities. The answers to this question range between the enthusiastic position of those who deem that cheap access to information on the Internet means access to opportunities and implicitly, to a better life for those with low incomes, and the opposite position of those who consider that, likewise in the case of internet access, the high socio-economic status constitutes an advantage, materialized in better and broader connections. The researches highlighted by the authors of the study have emphasized that the impact of the educational level on the use of the Internet is greater than the impact of the incomes and that the access disparities between various social categories and groups have diminished once the technology has developed and has become more easily accessible.

Another question emphasized by the four researchers is focused on the influence

of the Internet on the inter-human relations. The answers to this question range between indicating the socialization facilities that the Internet creates and, at the opposite end, highlighting the tendencies to withdraw within the artificial, virtual world that it fosters. Studies from the 90s indicated a good correlation between the use of the Internet and the participation in the cultural activity (literature, shows, use of printed mass-media, etc). This correlation disappeared in a few years.

As regards social interaction, a study from 1998 (Kraut *et al.*) highlighted the decline in the communication with the family members and with the circle of friends, simultaneously with the rise in the feeling of loneliness and of the depression brought about by the use of the Internet. The situation changed, according to the results of subsequent researches, due to the accumulated experience and competence and to the extension of the user networks. The Internet has cancelled the community members' role of geographical proximity and has brought along the creation and keeping up relations in the network. The studies conducted upon the online communities highlight the participants' delight in the long-distance communication facility for elderly and sick persons, for minorities and advice claimants. Other studies have emphasized the great capacity of the online network to socially support its members. The Internet, as shown by the conclusion of these studies, supports the community connections by completing, not replacing, the interaction modalities of others.

Another question emphasized by the authors of the study refers to the relation of the Internet with the politics. The answers to this question range between the optimism of those who consider the use of the Internet to be an opportunity for fairly resetting the political scene and, at

the opposite end, the scepticism of those who consider the Internet to be a more efficacious means (through its greater capacity to invade the users' privacy) of propaganda and persuasion.

The highlighted researches show that those who search for political information on the Internet are already well informed and have a well defined political orientation. The Internet supplements and does not replace other sources of information. The possibility of retransmitting the accessed information throughout the network raises the Internet users' potential degree of political involvement. Internet-favoured anonymity might amplify extremist speeches. At the same time, however, the Internet might mobilize its self-regulation forces.

Another question highlighted by the authors of the study is centred on the impact of the Internet on the organizational culture. Its afferent answers cover the interval between replacing the authoritarian hierarchical bureaucracy with network-type uniform structures wherein the strategies are permanently reconsidered and, at the opposite end, favouring a strict managerial control. Most employees resort to the Internet at home in order to supplement, not to replace the time at the workplace. Work teleconferences diminish the employees' stress as regards risks, rendering the decision-making process more balanced, studies show. In the public sector, the use of the Internet has the effect of reducing bureaucracy, but also access to information is conditioned by IT training, this situation bringing about inequalities.

The last question highlighted by the authors of the study refers to the impact of the Internet on culture, in this case supporting the cultural hyper-specialization or the mass culture. The answers cover the interval between the optimistic trust in the democratization of the informational flux (wherein the media

consumers directly interact, without depending on the media organization and its editorial policy) and the limitation on criteria of economic-efficiency of the Internet users' liberties. Democratization is associated with mass culture. The intervention of the economically interested corporations in exploiting the Internet brings about an ever-increasing narrowing of the targeted public, isolation and myopia. The Internet is a direct-communication tool, e-library and tribune for the users' opinions; it likewise is a conventional supplier of media services. Its capacity to provide access on many paths to the information existing at all times yields the great malleability of the Internet.

According to the authors of the study the manner of solving the problems connected with the equality of the access to the Internet, with ensuring / protecting the users' privacy, with defining the specific rules of intellectual property determine the future of the Internet. Sociologists use the Internet as an immense laboratory, support for researches and source of information. Explanations with respect to the collective choices that will determine the evolution of the Internet are expected from sociologists.

Philip Agre (*apud.* DiMaggio *et al.*, 2005) showed in the late 90s that the discussions about the Internet are less nurtured by solid knowledge than by the system of myths and ideas that society projects on it. Justifiable through the actuality of the theme and through the spectacular dynamics of the Internet, this support could signal something else than knowledge gaps rather through myths than solid knowledge. It might be the adequate expression of the contemporaries' reaction to a marked existential challenge.

Laura Maliţa [4] synthetically presents the advantages and disadvantages brought along by the use of the mobile phone. This way, its use has the following advantages: mobile phones are small and portable; they have pleasant design that may be customized; owners are attached to their devices; mobile phones have multiple uses, they may be used in emergency situations; they are user-friendly; mobile telephony networks cover larger areas than other communication means; mobile phones facilitate telework, the cost of the calls is not very high; phones have multiple functions; they provide access to the Internet; they may be used as means of entertainment; they may be used by anyone, anywhere, anytime, regardless of the network and device.

The disadvantages of to the mobile phone are - according to Laura Maliţa - the following: the boundary between leisure and work time is continuously blurring; phone use in public spaces is sometimes annoying ; phones affect the users' health; the language is transformed through its adaptation to the specificity of the communication through mobile telephony; vulnerability to viruses; children are tempted to excessively use the mobile phone; the right to privacy is violated; the loss of the mobile phone may entail the loss of important data, the use of the mobile phone is dangerous when driving, mobile telephony harms the environment.

The relation between advantages and disadvantages is subject to personal assessments on communication, information and on the power resulting from holding them.

4. I.P. Culianu and the Renaissance representation of the world

The Internet and mobile telephony technically place network-type structures over the world. The users are in permanent possible contact. This state of affairs is fairly similar to the Renaissance representation of the world, a magical representation, according to I.P. Culianu [2]. For the Renaissance human being,

Culianu shows, the space is structured as a network wherein all things are woven and may interact. The principle of these interactions is the universal pneumatic sympathy. He who knows the principle may seize hold of the world, acting in the network nodes. The effectiveness of this action proceeds from the continuity of the nature of the human soul and the world's soul. Imagination renders action possible, operating in the fantastic range.

This representation of the world extends Antiquity through the Middle Ages. The scission, according to Culianu, occurred in the human imagination between Renaissance and Reformation. Modern science is the result of a process similar to natural selection, proving its validity in the conditions of the terror inspired by the witch stakes. People have turned to occupations considered harmless by Christian Churches. Renaissance is a culture of the fantastic, it actively operates with phantasms. The modern man, the outcome of a psychological mutation, represses the Renaissance picture of the world and, sheltering within himself a terrible fellow he cannot communicate with, is always close to crisis. The censorship of the imaginary brought along exact sciences, modern technologies, modern institutions and the procession of afferent chronic neuroses. The picture outlined this way seems hardly to represent the best of the possible worlds for the human being. The loss of the other communication paths between the human being and the world stands for an unfortunate accident.

History is unpredictable, paradigms are incommensurable. Culianu does not believe in the cumulative progress. The modern science is by no means superior to the magical paradigm and here his discourse meets Th. Kuhn's discourse.

The solution suggested by Culianu is the one of a new Renaissance, consequence of another epistemological mutation.

5. Communication and knowledge

Contemporary communication means, transforming their users into network nodes, support a holistic representation, almost magical in Renaissance terms, of the world. In this representation, the world unveils other strange attributes. Space and time become relative; distances reconfigure their signification, associating simultaneities.

The use of the modern communication means signifies partial release from spatial and temporal constraints. The mobile phone supports closeness a whisper away and also returns to emotional contexts of former times. It facilitates and urges clarifications of situations, allowing for the things untold to be spoken out. It acts almost therapeutically, opening paths for releasing former tensions. It allows thereby the comprehension of a situation both backwards and forwards, and likewise reconciliations with oneself and with the others. It technically underlies meditations upon the influence that time can or cannot exercise on the human being, upon the changes it can or cannot operate. It is an instrument in an endeavour of drawing closer to the essential. The mobile phone does all these things simply because it exists. It is the tool at hand for replacing the individual in the network of his personal relations and in his own history.

As regards the Internet, the plea for considering it as an instrument for self-knowledge eludes the area of the online games and players. In their case, the stress is laid on the game, on the phenomenology of the game and not on the specificity of the games allowed by the net.

Away from the reason of its establishment, the Internet is mostly used by the common persons who do not play games, for obtaining information in areas of immediate interest or for establishing and keeping up personal connections. In

both cases, the Internet user implicitly works towards searching himself.

The orientation in the wide, overwhelming field of the unknown information acquires connotations of initiation as it supposes clearly outlining the purpose and ordering the priorities into a hierarchy during the search. It is an exercise for consolidating the self, the more useful as it is not devoid of dangers.

As support for personalized communication, the Internet ensures, through the very technical conditions of its use, the creation of a private space, of an interval wherein the individual faces himself. Either having to define himself in order to introduce himself, in case of establishing a connection through the Net, or exploiting the liberty of a delayed, not *yet* formulated, answer, the user offers himself occasions of introspection. The time spent this way is not necessarily wasted. It may be converted into a support of the self-growth. Talking to each other, people also speak with their inner selves. The isolation from one's fellows, highlighted as potentially dangerous for the frantic Internet user is, at the same time, a favourable condition for self-retrieval. And the withdrawal in the private cyberspace, often suspected of pathological charge, may be even a wise withdrawal from the world's madness.

6. Conclusions

Human beings have not been uselessly endowed with speech, Aristotle thought. By and during speaking, people grow up. Elaborating ever more efficient communication means, the contemporaries implicitly endeavour with the purpose of their own growth, opening new paths for communication. In this perspective, the injuries caused by the fairly unskilled use of the new communication means may be considered part of humankind's growth.

By communicating, the human being knows himself. His new communication instruments, expression of the technological progress, simultaneously favour the return of his attention towards what he is and his placement in the world's network.

In the same Hegelian optimistic perspective the communicational paradigm is the third natural step in the demarche for enriching the human species. Humankind grows, it metamorphoses, by communicating itself. The general interest for courses and specializations in many kinds of communication may be a sign for good intuition of the growth.

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