Cyberspace and Cyberculture: the new social and governance field

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Abstract

This paper discusses how governance on cyberspace used cyberculture elements and is increasingly using data to homogenize behaviors and social groups. It is intended to discuss historical and philosophical issues through transdisciplinary study, gathering political sciences, communications, sociology and international relations to demonstrate that people are taking social network platforms, exposing their privacy and facilitating data capture by large companies. We will see social behaviors on social network platforms and how power groups have used data to manipulate social groups.

Keywords: cyberspace, cyberculture, social network platforms

1 Cyberspace and post-modern condition

With the quick scientific and technological advance, technological devices became more accessible and were exponentially being incorporated by society to facilitate routine activities, and are used both at work and in personal relations. We can notice that the scientific and technological advance created better life conditions to the population. The social transformations in the last decades involve not only economic and technological changes, but deep social transformations as well, still in turmoil. This paper presents some explanations on how data are produced, consumed and shared on social networks, in addition to how and where these networks are structured today. It is also shown how the construction of social identity changed and is changing due to the break with concepts of truth and modern meta-narratives.

For researcher and artist Cleomar Rocha (2019, p. 113) "technology is not technique, or device"; "technology is a knowledge that spreads in a community, after the understanding by science evidences". For him, "device is not a technology, but uses this knowledge, as it incorporates this knowledge to execute its function". This thought is aligned with anthropologist François Sigaut who says that we can't directly "observe" techniques. What we can see is people doing things: a plumber fixing a leakage in your bathroom; a mechanical shovel digging a hole in your street (SIGAUT, 2002 [1994]:424). For anthropologist Ludovic Coupaye (COUPAYE, 2017, p. 476) the "speeches produced" by usages, artifacts (works of art of "new Technologies" products) are no longer passive witnesses, reflexes or signifiers, but rather "actors" of social life, and that, sometimes, not metaphorically".

Today, the idea is to have everybody connected to the internet, producing and sharing data. Not very long ago, mobile phone devices were used only to make calls (verbal language), then text messages prevailed (graphic language), and today everybody has cameras (visual language) and connectivity with internet. Internet is part of people's daily life, and the trend is that we will be increasingly more connected to devices linked to internet, making connectivity a common space in social construction and in the identity of the social being, so that there will be no longer distinction of "online", "off line", "real" and "virtual" (HINE, 2015 apud TEIXEIRA; ZANINI; MENESES, 2017). "The internet is no longer a mere instrument and becomes part of the political action of a wide network of social actors" (TEIXEIRA; ZANINI; MENESES, 2017). Some theorists view connectivity as characteristic of our age, placing it above simple connection between persons and things and linking it to the time we live – the connectivity age -, where participation becomes self-motivating as contents are exponentially received and shared on the network, many of them images.

Cyberspace is increasingly becoming more important as stage for political debate, attracting companies and public agents to social media platforms. It is therefore necessary to understand the context and the global conjuncture, to understand why, who and where discussions occur, because they form the collective agenda. Next, syntheses

are presented of the thought of scholars who study the post-modernity[1] or super modernity and how social movements are being developed in this new field.

1.2   New technologies, conceptions of the world and new truth regimes

With the emergence of new technologies, the cyberspace assumed a place of central power promoting the exhaustion of hierarchically rigid institutions like church and academy, making way to relationship networks, with fluid, transversal and cooperative structures.

Studies on contemporaneity address global and collective themes that reflect and are expressed in the individual life, having as initial historical Mark the break with the previous period, modernity, by means of the decline of the Soviet Union and the fall of Berlin wall, which promoted intense socio-economic changes at global level, breaking with the modern model of the Cold War (MAFFESOLI, 2015, *on-line*) and "changing the global geopolitics[2]" (CASTELLS, 2000, p. 39).

The new conceptions of the world and reality arise due to several contemporary phenomena, among them, the expansion of concepts of identity, gender and race. They create doubts and promote reflection on economic, social and environmental problems that have been widely discussed both in academic ambit and outside it. These analyses on our historical condition are focused on the globalization and fragmentation paradox. On one side, globalization hegemonizes cultural manifestations and imposes the neoliberal economic model based on large scale consumerism that generates large scale production and disposal. On the other hand, the fragmentation of this process by means of impacts on the nation-state political system "due to local regional and institutional differences that emerge not only across geopolitical groups, but also inside them" (MARTINS, 2013). For Martins, these two contradictory forces create conflicts in social spaces that are intensified, in the post-modernity, by the participation of the mass in social networks located in the cyberspace.

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1 "As of the 1950s, the term started to be used in North-American literary theory to classify the main schools in the 20th century. At first, the term was used in pejorative sense, that is, to name a poorly inspired moment compared to previous productions in modern languages area. But in the mid of the 1960s, the word gained affirmative connotation. In 1969, the American literary critic Leslie Fiedler (*Cross the border*) describes his time as a death fight between modern and post-modern literature. The post-modern watchword would be: "transpose the border" between a supposedly elitist art and a more popular art" (FEITOSA, 2004).

2 Geopolitics is a study of States in their relation in the world context (BOFIM, 2005).

For theorists, this socio-economic and cultural transformation, somehow, has recently promoted some divergence among authors and schools on our current historical period and its definitions; however, there is consensus that we are undergoing a dense social, economic, cultural and symbolic transformation, possible and potentiated by the new information and communication technologies. To theoretically ground this research, post-modern, super-modern and hyper-modern concepts will be presented along with their relations with cyberspace and contemporary social movements.

Post-modernity, or super-modernity, or hyper-modernity definitions are linked to the social changes that the contemporary society is undergoing due to breaks with truth regimes and modern meta-narratives already consolidated in the social culture. These three terms were coined by researchers from different schools in order to define the state of the arts of the contemporary period and also o make theoretically possible the development of methodological studies on the theme. Some definitions on this theme will be presented for a better understanding of the time we live.

Maffesoli (2015), while approaching post-modernity, remarks the difficulty to define the term, but creates a provisional definition that would be "the synergy of archaic phenomena and the technological development" and explains that the main objects of study of post-modernity are the Nation-State, institutions and ideological systems with emphasis on local, urban tribes and mythological bricolage[3]. For Bauman (2001) there is a transition from the modern model (solid) to the post-modern model (liquid), where human relations are increasingly becoming more ephemeral. Giddens (1991) understands that we are still in modernity and that the term post-modernity is the "attempt to ground epistemology" on social life and the patterns of social development that escaped from the control of philosophy and contemporary epistemology and proposes to analyze the nature of modernity itself, which has been insufficiently covered by social sciences. Augé (1994) rejects the term post-modernity for considering that there is no break with modernity, as suggested by the term 'post', defending the

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3   "Bricolage" is a term originated from the French term "bricòláge", whose meaning refers to the execution of small household works without need to use the services of a professional. Available on: <https://www.significados.com.br/bricolagem>. Access on: 04/23/2018. In this paper we use the concept in the sense that the "scientific objectivity does not exclude the human mind, the individual subject, culture, society: it mobilizes them. And objectivity is grounded on the uninterrupted mobilization of the human mind, its constructive powers, as socio-cultural and historical ferments" (MORIN, 2007, p. 58) (our translation).

continuation with modernity, however, modernity with acceleration factors defined as "figures of excesses" rather than "non-places" which he characterizes as space superabundance, individualization of references and transformation in time categories, which would be super-modernity. Lipovetsky (2004), one of the theorists that made the term "post-modern" popular, today disagrees that there is break with modernity and defends the term 'hyper-modern' based on excesses to define the current age. He explains that in the moment when the expression "post-modern" emerged, by the end of the 1970s, researchers analyzed social, political, economic and cultural transmutation of the time and needed a term to explain it. The term coined at the time was "post-modern". Lyotard (1970) was one of the pioneers in the use of the term post-modern in philosophy, crossing philosophy connected to art and politics to emphasize the study on post-industrial society and post-modern culture. The author states that due to the loss of credibility of great discourses that legitimate reality, that is, modern meta-narratives, spaces emerged to be filled by pluralism and affirmation of differences.

People can connect to others through social networks via text, video, voice or images, regardless of the location or time zone. Contemporary life is objectified, originates elements as data, shared among digital media platforms' participants, from sad and indignation moments to joyful moments. We understand that these deep transformations, in a short period of time, have influenced the creation of urban tribes with highly consumerist use of these data generated.

This conception of consumerist society is aligned with Baudrillard (1981) thought, that proposes to explain the contemporary personal behavior by means of the consumption society and objectification of things and of life, creating a reality where the object is more valuable than its functionality, that is, consuming a given object is more important that its utility. Advertising uses it with branding[4], promoting the image of a given object, company, known brand, transforming the product itself into its purpose. This conception, defined by Baudrillard (1981) as "sign-market" is different from all the previous societies had lived so far.

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4   "*Branding* is the system for brands management oriented by the significance and influence that brands can have in people's life, aiming at generating value for their publics of interest" (CAMEIRA, 2012, p. 44) (our translation).

All these aspects are potentiated by the capitalist and globalized system model of today that influences society by means of the cultural industry and guides daily discussions, as clarified by studies on the setting agenda theory.[5] These instruments of power are used in large scale and impoverish personal relations, objectifying these relations and transforming them into goods, disqualifying those who opt for life styles that are not linked to consumerism (ADORNO, 1992).

> The characteristic feature of this time is that no human being, without exception, is capable of determining his life in a sense to a certain extent transparent, such as occurred in the past in the assessment of market relations. In principle, all are objects, even the most powerful (ADORNO, 1992, p. 31) (our translation).

Individuals start to behave as goods and attempt, by means of image, to add value to themselves. This value in the consumption society is associated to ostentation of material and consumption goods, in addition to public demonstration of buying power or political power that elevates them as consumption product before the other individuals who live in this symbolic system where fewer likes, fewer followers, represent invisibility, and, in the connectivity age "invisibility is equal to death" (BAUMAN, 2009, p. 21).

> [...] people do as much as they can and use the best resources available to them to increase the market value of products they are selling. And the products that they are encouraged to place in the market, promote and sell are themselves (BAUMAN, 2009, p. 13) (our translation).

For Debord (1997) we live in a "society of the spectacle", where goods and appearance became more marketable in the context of social relations, becoming a form of social relations where having and pretending to be momentarily nurture the living, objectifying and making artificial experiences, which are not lived in their essence. The image that the individual attempts to transmit of himself or his way of life exceeds reality and makes of the image, the representation, a new reality. Debord (1997, p. 8) says that "the spectacle, understood in its totality, is at the same time the result and the project of the existing production mode" (our translation). The spectacle is not just a set of images

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5   "(..) daily selection in the presentation of news, editors and editorial directors focuses our attention and influences our perceptions of those that are the most important issues of the day. This ability to influence the emphasis of topics in the public agenda was called the agenda setting of news vehicles" (McCOMBS, 2009, p. 17-18) (our translation)

posted or shared on social media platforms, it is inserted in the context contemporary social relations, mediating the relations of people with images, narratives and framing. And this spectacle, this social action, contributes to create the collective reality of our days.

As presented since the beginning of this text, society is quickly undergoing transmutations in all spheres. When Debord (1997) analyzes and explains the "society of the spectacle", he is analyzing the 1960s and, even later, in 1988, when the author reassesses the society of the spectacle, it is still very different from the reality we live in 2020.

We agree with Debord (1997), though, nowadays, technological devices multiplied, like platforms and social networks have done, in addition to the number of people with access to the new conceptions of reality and metanarratives. These *prosumers* [6] became fixers and maintainers of the way of life grounded on spectacle, consumption, fiction, and "everything that was directly lived became representation" (DEBORD, 1997, p. 15) (our translation). The way of living life is very personal, but, analyzing through Debord thought, we constantly see advertising build images of the products that will be consumed. In this case, the image becomes more than the products themselves, and people also become products that need a good image. Thus, the image plays a role that carries desire and starts to form the person.

We are bombed on a daily basis by images of people with ruined marriages posting photos of the last travel in family to Europe, in the best restaurants, wearing expensive clothes indicated by personal stylists, faces marked with beauty products and esthetic procedures smiling to the photo that will form an album with family records on Facebook or Instagram intended to put them in this imagetic market under the view of a family success image and, therefore, encouraging other families to do the same. All that

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6   In 1979, Alvin Toffler coined the term *prosumer*, which derives from the union of two words that are antagonistic at first, producer and consumer. These consumers, in addition to interfering with the form of production, could also customize their products. Kirsner Scott (2005) sees the term *prosumer* as the union of "*professional-consumer*" who is not seeking capital, but rather to improve their distribution channels for creative works. In the marketing field, Mcfedries (2002) identifies it as "*proactive-consumer*", which would be the one that take measures to attempt to solve problems in companies. These studies collaborated for companies to create departments specialized in contact with prosumers and the creation of the concept of branding in advertising, which is "the system of management oriented by the significance and influence that brands can have in people's life, aiming at generating value for their publics of interest" (CAMEIRA, 2012, p. 44) (our translation).

contributes to maintain this social system that became hegemonic. This photo – this product, where these people appear enacting a happy life – is used as instrument of construction of a self-image that represents moral and cultural values of the class or social group to which they belong or want to belong.

The current hegemonic power regime, for knowing the functioning of today society, has used the power of images and personal information transformed into algorithms to create regimes of truth and regimes of power to watch and control society. It is not something new. The photograph technique, since its creation in the 19th century was used to create regimes of truth that stigmatized peoples and cultures, contribution to the Eurocentric domination at global level.

Next, we will deepen the understanding on how power groups have used scientific and academic knowledge – like the concepts of connectivity civilization and image civilization – to control and subdue entire societies, initiating a new phase, the psychocapitalism. Cameroonian researcher Achille Mbembe (2017, s/p) alerts that the age of "humanism is coming to the end". For Mbembe, "another long and mortal game started. The main shock of the first half of the 21st century will not be between religions or civilizations, but rather between liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism, between the government of finances and the government of people, between humanism and nihilism" (2017, s/p) (our translation).

Based on the understanding of concepts of sign-market, society of the spectacle, age of connectivity and civilization of image – which result from social researches produced in the last decades – we can enter the current discussion on the contemporary society,[7] also called society of transparency. The concept of society of transparency comprises all concepts presented, unifies them in one single definition and proposes a systematized analysis of the current society's way of life, simplifying this dense subject for academic studies.

1.3 Internet and social movements

Online social networks let people, wherever they are, whatever the form they are, interact, keep contact with friends, and individuals can express and be heard by a local

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7 Estamos falando, principalmente, de grandes conglomerados urbanos.

or even global audience and are increasingly becoming target of campaigns of marketing, advertising, in addition to being stage of political and ideological disputes (BENEVENUTO, 2010, p. 3) (our translation). Social movements on the internet seek to create identities that will put them far from old movements while providing a new garb or approach to old problems.

Attracting these different groups creates political capillarity, which strongly favors the expansion of the group's ideas and domain. However, this expansion also fragments the group due to a series of factors explained by the dilemma of cohesion and expansion. Cohesion considers the group unity by means of identity; identification that people have with the cause, the group, the action, the theme, the framing. Expansion, in its turn, refers to the flexibilization of identity commitments to reach a higher number of individuals (GOBBI, 2016, p. 42).

Bennet and Segerberg (2012) divide the actions on networks in three main topics: organizationally negotiated networks; organizationally activated networks; and networks activated by the crowd. In the three cases individuals hold certain freedom and autonomy in actions – "personalizable action framings" – which differ from the logics of collective action.

New forms of mobilization and activism have emerged using social network platforms that became important instruments to organize and mobilize the society, drawing the attention of several social actors for their capacity to engage people and disseminate ideas in conflicting processes. "The new technologies provide approximation of the citizen to political representatives and also to the object of political discussion in a space of autonomy, much beyond the control by governments and companies" (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 11) (our translation), creating an appropriate place for the development of digital activism, or online activism.

Online activism has led to changes in the political culture and guided the combat to varied forms of gender, sexuality, race, belief or class oppression. "It is an engagement that aims not exclusively at confronting or connecting to formal political mechanisms, but mainly at generating and fomenting behavior changes in the society" (TEIXEIRA,

ZANINI, MENESES, 2017, p. 7) (our translation). Gerbaudo (2016), on the other hand, analyzes this activism as "moments of digital enthusiasm" generated by the synergy of the page administrator, who creates narratives and framings and plays the role of a kind of *prosumer* while receiving, reinforcing and sharing. The author also reflects on the liquidity of social media, where events are fugacious and movements start to decline when they are no longer "alive" becoming ephemeral and are replaced by other events, which is characteristic of the consumption society and the society of the spectacle.

We understand that there are highly complex factors for leaders of social movements to keep the group united and engaged while expanding the group's territory and domain coverage. Tarrow (2009) states that the power of promoting collective actions is not the same power to provide continuation to them. Control and strategy of leaders is necessary to balance internal disputes in organizational processes and to keep the group cohesive while taking advantage of the internet in political processes (VÖN BULLOW, 2016 apud GOBBI, 2016). The new communication and information technologies were assimilated by the market creating a digital economy that makes capital circulate through selling of data; as examples we have the scandal of data sales by Facebook (2018), and the USA and Brazil elections, which had massive use of artificial intelligence. The groups of power linked to the financial capital use the new possibilities of CITs to influence political elections, democracies, people's ways of life, chiefly for using and applying the complexity of academic knowledge for purposes of domination.

With the emergence of new technologies and the expansion of networks and social media, populists have created their agendas and shared without filters from gatekeepers,[8] journalists, mass media professionals. This relation involving politics, social media and populism is referred to in the study by Bimber (1998, p. 137 APUD Sven Engesser, Nayla Fawzi e Anders Olof Larsson, 2017), who clarifies the potential to promote non mediated communication among politicians and citizens, and, thus,

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8   *Gatekeeper* may also be understood as the "doorman" of the newsroom. It is that person responsible for filtering the news, that is, he will define, according to editorial criteria, what will be communicated. With the effervescence and a certain trend in the practice of collaborative journalism, the gatekeeper function has undergone changes. The audience, increasingly less passive and more participative, leaves this function less centralized, however without losing the importance in the structure of news construction. Available on: <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gatekeeping>. Access on: 05/19/2018.

"restructure the political power in a populist direction". While analyzing the political growth on social media and the expansion of the populist language for social mobilization, Bartlett (2014, p. 94), remarks that "the bitter and short nature of populist messages works well in this medium".

Han (2014) sees a possible escape for the civilization crisis we experience in art and contemplation. Art is a possible solution for us to find other narratives to live the "I", to better understand the world and its functioning, to achieve self-knowledge. The author states that for us to live better moments of emptiness, deep reflections on our lives are required, moments when we explore ourselves.

For a better understanding of the questions raised so far, we created a table with the main characteristics of the modern world with regard to the globalized world that exemplifies cultural, political and socio-economic transformations experienced by the society in the last three centuries.

Table 1. Characteristics of the modern world and the globalized world

MODERN/DOCUMENTAL WORLD 19th – 20th CENTURIES	GLOBALIZED/FICTIONAL WORLD 21st CENTURY
INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY	SOCIETY ON NETWORKS
RESPONSIBILITY WITH THE REAL	FICTIONAL NARRATIVE
VERTICAL	MULTIPLE
STATIC/SLOW	MOVABLE/FAST
PATERNAL	COLLECTIVE
DISCIPLINARY	RISK/TRANSPARENCY
HOMELAND	GLOBAL
PHYSICAL SUPPORT	DIGITAL SUPPORT
UNISEXUAL	TRANSEXUAL
DIGITAL	HYPERDIGITAL

With this brief bibliographic survey on cyberspace and social relations in the contemporary world, we tried to explain the current context and the contemporary conjuncture of social organization in the cyberspace and how groups of power have acted inside this new social construct. Our objective was not to exhaust the subject, but rather to provoke the reader's attention to facts that are inherent in our society, showing, through authors from different areas, that there is a dense social transformation that is directly influencing the social re-organization by means of the power that images and their representations and perception exert on humanity. We also sought to demonstrate that social movements on the internet seek to create identities that will put them far from old movements while providing a new garb or approach to old problems.

We understand that the academy has also its share of accountability for the distancing of the society. We also raised questions for future research: Which are the academy responsibilities with regard to social issues and democratization of teaching and knowledge? To where and to whom knowledge is being produced in the academic ambit?

We suggest the trans-disciplinary study for future research and discussions in the academic ambit to develop methodological studies on the theme and promote real democratization of knowledge, besides a probable reduction in manipulation of the population on themes already outdated in university chairs.

2 Conclusions

Considerations on the digital construct in the society and its implications are far from being dimensioned, since we are still immerse in this historical moment that remains in dynamic operations, therefore still changing. Meanwhile, acknowledging development vectors and even movements may serve as diapason to inspect the relations among social, cultural and technological dimensions, in order to navigate supported by a compass, with respect to studies on culture, technologies and media.

Far from exhausting such discussions, the intention was to punctuate how networks and this locus of interaction achieves protagonism in the culture, in a performativity that, sometimes, builds metanarratives motivations that impact the objective and subjective ballast of persons, of the social body itself. From historical and philosophic approaches,

with the notes brought in the present paper, a social emergence with few rules is deflagrated, which makes the direction oscillate among truths, realities and quasifictions, creating a problematic complex that, differently from the virtual one, is not solved in the current one. It rather re-dimensions the social complexity, wrapped up in a thousand persons, thousand vectors, requiring critical densification to overcome the evident, the apparent, and reaches the immanent in the transcendent, the heart in the leftover, and the essence in the abundance.

It is exactly in this perspective that the glimpse emerged to make see social, political and cultural tensions that networks formulate in the social body and in the historical moment, full of futures, requiring the prenatal that will indicate the nature of this fetus. And if this socio-cultural tensioning shows its face on social networks as in the ballast appointed in this paper, it is essential that studies on the naturalization of the cyberspace and cyberculture find, for once, the umbilical cord that deauthorizes, once and for all, the split between them and the natural world and culture, but, before that, acknowledges them as trace of one single body, the social body, even when we can glimpse their personas, complex, contradictory and incomplete, as they always were.

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