

The End of the Information Society. Notes for the Configuration of the New Contemporary Public Space: the Society of Devisers

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Abstract

Mass media have often been described as the “new public space” of the current democratic societies (Ortega, 2003: 61). The increased popularity of New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT) is certainly motivating a change in the paradigm: according to the Society of Devisers, it is linked to the notion of collectiveness, it is demystified and fragmented. That is to say, it is taken out of the journalistic showcases and transformed into something alive, incomplete, accessible and multiple. The new society, fissured and emotionally hyperactive, is crossed by the mirror-neurons. This society of anonymous individuals gives public space triggering bursts of energy and enables, in the multidirectional map of devisers, its own central nervous system, although in close connection with the human body. In the next article of revision, the authors describe some of the characteristics which define the advent of that social emergence.

Keywords: Marshal McLuhan, Jean Baudrillard, Jürgen Habermas, internet, media

1. Two spheres of representation

Mass media have often been described as the “new public space” of the current democratic societies (Ortega, 2003: 61). The increased popularity of the New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT) is certainly motivating a change in the paradigm.

In previous centuries, citizens showed their discontent through forms of communication such as graffiti or anonymous pamphlets (Pajnik and Downing, 2008). Today, civil society has easily accessible tools to respond actively and jointly against the symbolic resources management, regardless of political institutions or media, as noted by Bowman and Willis (2003), Bruns (2008) and Castells (2008).

Websites such as *WikiLeaks*, *MySpace*, *Facebook*, *Tuenti*, *Twitter* or *Meneame*, among others, allow the citizens to share their thoughts in real time within a group from which they emerge as opinion leaders. This is why the contemporary public space is divided into two parallel spheres, generally different both in the production of content as well as in the characterization of their main actors. The first of these spheres is represented by social networks; inside them, the citizens encourage democratic participation, foster fissures, and crack the central sociological tendencies. The second of the spheres includes the media.

Those central sociological tendencies are channeled through them in an attempt to organize the citizen's life.

The high participation recorded within social networks and the steady fall of the media audience (Cassidy, 2007; *Infotendencias* Group, 2012) suggest the existence of a wider democratic interpretation: the represented are reconfiguring the representative scene, they are transcending it.

The professional work of the journalist is often extolled by inserting him into the demagoguery of cultural authority (Schudson and Anderson, 2009); his ability to generate thought (Casals, 2006: 61), or his enablement of new attitudes that facilitate the progress of the whole society (Casero Ripollés, 2009). These are some versions that enshrine the public role of the journalist, that mystify it from a perspective that somewhat distorts the normal operation of newsrooms. The commoditization of information, the acceptance of central tendencies to naturalize hegemonic discourse (Costa, 2008: 53; Boczkowski, 2010), socially demystifies and demythologizes the journalist. Thus, the citizen who, in a display of democratic participation, becomes the creator and middleman of ideas. If citizen journalism misses the so-called demagoguery of rigor and objectivity, the values surrounding the authenticity of the information are reinforced instead. The issuer, a reporter proclaimed, configures contents that may be defined according to all or to most of the following attributes¹: 1) they are free (information is *decommodified*); 2) they are spontaneous (information is not enshrined, is not routinized); 3) they are close (the receiver shares a common affective code with the issuer); 4) they are direct (gatekeeping is partially annulled); 5) they are timeless (they are not necessarily linked to the notion of today); 6) they are flexible (regarding format: videos, audios, messages, etc., are allowed); 7) they are interactive (they usually rig bi-directionality or even multiple directionality). Even if it has some advantages, the new participatory movement has been criticized because media contributions are still more credible (Flanagin and Metzger, 2000; Kioussis, 2001). According to Bauman, the Internet offers an illusion of democratic participation (in Deuze, 2007: 674 – 77), and there is an abundance of false information (Nozato, 2002), "*infotainment*" (Dahlgren, 1996), hidden publicity (Carrera, 2011), and in general there is less news and fewer informative approaches (O'Sullivan, 2012).

But the most interesting fact is the combination of both spheres: the integration of participatory journalism in the mainstream media (Bowman and Willis, 2003). That progressive integration² is delivering a new social concept, which we have defined as the *Society of Devisers*, because it synthesizes a wider activation through the intellectual contributions³. In the Information Society the audiences were basically passives,

¹ We are resuming these conditions from a previous work (in Oller and Barredo, 2012: 57).

² In a parallel work we have examined the informative construction of the five matches played between Real Madrid and Barcelona (2010 – 11). The 30% of the words of those relevant events in the most visited online newspaper in Spain, *MARCA.com*, were assigned to the collective interviews, a special *cyber* form where the users ask a special guest or journalist.

³ The internet users have been defined as *prosumers* (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), or producers (Bruns, 2006, 2007). We have chosen a concept linked to a humanist notion.

because the information was served by certain channels of communication. In that new concept, citizen journalism transforms only by becoming a citizen: journalists as intermediaries, largely reduce their work as transmitters of information and they start to adopt the role of *gatewatchers* (instead of *gatekeepers*), according to Bruns (2003).

Public space, divided between the concrete (the city) and the abstract (networks), includes some institutions defined by their transparencies in which all information relating to their performances must be easily accessible: it encourages direct contact between the elected and their constituents. The so-called *Information Society* rhetorically builds channels and intermediaries, but basically reflects the arbitrary nature of the institutions, their partially eroded taboos (Barredo, 2011), and the supremacy of the organizational speech on concepts like objectivity or creativity (Deuze, 2005; Chomsky and Herman, 2009; Boczkowski, 2010; Díaz Nosty, 2011). The virtual sphere sometimes offers more technical possibilities rather than public participation, as it has been tested in different previous works (Ruiz, Domingo, Micó *et al.*, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2012). But the main change is the common attitude shared by the collectives based in the internet, towards a general social mobilization.

2. From hierarchies to liberation

In the Society of Devisers, the rational (represented by business or professional hierarchies, pacts between the managers and the managed, etc.) yields the intuitive (information is collectively dispensed). The *legitimacy*, which is what underpins the symbolic prestige of the media, moves to the operation of the institutions: they are legitimate because they are transparent. But legitimacy also moves from media companies to issuers-devisers, acclaimed as opinion leaders not by the idealization that drives say the head of a medium, but by the impact of their ideas, their ability to penetrate the social discourse through multipliers or replication. They are devisers – and not informers - because the value of the information does not characterize their messages. Abstraction, projected through networks, prevents issuers from adopting a unique strategy or function.

In the manipulation of knowledge, the citizen's participation is not limited by his or her non-journalistic condition. On the contrary: in the Society of Devisers knowledge is linked to the notion of collectiveness, it is demystified and fragmented. That is to say, it is taken out of the journalistic showcases and transformed into something alive, incomplete, accessible, multiple. This is connected with the fragmented structure of the internet, as the information is sent in packets (Flanagin and Metzger, 2000; Aibar, 2008). That notion of manipulation also includes an intuitive offset: the visual becomes tangible. Images don't have a symbolic accumulation, they are dissolved in a solution of continuity, they are "texturized". The current receiver

"touches" the surfaces, he recognizes them, they are palpable, he decodes them according to their structural volumes. What matters ultimately is not to unravel a meaning, but to slip on a sense. If journalists in the Information Society resemble pearl farmers, every citizen in the Society of Devisers contributes to this.

One of the main problems of the emerging paradigm is the question of the authenticity; in the Information Society the authority was labeled by the copyright (Deuze, 2001) or both journalists and media were responsible for them, as Micó, Canavilhas, Masip and Ruiz (2008) suggested. However, in the Society of Devisers, authorship is seen as partially anonymous; the author is less important than his or her contribution. The lack of interest in the devisers tested in some forms of interaction in the internet (Masip, 2011; Masip, Ruiz y Micó, 2012) is balanced with a reinterpretation of the collective: a deeper fragmentation means a deeper connection around the core topics, as it has been already tested in certain studies (Bennett, Breunig and Givens, 2008; Bennett y Segerberg, 2011).

In the Information Society, the finiteness of paper or of the minute on-air determines the utilization of levels and hierarchies. In the Society of Devisers, the abundance originates liberation of the patterns, a suppression of the standards, an emancipation of the ways. Usually made with the famous 6Ws (*Who, What, Where, When, Why and How*), the journalist's rational message is shattered by an intuitive message which in general only uses one of the 6Ws, because the other messages – i.e. the ones from the other devisers– are distributed, applauded, criticized, but above all –and this is why it is innovative– manipulated. The sensory displacement towards the tactile relates to an instinctive positioning: the modern eye processes information by imitating the behavior of the finger. The messages, in this case, no longer have the metal framework of traditional journalism, because the main purpose of the deviser is not to persuade of this or that fact. It is not necessary, therefore, to convince, so there is no need for those discursive strategies to strengthen the credibility of the message - to make it professional or commercial- as for example the classical pattern of the 6Ws (Armentia, Caminos, Elexgaray *et al.*, 2000).

The 6Ws replicate, in journalistic language, the systemic hierarchy. That linguistic pattern encompasses with an inevitable ideological pattern, a referential one. In the Society of Devisers, the referents already destroyed, just the opposite happens: intuition is stimulated. The use of rhetorical tactics (and the 6Ws are that) becomes useless, because devisers do not aim only to the brain but especially to the flesh: intuition is perceived through the tactile, of what is burning or cold, crumpled or flat. The new concept of writing includes a more sensitive implementation of images, sounds or hypertext (O'Sullivan, 2005), to reinforce the textures of the information.

Bruns (2006) has explained the displacement of the hierarchies towards a *heterarchical* structure. Paradoxically, the spatial abundance of the social networks does not produce unlimited messages; in a

show of urbanism, the devisers avoid making long comments and make use of the synthesizing function, perhaps because that is the way of proving the horizontality of the communication. They have to compress the essence of their thoughts in a few words, something which can be notably told apart from the usual classism in the media of the Information Society. It is not possible to talk about democracy when an orator speaks for half an hour, and another orator only speaks for half a minute in the same auditorium. The possibility of spreading his or her ideas and turning into a broadcasting station mobilizes the citizen, transforms him or her into a *participant*.

Over time, the media has moved from manager to owner of the symbolic space; with the news blackout of its editorial offices, which are the highways on which the knowledge of the Information Society drives, the only possible way of dissent is the street, that is, the pre-technological tool. In the Society of Devisers, the public space is divided into two poles apart defined as a *concrete space* –delimited by the city– and an *abstract space* –bounded by the social networks. It is in the abstract space where the neo-demonstrations occur; as a limited space, the street can only accommodate a certain number of people. In the social networks, however, any demand can be instantly supported by millions of individuals.

2.1 Neuronal activation

The new society, fissured and emotionally hyperactive, is crossed by the mirror-neurons. This society of anonymous individuals, gives public space triggering bursts and enables, in the multidirectional map of devisers, and own central nervous system, although in close connection with our body.

A mirror is an in-between: it positions us on the outside, it expels us from ourselves; the mirror is a displacing identity and a movable object. The mirror is a displacing agent when it attends outer space; it is equally an atomizing agent that runs on the ego's inside: the mirror as revitalization. The *Society of Devisers* crosses areas of interaction with the field of neuroscience, particularly with mirror neurons science (Rizzolatti *et al.*, 1996). In summary, the mirror neurons circuits, located in the frontal-temporal-parietal region, are activated when we observe the actions of others. The mirror-neuron system is a system of observation-execution and plays an important role in the understanding of the others' actions and, what is more important, due to the mirror-neurons there is no need for intermediaries. The *Society of Devisers* as a mirror-neurons circuit that observe and perform outside any foray of hegemonic elements not only depersonalize and flattens the *Information Society*, but devisers take possession of the public sphere with organic, metabolic and synaptic instruments. If the edge of the world is determined by the limits of language, as Wittgenstein states (2005), to Deviser Subjects, the limit of participation in the public sphere is the limit of the mirror-neurons. What is interesting here is that mirror-neurons are associative neurons, of social interaction: they specialize in the actions and link the sender and the receiver. Being the empathy

neurons, the emotional burden becomes unlimited-becoming, and the cleft takes its full potential. Ultimately through, the emotional and ontological cracks, mirror-neurons are activated, exciting the space of anonymous citizens and making them hyperactive communicators and linkers.

The mirror-neuron is then activated when we take a given object or execute an action or when we see another person taking or executing the same action. When an individual acts our mirror-neuron circuit activates, creating an image in our brain: we get involved some way in the action involuntarily. We make ourselves a representation of the action that we see in our motor system. The brain represents the actions of others in its own motor system when one observes the actions. In the *Society of Devisers*, the mirror-neuron process is simultaneous, multidirectional, complex and in a radiant chain. Through mirror-neurons we understand the actions of others. And what belongs to others becomes within us, we integrate it. We semanticize the action of the other. How do we semanticize the action of the other in the *Society of Devisers*? The mirror-neuron allows us to understand the meaning of the action, the emotional burden and the intention. When the motor system is activated, one semanticizes the observed action. Understanding and imitating the action of the other (we imitate to reproduce or to learn) are functions of mirror-neurons. The Deviser Subject squeezes the full potential of these empathic circuits, because they are necessary and stimulating for the expansiveness of their shared and shareable languages and emotions. Nevertheless the expansive functions of mirror-neurons may slow-down or crash through the mechanism of anti-mirror-neurons (Mukamel et al., 2010), that in this neurobiological perspective engages with the *Information Society*, and its absence of cracks. Here is an antagonism to the empathic and generating irradiation of simultaneities of the mirror-neurons circuit. The anti – mirror – neurons may operate at two levels:

- 1 – Deactivation of the mirror – neurons. When we see the actions of the others the actions are observed, but there is a deactivation: there is no imitation.
- 2 – If the brain represents the actions of the others in its own motor system, how can we know who has done the action? The system of anti-mirror-neurons might clear this question.

In the *Information Society* there cannot be an activation of the mirror-neurons because the audiences do not feel represented by the representatives⁴. Then there has to be an activation of the anti-mirror properties, those that promote inhibition and restraint, share, in the areas of the *Information Society*, inactivating properties of emotion, empathy, imitation, learning, understanding and, ultimately, properties of collectivization. The most massive activation of anti-mirror-neurons, in the case of the *Information Society*, not only reduces the emotional bonds between senders and receivers, but becomes an incommunicability device.

⁴ There is a lack of credibility shared by media organizations according to an enormous bibliography as for example in Bardoel and Deuze (2001); Deuze and Yeshua (2001); Bruns (2003, 2008); De Pablos and Mateos (2004); Timoteo Alvarez (2005); Boczkowski (2010); Garcia Galindo (2010); Diaz Nosty (2011); and by politicians (Uriarte, 2001; Almiron, 2006; Timoteo Alvarez, 2010; Rodriguez - Virgili, López - Escobar y Tolsá, 2011). The lack of credibility, in our opinion, has a general orientation: what the devisers are questioning is the *Information Society* as a structure of coexistence.

3. Conclusion

In the *Society of Devisers*, the sources are being multiplied infinitely, there is no longer the media set to which the receiver should approach to understand coexistence. The new, symbolic space includes a dramatic increase of hidden marketing tactics, but it is also the emergence of a form of collective intelligence (Timoteo Álvarez, 2005), leading to a deeper fragmentation, paradoxically, to a deeper connection between the users or devisers, as we have already quoted according to the empirical results of Bennett, Breunig and Givens (2008) and Bennett and Segerberg (2011). The *Society of Devisers* is related to Flych's "society of connected individualism" (in García Galindo, 2009: 9), or the evolution of concepts like the "absolute freedom" defended by the existentialism (Singer and Ashman, 2009: 7 – 11). It is also a new phase in the evolutionary scheme of capitalism, according to Mattelart and Tremblay (García Galindo, 2009: 10).

Nowadays, we find that the NICT represents the citizen's option, the critical or thoughtful sphere. This option is differentiated by the possibility of direct democracy and it tends to stimulate the participation of social minorities (Frankenberg, 2007:22), while the mainstream media is still the frame of symbolic representativeness that organizes the social perceptions of the majority of the population. Due to the tension between both spheres, a peer-to-peer relationship is created where a *supercommunication* appears, exceeding the boundaries of the simple, linear *feedback*. In this sense, we can metaphorically talk about the *informative whirlwind*, where all the pieces of information are intertwined within a space which is limited by a symbiotic relationship and which finally merges into a precise point of space and time. This point is evolving; it is always in constant motion. Perhaps dynamism is the only characteristic vector of this period. The human race is leaving the stage of the Information Society, and we are moving forward to the Society of Devisers, a more intuitive informative positioning. The end of the first phase will coincide with rapid technological development, which, at the same time, will include a new identity development.

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