PATHOLOGIES AND DYSFUNCTIONS OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MEDIA CONTEXT

1ST VOLUME

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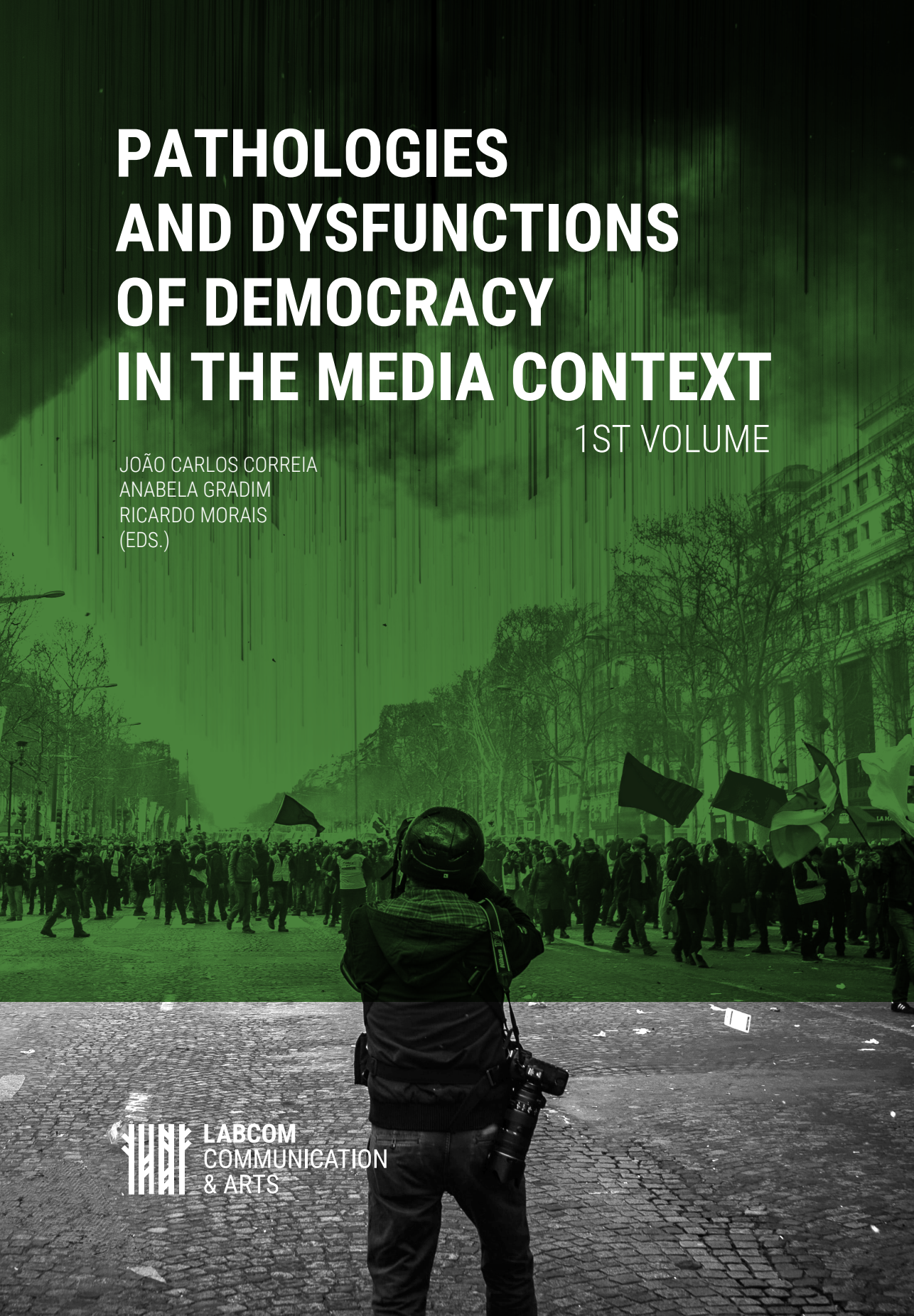

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Part 1

HYPER-SURVEILLANCE, CONTROL MECHANISMS, AND DIGITAL POLITICS

ALGORITHMIC MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY: POWER AND RESISTANCE UNDER DATAFICATION

Dimitra L. Milioni[1]

Introduction

Much has changed since Time magazine designated "You" (the average social media user) as Person of the Year in 2006 and composed in 2010 a paean to Facebook's creator and owner Mark Zuckerberg and his invention (Facebook) for changing the world from a "lonely, antisocial world of random chance into a friendly world", where one "will never have to be alone again" (Grossman, 2010). In March 2018, the "Cambridge Analytica" scandal is the latest case in a series of revelations about the dubious role of Facebook, and the corporate web more generally, in core democratic processes. At the time of writing, Facebook is reproached for leaving hundreds of millions of its users exposed to harvesting of their private data and political manipulation with so far unknown consequences (Greenfield, 2018). Users' anger and disillusionment expressed at the growing #DeleteFacebook movement on Twitter has many sources besides the latest data breach: targeting of Palestinian accounts critical of Israeli government policy (McKernan, 2016); marking the Rohingya activist group Arsa as a "dangerous organisation" in Myanmar; changing Facebook's news algorithm to deprioritize content shared by businesses in favor of that produced by friends and family, treating at the same time "fragile democracies as laboratories" (Bell, 2018) to experiment

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on user behavior and news organizations depending on news to reach their audiences as "unfortunate lab rats" (Dojcinovic, 2017). A while back, Zuckerberg's Internet.org project aiming at bringing internet access, along with basic connection to Facebook, to billions of people in developing countries also faced criticism: *Wired* magazine blatantly dismissed Zuckerberg's rhetoric about being on a "mission to connect the world", seeing instead a business strategy to "placate skeptical shareholders who worry the number of Facebook users is reaching a saturation point" (Tate, 2013).

This chapter attempts to tap into the relation between "algorithmic media" (McKelvey, 2014) and democracy under datafication, the fundamental paradigm shift brought about by big data (Milan and van der Velden, 2016). In particular, I seek to dissect some core modalities of algorithmic power and point out the major effects of big data and algorithms on governance, reality construction, culture and social identities – in short, on democracy at large. The chapter concludes by offering some reflections on the prospects of resistance or agency of datafied subjects.

Key concepts: Big Data and Algorithmic Media

Skepticism toward big data and algorithms is growing and is not confined to academic thinking. Besides news reporting that increasingly scrutinizes internet moguls' policies and strategies, questions are raised also by popular culture products. The Netflix science fiction series *Black Mirror* and a series of novels popular among teens (such as the *Matched* trilogy, *The Maze Runner* or the *Hunger Games* series) capture the zeitgeist and shape a new wave of neo-dystopian popular discourse (Miller, 2010). In these fictional worlds, every imaginable aspect of everyday life – and death – is algorithmically defined and human actors are involved in a struggle against emerging technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence, robotics, machine learning) that reap unintended consequences while undermining common values, long-established social structures and democratic institutions. At the same time, they feed a stream of public commentary around issues such the loss of human agency as free will and decision-making capacity

(Bassil-Mozorow, 2018) and the "corporate authoritarianism" of big data corporations, urging for "asserting public oversight of the Silicon Valley companies whose policies are dictating the future shape of our societies – as well as our personal lives" (Hussain, 2018).

The relevant scholarly discussion is centered around what has come to be known as *datafication*, "the process of rendering into data aspects of the world not previously quantified" (Kennedy et al., 2015: 1) or "the transformation of part, if not most, of our lives into computable data" (Cheney-Lippold, 2017: 276-278 [e-book]). Datafication entails the increasing collection of very large datasets of non-traditional data such as data about users' logged behavior, social interactions, and preferences or cultural tastes (Rieder, 2016). In simple terms, big data is about "what people are, do and say" online (Couldry & Powell, 2014: 1). Both market actors and governments engage in continuous data-mining of enormous corpuses of amassed datasets at high speeds for various purposes. These vast datasets are processed by the use of algorithmic techniques, which are usually probabilistic and capable of learning by statistical induction (machine learning) (Rieder, 2016). Algorithms structure and sort people, relations, places and things (Beer, 2009). More importantly, algorithms make decisions that are instantly presented to users, defining a given reality. An example is differential pricing online: a user's location, her/his demographic characteristics and browsing behavior is compared to million other users' shopping behavior to calculate an individualized price for a product "at the highest level the user has been estimated to support" (Rieder, 2016: 42); this occurs in the fraction of a second and without human intervention besides the design and control stages.

At the heart of algorithmic media, then, is the "computational generation of knowledge or decisions" by configuring computationally both problems and solutions of social phenomena (Gillespie, 2016: 26). Most of the media we use everyday are algorithmic media, in the sense that they are based on computational routines that make decisions and "dynamically adjust outputs and inputs" (McKelvey, 2014: 598). Algorithmic power (Bucher, 2012) refers to the mediation of algorithms that is virtually ubiquitous; it

literally constitutes and enacts everyday life (Willson, 2017). Algorithms mediate *access to knowledge* (what can be found by search engines/crawlers, filtering, and aggregation applications); *evaluation of knowledge* (what is considered relevant through search, scoring and ranking applications e.g. sorting in search engines and news feeds); and *production of knowledge*, through applications for the production of algorithmic journalism, cultural content (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016), even academic writing (Introna, 2016a). Algorithms also *anticipate*, through forecast applications that deduce our personal preferences and desires or inform our choices about how to dress based on weather forecasts (Roberge & Seyfert, 2016) or, more seriously, predict criminal behaviour ("predictive policing") and inform decisions on offenders' sentences (Angwin, Larson, Mattu & Kirchner, 2016) or predict "deadbeats" and inform decisions about who gets a loan. In other cases, algorithms can act as *law enforcers*: YouTube's ContentID system identifies copyrighted works uploaded by users and flags them – an "algorithmic cop" able to "handle 72 hours of video material every minute" (McKelvey, 2014: 598). They mediate *preferences about the selection and consumption of products and services*, through recommendation and scoring applications of commercial goods (Just & Latzer, 2017) e.g. the calculations of the shortest or more desirable path in our navigational devices (Roberge & Seyfert, 2016) or microtargeting advertising. Last but not least, algorithms mediate *our social experience* e.g. recommendations about professional and social connections like colleagues, friends and partners or recommendations about who we will date via dating apps.

But how do internet algorithms govern (Just & Latzer, 2017)? What does it mean that "power is increasingly in the algorithm", as Scott Lash (2007: 71) has argued? What are the implications of algorithmic governance and why is it at odds with democracy? These questions were taken up recently by the so-called "soft sciences", namely social sciences, humanities and cultural studies (Roberge & Seyfert, 2016). In what follows, I will discuss three key modalities of algorithmic power drawing on recent critical analysis in the

field: opaqueness, claims to epistemic superiority and post-hegemonic or ontological power.

Modalities of algorithmic power

I. Opaqueness or algorithms' "blackbox" nature: accountability deficit

The "black box" metaphor (Pasquale, 2015), is often used to signify two features of algorithmic processes: first, that every action online that is translated into data is recorded and stored, like a black box in an airplane; second, that the algorithms themselves remain typically hidden, as they are valuable trade secrets and are thus protected by law as such. The fact that algorithms are "deliberately obfuscated" (Gillespie, 2014: 192) has two implications for democracy. First, it establishes a new and fundamental form of "digital inequality in algorithmic reality production" (Just & Latzer, 2017: 251) between companies and users. Only some privileged users of corporate social media, such as commercial partners and advertisers, are offered preferential access to the inner workings of these systems and get a "glimpse under the hood"; at the same time, they are bound with nondisclosure agreements (Gillespie, 2014: 185). Second, democratic control and accountability are rendered difficult, if not impossible, because the evaluative criteria by which algorithmic decision-making occurs remain elusive. Algorithms act as delegates, as Latour would say, much like news editors or parliamentarians (Just & Latzer, 2017), but with reduced transparency, accountability or moral obligations. An example is the #amazonfail event, when all gay-themed books had been removed by search pages because they had been classed as "adult" so that the search pages would be more "family-friendly". As Gillespie points out (2016: 24), blaming the algorithm is a convenient means for warding off criticism when companies must justify their services, explaining away errors and unwanted outcomes by pointing to "the algorithm" as responsible for particular results or conclusions (Morozov, 2014: 142).

An additional problem is the diffusion of responsibility, an intrinsic characteristic of algorithmic systems. Although we tend to treat algorithms as

single artifacts, in reality they are very messy systems in which many different people are involved (designers, owners, operators, users) – so messy that even programmers and software engineers are increasingly unable to grasp them in their entirety. In light of this complexity, even measures such as the release of source codes might not be a sufficient solution for more democratic control over algorithmic processes (Just & Latzer, 2017).

II. Claims to Epistemic Superiority: Objectivity as ideology

This deficit in accountability is counterbalanced by an explicitly ideological claim, often put forth by algorithms: the claim of their epistemic superiority as objective arbiters and decision-makers. An example of such claims is Tewell's (2016) critical semiotic analysis of the Google's legendary search landing page. As he writes (p. 297):

> Upon visiting Google's homepage, users find a white, mostly blank page, containing a cheerful logo and a single search box. The white background is an important design choice, signifying a type of neutralized blank slate, seemingly open to locating whatever the searcher wishes to find and passing no judgment.

The white background and the simplicity of the interface conveys the "appearance of stark objectivity" (ibid), combined with notions of playfulness and fun. And while Google intervenes to omit results associated with pornography or copyrighted material, it refrains from doing the same when its autocomplete function unintentionally reproduces stereotypes through suggested terms that are racist, sexist, and homophobic or enable users to flag those suggestions as offensive, as other websites do[2] (Tewell, 2016: 299; Baker & Potts, 2013[3]). As web companies actively construct the articula-

2. This has changed, as now (April 2018) Google offers the option to "report inappropriate prediction" in the main Google search interface, selecting a reason from a list (hateful, sexually explicit, violent, dangerous and harmful activity". To request content changes for legal reasons, the user is directed to Google's legal help page (https://support.google.com/legal/answer/3110420).
3. Baker & Potts (2013) examined the autocomplete facility of Google search, which suggests search certain keywords or phrases when a user types a query. The study investigated auto-completed questions about particular identity groups and found that certain groups were linked to particular stereotypes or qualities e.g. gay and black identities were associated with negative stereotypes more often than other groups. Although these questions appeared because users had typed them in Google search, auto-completion algorithms feature them prominently and it is likely that they will be clicked

tion of algorithms as impartial and objective through their design choices (Gillespie 2014), most users tend to place blind faith in the quality of search results, as relevant studies show (Pan et al., 2007; Hannak et al., 2013).

Algorithmic objectivity is evoked in other crucial areas of decision-making, for example judgments about who gets employed, who is granted a loan or welfare benefits, even for judicial decisions about offenders' sentences. In 2016, in a now well-known investigation, ProPublica published an analysis of algorithms used by US courts to predict criminal behaviour and determine offenders' sentences, which was found to be prejudiced against blacks (Angwin, Larson, Mattu & Kirchner, 2016). Algorithmic bias in terms of race (the "coded gaze") was found in facial recognition software, as dark--skinned people were not consistently detected and photos of people of Asian descent were not validated by an automated passport renewal system[4] (Buolamwini, 2016). Sweeney (2013) looked at online advertisements and found that advertisements for public records on a person and advertisements suggesting arrest appeared more often for black-sounding names than for white-sounding names on Google.com and Reuters.com. Similarly, Ananny (2011) observed the Android Market recommending a sex-offender location app to users who downloaded Grindr, a social networking tool for gay men, associating homosexuality with predatory behaviour. The problem with these incidents is not so much their bias (after all, all systems of knowledge production are biased), but the claim of objectivity put forth by commercial and state actors to justify decisions. Rieder (2016) speaks of "empiricism on steroids" to criticize the epistemic character of big data, which privilege an "economic morality [as a] guiding logic that conditions and directs our daily lives" (Allen, 2012: 19, cited in Rieder, 2016: 41). In politics, especially when traditional institutions and modes of authority suffer from legitimation crisis (Habermas, 1973) and are perceived as "inefficient,

on more often, further enhancing their visibility. Baker & Potts (2013) hypothesize that these questions have the capacity to induce effects e.g. they can cause offence, they can validate stereotypes for users already holding prejudiced opinions or they can increase the likelihood of adoption of these prejudices for users who have not critically engaged with issues for stereotyping (e.g. very young users).

4. While this is an unintentional racial bias, this classification still "reifies whiteness as normal and blackness as abnormal", possibly rooted in real-world inequalities in the computer engineering industry (Cheney-Lippold, 2017: 387-389 [e-book]).

partial, paternalistic, corrupt, or illegitimate" (Rieder, 2016: 43), fully automated decisions are posited not only as cost-effective but also as neutral or democratic and thus as socially and ethically desirable (ibid). Yet, despite being framed as disinterested readings of reality, algorithms represent a particular "knowledge logic", yet one that is rarely identified and critiqued as such. As Gillespie (2014: 168) pointedly argues, "that we are now turning to algorithms to identify what we need to know is as momentous as having relied on credentialed experts, the scientific method, common sense, or the word of God". Therefore, the assertion of algorithmic objectivity plays a profound ideological role, "in many ways an equivalent role to the norm of objectivity in Western journalism" (Gillespie (2014: 181), which seems to maintain (or at least not challenge) the structured and unequal character of contemporary societies.

III. Ontological legitimation: post-hegemonic power

The third point refers to the ontological modality of algorithmic media. There is a fundamental difference between traditional and algorithmic media in regard to how meaning is constituted. Within traditional media (such as the domain of news) a key modality of power was discursive in nature, namely it was exerted through the production of content and the "closure" of its meaning. In algorithmic media, the main currency is "data", produced by users, often unwittingly. In the words of Couldry & Powell (2014: 3), "many everyday activities now produce data without requiring human meaning-construction (or even basic consent)". For instance, when interacting with sensor networks, we are not producing "content", namely messages with constructed meaning, but we produce "data" e.g. "temperature readings, status updates, location coordinates, tracks, traces and check-ins" (ibid). This data, aggregated and calculated, acquire meaning "not semantically (through expression and interpretation) but through processing – especially the matching of metadata" (Couldry & Powell, 2014: 3; Boellstorf, 2013). Moreover, the meaning of this "content" is available only to data owners (corporate platforms), who use them to make profit, producing a fundamental power asymmetry. Users, typically unaware about this

profiling, have no opportunity to "talk back" and challenge this information nor use it for their own purposes.

In a similar vein, several researchers have sided with Scott Lash's view about algorithms' deep embeddedness in the texture of everyday life that has changed the nature of hegemony (Beer, 2009; Couldry & Powell, 2014; Roberge & Seyfert, 2016). Lash (2007) argued that power is "post-hegemonic" in the information era, and domination works ontologically instead of discursively. The ontological modality of algorithmic power operates at the level of everyday routines and mundane use (Roberge & Seyfert, 2016). Social media affordances reward users' correct behavior and punish their failure (or refusal) to follow the rules. In this sense, algorithms exert a kind of power over users, which is neither symbolic nor semiotic but works "through the technical structuring of a way of being", as Bucher (2012: 1170) argues drawing on Foucault (1977). What follows is that the decision-making power of algorithms often eludes reflective thinking. To give an example, traditional media involve enduring representations (e.g. the masthead of a newspaper or the nightly television news broadcast), which allow, under certain circumstances, reflexive processes by audiences e.g. "oppositional readings" of hegemonic texts (see McKelvey, 2014). Algorithmic media, on the other hand, lack such enduring representations. An example is the results of a Google search or the suggestions of the autocomplete function. The logic behind these outputs is not uncovered, representations (texts) do not endure and "by default moments of reflection evaporate" (McKelvey, 2014: 603). Due to algorithmic media's "continuous temporality" (McKelvey, 2014) and their a-semiotic (namely ontological) character (Langlois 2011), their function is *experienced* rather than *consciously reflected upon*, and so are their effects.

Implications of algorithmic governance

Although the field of critical algorithm research is still young, studies within the broad area of Science and Technology Studies has unearthed some implications of algorithmic power that seem antithetical to democracy. In what follows, I will briefly examine four issues, namely personalization,

microtargeting, construction of algorithmic identities, and affirmation of hegemonic values.

I. Personalization: Individuation and polarization

Most algorithmic media such as search engines, corporate social media and various other websites (e.g. online news media, amazon) employ selection mechanisms like recommendations, digests, search results, targeted online ads etc. to maximize user satisfaction by personalizing their services and outputs. Personalization occurs based on user socio-demographics, previous user behavior, location, user connectedness but also other users' behavioral patterns. Thus, assumed identity characteristics determine what users can see (and cannot see) online. The exact parameters and the extent of personalization cannot be known, as algorithms are proprietary secrets. Pariser (2011) argued that Google uses 57 signals to personalize search results, while Facebook is reported using approximately 100,000 factors in 2013 to algorithmically choose the best stories for News Feed (McGee, 2013; Eslami et al., 2015). An experimental study (Hannak et al., 2013) found significant personalization on Google search: 11.7% of search results differed from user to user, according to whether users were logged in to Google and their location (IP address). Notably, personalization was highest for queries related to political issues and news.

Personalized results produce "different individual realities" (Just & Latzer, 2017: 248) and thus amplify "existing audience fragmentation and individualization trends" (ibid), which are often seen as curtailing democratic processes. Individualization can weaken common societal bonds and erode common norms and institutions (Just and Latzer, 2017: 248), resulting in what is called "dangerous individuals" (Schroer, 2008). At the same time, it produces "endangered individuals" (Schroer, 2008), namely people subjected to more effective control, privacy threats and surveillance, and is associated with the so-called "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011) with echo-chamber effects (Sunstein, 2007). Popularized by Eli Pariser, the "filter bubble" refers to the diminishing of information diversity and the amplification of political polar-

ization, as users are enclosed in an endless loop defined by their previous actions online and exposed to content tailored especially for them and their pre-existing attitudes, interests, and prejudices. In other words, we are led into "bubbles" "where we find only the news we expect and the political perspectives we already hold dear" (Gillespie, 2014: 188). Another study (Epstein & Robertson, 2015) investigated the impact of search results in the context of elections, through five experiments of about 4,500 undecided voters of the United States and India. They found evidence of a "search engine manipulation effect". The study demonstrated that biased search rankings of candidates can shift the voting preferences of undecided voters by at least 20%, with a much higher shift for some demographic groups – a percentage more than enough to judge the outcome of elections today in most countries. Moreover, the bias in search results ranking can easily be masked so that people are not aware of it. Since research results are typically customized, we can assume that they are constantly biased, although not (necessarily) by deliberate manipulation.

II. Microtargeting: Creation of "impressionable subjects"

The idea of the filter bubble is taken to its extremes if we consider the contemporary techniques applied by platform owners for targeting internet users with specific messages. We consider two examples, one in the area of commercial advertising and one in the field of political marketing. In contemporary online advertising algorithms are used to produce what Introna (2016b) calls "impressionable subjects", namely subjects that are "highly likely to convert" (p. 26) – buy a product or "buy" an idea. This idea is based on the Foucaultian concept of subjects being constituted through regimes of knowledge (and the power effects knowledge induces) (Foucault, 1980; 1991). As Introna (2016b) explains, while traditional advertising was broadcast to more or less mass audiences, advertising online enacts, algorithmically, "individuated" and ultimately "branded" impressionable subjects. "Individuated subjects" are produced by the use of cookies and third-party ad-servers, which can "stalk" the user as he or she browses. This way, users are profiled in detail: through the "tracks" one leaves behind,

"the browser/user can become segmented and produced as an individuated subject who might be interested in a particular type of advertisement" (Introna, 2016b: 36). This profile allows ad-serving companies to engage in behavioural targeting by a fine-grained microtargeting of users with advertisements. For example, Google associates users with certain keywords and shows "relevant" ads each time a user types these keywords in search, Gmail or YouTube (Introna, 2016b: 37). Furthermore, machine learning is used to build models of behavior i.e. categorize or classify behavior, match and cluster similar behavior and predict future behavior. Through machine learning algorithms, the unique, highly individuated subject is produced, which is also highly impressionable (Introna, 2016b: 39). In simple terms, if my profile (based on my past behavior) matches the profile of a person who purchased a product, I will be matched to a brand (tagged as of "high brand affinity") and I will be shown the relevant advertisements. When I show up online, a real-time auction is sent and the product with the higher bid gets the right to display the ad to me (Introna, 2016b: 41). Even the form and content of the ad can be customized to fit my profile. The more data are provided, the more subtle the models become. As Introna argues (2016b: 41), this way, "a subject ... has become fully and completely *branded*" (original emphasis).

Given that the web has long been handed over to the market, these corporate practices have not been met with significant criticism – at least not in the domain of public discourse. Yet, it was a matter of time before these very practices entered the political field, leading scholars to assume that "algorithms considerably affect the way public opinion is formed" and "govern the public agenda" (Just and Latzer, 2017: 249). A prime example is the recent events that marked the 2016 US presidential elections. As was recently revealed, more than 3,000 Russia-linked Facebook ads were bought and shown to specific Facebook users, promoting inflammatory messages on divisive issues (Shane & Isaac, 2017). Fake news also targeted specific individuals with given political opinions. This became possible due to the model of behavioural targeting described above, which allows social media

owners and other actors purchasing their services to identify subgroups according characteristics like religious and political beliefs, taste in TV shows and music, as well as emotional traits. Algorithms can also identify users' "hot-button issues" and identify people that are most susceptible to persuasion (Calabresi, 2017).

The work of ideological construction regarding the "like economy" (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013) is revealed if we look at how the US elections incident was covered by prominent mainstream media, namely its framing as a "Russia vs American democracy story" or a Trump-related story. Journalists and government officials tended to frame the event as a major blow to democracy. For instance, *Time* magazine reports how the "Russian hacking" was able to "manipulate public opinion", being "the most visible *battle in an ongoing information war against global democracy*"[5] (Calabresi, 2017, my emphasis) and "*a threat to the very foundation of our democratic political system*"[6] (ibid, my emphasis), "undermining the credibility of American democracy" (ibid). In fact, in a revamped Cold-War spirit, the article stays clear of criticizing the data power of corporate platforms, but it does criticize the US government for not doing enough "social media propaganda" due to a tight control over foreign surveillance programs[7].

In this piece of reporting, protection of civil liberties emerges as a problem, as an impediment. Although press reports now increasingly criticize the role of corporate social media in the process, they rarely go to the heart of the problem, namely the political economy of the internet and the rampant commercialization of social media, which has allowed corporate practices to grow into extremely sophisticated methods of fine-grained surveillance and identity construction, exempted from democratic control and trans-

5. This statement is attributed to officials at the FBI, at the CIA and in Congress.
6. Attributed to former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper.
7. The relevant passage is as follows: "But if Russia is clearly moving forward, it's less clear how active the U.S. has been [in information-warfare] [...] There are signs that the U.S. may be playing in this field, however. From 2010 to 2012, the U.S. Agency for International Development established and ran a 'Cuban Twitter' network designed to undermine communist control on the island [...] the U.S. government hired a contractor to profile Cuban cell phone users, categorizing them as 'pro-revolution,' 'apolitical' or 'antirevolutionary' [...] In the U.S., public scrutiny of such programs is usually enough to shut them down [...]" (Calabresi, 2017).

parency obligations. This idea is compatible with a fundamental ideology permeating the data industry, the idea of the "sovereign interactive consumer" (Gehl, 2014). As Gehl argues, the ideology of self-regulation, pushed by advertising and marketing companies, is based on an imagined user who is conceived as a free and powerful subject, a "master of digital flows" (2014: 110), able to make informed choices and take on the risks related to her/his activity online. What follows is the shifting of responsibility from data industries and regulatory agencies to the "enlightened" user, doing away with demands for accountability placed on the companies themselves and constraining regulatory frameworks that limit the operation of "networked new media capitalism" (Gehl, 2014: 113).

III. Algorithmic identity construction: production of user subjectivities

From a culturalist perspective, a substantial challenge for democratic politics is related to algorithmic profiling and the production of specific subject positions or user subjectivities. Social media infer and assign to users (and non-users) categories of identity (such as gender, race or class), based on profiles that are created for them from information about their web-surfing habits. Cheney-Lippold (2011) calls it "algorithmic identity" and data activists call it "digital shadows"[8]. Algorithmic identities or "measurable types" are "actionable analytical constructs of classificatory meaning" (Cheney-Lippold, 2017: 493-494 [e-book]). A crucial question is *whether these identity representations constitute digital subjects*, namely "produce" or reinforce identity perceptions of users and further dictate their online behaviour. In other words, how does algorithmic profiling perceive or construct its subjects? How does the construction of algorithmic identity affect users' sense of self? As Bucher (2017: 35) put it, "to what extent [do] we come to see and identify ourselves through the 'eyes' of the algorithm"? Algorithmic identity construction is problematic for two reasons. First, these inferred identities increasingly condition which content we are exposed to online, based on our assumed identity characteristics. Recommendations are a usual form, as are

8. See the data activism project *Me and My Shadow* (http://myshadow.org/).

targeted advertisements and all sorts of personalized content, but also interfaces in general. To give an example, if a user is assigned a gendered male identity, it is more likely to be exposed to content that has been related to a "typical" male user (Weber and Castillo, 2010). These identifications have the potential to determine "real" identities. Recommendations online can softly persuade users towards normalized behaviour as they "tell us who we are, what we want, and who we should be" (Cheney-Lippold, 2011: 177). For instance, as gender categorizations condition user experiences online and determine to which content they are exposed, there is a risk of further consolidating and solidifying those identities and their meaning – a kind of "disciplinary normalization" that speaks to "some perceived naturality of gendered performance" (Cheney-Lippold, 2017: 1106-1112 [e-book]). Friz & Gehl (2016) identified "gender scripts" in the sign-up process of Pinterest, "a script that hails an idealized, feminized user" (p. 688) and seeks to inscribe hegemonic performances of femininity into the use of the platform i.e. passivity is favored over activity, curation over creation, image over text, collaboration over competition (p. 700).

Second, algorithms define the actual meaning of these identities, namely what "maleness", "whiteness" or "working class" is or *should* be online; which interests, tastes, habits algorithmically categorized users have or *should* have. To be sure, the construction of social identities in the public discourse has always been embedded in power relations (and struggles); what is novel here is that the algorithmic construction of identity, opaque as it is within proprietary algorithms, is insulated from civil and critical discourse and the conventional mechanisms of political intervention (Becker & Stalder, 2009). As Cheney-Lippold (2011: 178) argues, "we are effectively losing control in defining who we are online, or more specifically we are losing ownership over the meaning of the categories that constitute our identities". In terms of cultural theory, algorithmic identities may operate as a "closure" that defines subject positions and stabilizes hegemony (albeit temporarily). As Cheney-Lippold (2017: 1156-1162 [e-book]) puts it, "arbitrary closure is [...] a conceptual stop to space and time in order to analyze and make as-

sertions about who we are. Not limited to an algorithm's output, digital computers produce arbitrary closures every time they calculate a function". While users can resist this "hailing", in Althusserian terms, "power [...] is asymmetrically produced. The algorithms have intimate knowledge of the subject, yet the subject is quite ignorant of them" (Introna, 2016b: 46). On the other hand, Cheney-Lippold (2017) makes the compelling argument that algorithmic identities, fluid and unstable as they are, can de-essentialize traditional conventions and rigid established referents of identity and thus can be liberating. At the same time, however, our identities lose their history and thus lose their politics, as "algorithmically produced categories replace the politicized language of race, gender, and class" (p. 116-118 [e-book]). To quote the novelist Tom Robbins, "you can't tilt windmills when they won't stand still"[9].

IV. Affirmation of hegemonic (capitalist) values

The process of subjectivation described above is often related to hegemonic, capitalist-asserting values. To begin with, the development of web 2.0 has intensified the logic of commodification. Commodification concerns not only the data and the content produced by social media users, but also social relations themselves, as almost all kinds of sociality are coded into proprietary algorithms and are moved from public to corporate space (van Dijck, 2013; Cheney-Lippold, 2017). Users of digital communities also become commodities, especially when they represent an attractive, sellable demographic profile (Olsson, 2014). This is related also to biopolitical forms of control**,** as shown by Karppi's (2013) interesting analysis of memorialized accounts of deceased Facebook users. Facebook implicitly promotes the conversion of deceased users into memorial accounts, instead of their removal, which acquire use-value and exchange-value (ibid; see also Lash & Lury, 2007: 8). Second, the content in the social web becomes standardized so that it becomes manageable and sellable (van Dijck, 2013). An example is what Hallinan and Striphas (2016) call "algorithmic culture" to describe

9. Tom Robbins (1980). *Still Life with Woodpecker*. New York: Bantam Books.

how Netflix produces cultural content (hugely popular movies) based on algorithms that determine what audiences want. This results in people being exposed to more of the same, based on what algorithms infer they already like. A third concern is the promotion of neoliberal economic norms and values. For instance, a social norm that is being created and reproduced by corporate networks is a constant prompt to consume and keep consuming at a frenzy rate (Mager, 2012), legitimizing consumer culture and constituting citizens as capitalist subjects (Dahlberg, 2010). Other prevailing norms of online sociality are hierarchy, competition, and a winner-takes-all mindset (van Dijck, 2013). An example is the function of Facebook metrics: as users are constantly told how many friends they have, how many messages are pending, how many likes a post has, are being compelled to exceed their own metrics and produce more content for the company to monetize (Grosser, 2014). As Gehl (2014: 15) pointedly argues, "because hegemonic social media is produced within informational capitalism, the inherent inequalities of that system are translated, ported, or simply replicated within new media software". Furthermore,

> " [...] new media capitalism as practiced by such sites as Facebook, Google, and Twitter has had terrible consequences: it reduces online interaction to binary declarations of like-it-or-not consumer choices; it hides and inures us to the surveillance systems operating underneath its surface; it relies on the free labor of its users to build its content while the site owners make billions by selling user data and stock in their companies; [...] and it promotes a culture of anxiety and immediacy over depth. In short, contemporary social media hardly seems compatible with democracy [...]" (ibid).

The (hazy) face of resistance in the age of big data

Critical algorithm research is a new but especially prolific field, with a significant volume of research work being published at an increasing rate[10]

10. A non-exhaustive list of recent works includes: Amoore, & Piotukh, 2016; Berry & Fagerjord, 2017; Bucher, 2018; Chun, 2016; Hargittai & Christian, 2015; Kennedy, 2016; Lanier, 2017; Noble, 2018; Schäfer & van Es, 2017; Srinivasan & Fish, 2017; Tung-Hui, 2016.

theorizing algorithmic processes and uncovering their implications. Yet, thus far much less attention has been paid to the prospects of resistance or agency of datafied citizens. In the face of the ramifications of data power for democracy, we urgently need critical research on algorithmic power, which will investigate, on the one hand, "whose interests are being served and whose interests are being denied or made invisible" (Langlois & Elmer, 2013: 7-8) in the operation of algorithmic systems, and on the other hand, what are the alternatives and the prospects for users' oppositional action. Regarding the latter, a host of intriguing questions emerges. For instance, how will user resistance look like in the age of big data? If Lash is right in that power is "more sinister in a post-hegemonic age" and "works from within" (p. 59), through performativity, at level of *being*, how can it be unmasked? Will the "battle" be fought discursively, institutionally or algorithmically, through the use of applications? Is the answer more regulation, setting limits on how corporate algorithms are being used by political and commercial actors, copying the regulatory frameworks of traditional media? Will alternative social media, based on a different political economy, be built, and will they be viable and able to confront the corporate social media giants? Or will resistance flourish at the fringes of civil society, in the form of "drifting" instead of discursive contestation (Lash, 2007)? Or, maybe, datafied users are less vulnerable and powerless than usually assumed. What Cheney-Lippold (2017) calls "the else" is composed of instances in which we sense, if not outright acknowledge, that "something is askew and affected" (p. 3096-3099 [e-book]) with the output of algorithms such as "getting an advertisement for baby formula when you're past menopause"; "the else serves as the procedural moment when human reflexivity enters into this new datafied subject relation" (p. 2960-2968 [e-book]) and can serve as the basis for a subject position of resistance and nonincorporation.

In the emerging field of data activism, opposition becomes more explicit. Data activism projects attempt to oppose corporate data power by using hegemony's own weapons, namely code that creates oppositional affordances. A recent study of eight data activism projects (Papa & Milioni, 2017; Milioni

& Papa, 2018) showed that data activists expose the fallacies of existing systems and endorse oppositional use positions (see Shaw, 2017), either by providing a counter-hegemonic "reading" of social media or by facilitating user actions that can modify designed affordances and encompass a subversive potential. For example, *Data Selfie*[11] is an application that tracks a user's actions on Facebook and offer her an aggregated visualization of her Facebook usage in real time e.g. the amount of time she spends daily on Facebook, her top preferences in terms of pages and posts, and a personality prediction based on her engagement with Facebook content. More importantly, users are offered a reconstruction of their algorithmic identities that are inferred by their data i.e. demographic features, emotional traits, consumption habits, cultural preferences, and political or religious orientation. Milioni & Papa (2018) argue that applications such as *Data Selfie* offer users *oppositional meta-affordances*; as they reconstruct users' Facebook-related algorithmic identities, they "render user data meaning-ful also for ordinary users, before or while Facebook makes them meaningful, malleable, and open to manipulation for advertisers" (ibid). Other data activism tools get in the way of corporate media, by hindering or distorting their operation, usually by obfuscation. An example of such "anti-affordances" is Ben Grosser's *Go Rando* application[12], which randomizes the six emotions that Facebook allows users to select when clicking the 'Like' button. The purpose of this application is to obfuscate a user's emotional profile on Facebook, filling it with noise, as a means of users' opposition to "emotional manipulation" and "surveillance and algorithmic decision-making" (Grosser, 2018). By engaging in a public display of emotional play, a kind of prank, users suspend the authorization they have given to Facebook to mediate their emotions[13] and at the same time signal to other users the possibility for playful subversion. Milioni & Papa (2018) argue that "ordinary" users, by embracing the

11. http://dataselfie.it/#/.
12. http://bengrosser.com/projects/go-rando/.
13. The mediating role of Facebook regarding user emotions assumed here can be best understood through Latour's (2005) concept of the "mediators", which, contrary to mere intermediaries, "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (p. 39).

oppositional affordances created by data activism projects, are offered the possibility to reflexively modify their behaviour online and affect the very algorithms that produce them as datafied subjects. However, despite its potential, data activism is constituted more as "personalized acts of defiance that do not seem to be weaved into a collective representation of 'we-ness'" (Milioni & Papa, 2018). Is it possible that such ordinary users' "ruses" (De Certeau, 1984), acquire a collective dimension and compose a "network of an antidiscipline" (ibid), which will erode dominant order from within? These are some crucial and fascinating questions for students of critical research in the years to come.

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TRUTH WITHOUT DEPTH, HOPE WITHOUT A HORIZON – THE DYSTOPIA OF DISCOURSE IN "WITHOUT SKY"

Jorge Palinhos[1]

Abstract: On March 12, 2014, the short story "Without Sky", signed by Natan Dubovitsky was published in the Russian magazine *Russky Pionner*. This dystopian story, probably influenced by Edwyn Abbot's *Flatland*, and H.G. Wells' *The Sleeper Awakens*, is generally attributed to Vladislav Surkov, one of Vladimir Putin's most trusted advisors.

In this narrative, we discover a future after the 5th World War, when large parts of the population suffered brain damages that only allow them to see in two dimensions and understand dicotomic discourse. In a world dominated by perpetual mobilization for non-linear wars, fear and technology flatten perceptions and language, until the bidimensional villages rise against the cities, whose inhabitants still remember that there are other words beyond "yes" and "no", "good" and "evil".

Drawing from this mysterious story, and the current debates on the nature of fact and truth, I will attempt to decode the portrait of political speech in this short fiction, and how it correlates with the endless problem of facts and political discourse, that goes from Gorgias, who prided himself on his ability of arguing in favor of anything, until the problems of political action of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas.

Keywords: Vladimir Surkov; Cognitive Warfare; Without Sky; Dystopia; Truth

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Language and Dimension

Language is a three-dimensional being. It lives precariously on the balance of three different elements: a speaker, a listener, and something they have in common – something the first two consider to be true, or at least credible, at the moment of communication.

This third element is what gives meaning to language. Without it, words are little more than sounds possibly pleasing to the ear. This third dimension of meaning is what establishes language as a means of communication and expression. Meaning is the abyss, or the wall or the plateau, upon which both speakers can jump over, or avoid, or thread upon, to fulfill their communicational journey. It is the solid element that gives thickness to words and sentences.

Yet, like depth, like walls, like abysses, meaning is also what brings shadow and uncertainty to communication. Nothing is clearer and more unambiguous than a meaningless word, because everyone can agree on its meaninglessness. However, a meaningful sentence entails negotiating what is that meaning and what meaning can bring to the circumstances of the persons involved in communication.

The problem of three-dimensionality in communication is what caught my interest on the short story "Without Sky" by Vladislav Surkov.

Obviously, a significant part of the meaning of the story draws from who its author is. Although the impact of autobiography in literature is an ambiguous element, since all fiction is and isn't, simultaneously, autobiographical – at the very least, the writing of fiction is, by itself, a life event – it is unavoidable considering the political background of Vladimir Surkov story in understanding the political fiction he wrote.

Surkov, born in 1964, is a Russian author and politician, whose political life has been closely entwined with the government of Vladimir Putin in Russia. Surkov has been Putin's deputy chief, deputy prime-minister, personal ad-

visor, and is sometimes credited by some to be the inventor of the term "managed democracy" to describe the political system of Russia.

In parallel with his political career, Surkov has also worked as a writer, and occasionally as a theatre director.

"Without Sky", published on the magazine for scouts, *Russky Pionner*, nr. 46, on May 2014, is probably his most well-known work outside of Russia, and it was published under the pseudonym "Natan Dubovitsky", the typical pen name of Surkov to write Science Fiction.

A world without sky

> *There was no sky over our village. That's why we went to the city to watch the moon and birds (...) On one of the hills, where the brick church stood, they even built an observation platform.* (Surkov, 2004)

"Without Sky" describes a world where a series of "non linear wars" have taken place. These wars are different from conventional wars due to the fact of being multiform and continuous, depending on an endless conflict – taking shape on different levels and fronts, not among clear groups of countries but inside a maelstrom of forces.

> *This was the first non-linear war. In the primitive wars of the nineteenth, twentieth and other middle centuries, the fight was usually between two sides (...) But now, (...) It was all against all. (...) Hundreds of thousands of airplanes, helicopters and rockets destroyed each other throughout the day in the silence of the tomb. Even falling, they were silent. Sometimes dying pilots screamed out, but rarely, because almost all of the machines were pilotless.* (Surkov, 2004)

Connecting the concept of "war" with the concept of "adventure", by Georg Simmel (2004), by assuming that both these concepts address particularly momentous events, the fact that these wars have no specific space, time, methodology or even authors, reframes these wars not as "adventure", not as something that breaks with the conventions of everyday reality, but they

become everyday reality. That is, these "non linear wars" become undistinguishable from ordinary life. In fact, although there is a mention of "after the war", we cannot be totally certain in the story if these wars have ended or not, probably because they became the ordinary life of the fictional characters, who are no longer able to be sure if they live at war or in peace. Therefore, the "silence of the tomb" can allude to the fact that this is a silent, almost invisible war, but it can also mean that the normal noises of war have become so normal that people no longer pay attention to them.

The world of this endless war is divided between city-dwellers and country-dwellers. These country-dwellers have become victims of the war, losing their sense of depth, and starting to experience the world in two dimensions.

> *My brain was just touched by its black and stifling presence. Something boiled out of my brain and evaporated: the third dimension, height. (...) I saw a two-dimensional world, endless in length and width, but without height. Without sky.* (Surkov, 2004)

This two-dimensional perception of the world gradually becomes a way of thinking about the world, and country-dwellers lose all idea of ever feeling a third dimension, height, or understanding the complexity of reality.

Height, or depth, according to the perspective of the onlooker, is the dimension of verticality, of individuality. George Lakoff (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) points out that height is a dimension symbolically connected with morality and hierarchy, so that erasing this dimension of the mind can have the ambiguous consequence of erasing social differences, but also of erasing any ethical concern. However, the story suggests that this "height" is mostly connected with a moral dimension, but seen under a positive light.

> *our very thoughts lost the concept of height. We became two-dimensional. We understood only "yes" and "no", only "black" and "white". There was no ambiguity, no half-tones, no saving graces.* (Surkov, 2004)

This cognitive difference between country-dwellers and city-dwellers makes city-dwellers pity the country-dwellers at first, and they try to find a cure, but the reaction of the country-dwellers is to plot revenge against the city-dwellers, who they regard as being deceitful and suspicious, and to try to impose a flat, bidimensional worldview on them. That is, the ones who don't see the sky, the horizon, rebel against those who are still aware of its existence. The suggestion is of those who hold a simpler understanding of the world trying to overthrow those who have a more nuanced view, so as to impose a more fundamentalistic world order.

The short-story finishes with an open and ominous ending that leaves the reader puzzled about the real meaning of the story:

> *We founded the Society and prepared a revolt of the simple, two-dimensional against the complex and sly, against those who do not answer "yes" or "no", who do not say "white" or "black", who know some third word, many, many third words, empty, deceptive, confusing the way, obscuring the truth. (...) We will come tomorrow. We will conquer or perish.* (Surkov, 2004)

I will be the first to admit that this story has several problems as a work of literature: its language is limited, with few suggestive images, an unbalanced narrative flow, with some elements very detailed and others which feel quite sketchy, even if they are supposed to be central to the story. The ending is somehow inconclusive, making this story feel more like the rushed synopsis of a longer fiction work than a fully-fledged, balanced and evocative short story.

Yet, the story is wide enough to suggest multiple interpretations and lines of thought. The "sky" of the title can be seen as a metaphor of paradise, with the country-dwellers becoming beings of despair, whose lack of options drive them to rebel against the ones who were given the sky. Or it can be read as a cautionary tale about the effects of war and conflict on the concept of truth, and how belligerency ends up driving honesty and truthfulness out of a polarized world.

However, the notoriety of its author, the fact that the narrator of the story is clearly positioned on the side of the country-dwellers, and some specific readings of this story, led me into trying to better understand its meaning and symbolism.

"Non linear war"

Numerous political experts have read "Without Sky" as a sketchbook of the disinformation campaign of Russia in contemporary times. In fact, the term "non-linear war" – along with "hybrid war", "ambiguous war", or "Gerasimov Doctrine" – started being used by political experts to refer to a mix of military, political and informational conflict, which seems to be promoted and supported by Russia to achieve its international aims. McKew describes it as a "guerrilla, and waged on all fronts with a range of actors and tools – for example, hackers, media, businessmen, leaks and, yes, fake news, as well as conventional and asymmetric military means". (McKew, 2017)

"Without Sky" is actually commonly read by foreign relations experts as a coded reference and metaphor for information terrorism.

According to Molly McKew (2018), "information terrorism" is the use of information to generation confusion and apathy in certain societies. The typical "information terrorism" procedure is to create a narrative involving political entities and institutions in some suppressed scandal, and increasingly connect the daily news with this story, spreading such theories on social media and letting the scandal gain a life of its own, until it becomes a social fact that the flatness of the internet experience cannot clearly deny and starts having an impact on real life, through threats, defaming, intimidation, "doxing", etc.

For McKew, and other experts, "Without Sky" works as a fictional theorization of this informational terrorism or "cognitive warfare", and they use the concept of "non linear war" to describe the informational influence that

Russian hackers seem to have had in several recent political upheavals – from the election of Donald Trump to Brexit, etc.

This influence relies on the multiplication of information sources that, paradoxically, repeat the same distorted information in multiple ways, and the existence of multiple commentators and online actors that seductively present bizarre theories of political and social events based on picking specific details and news. It is a conflict for the control of public opinion, to render it more polarized and confusing, therefore paralyzing political actors, by using new technologies to blur any connection with the real.

However, I find it hard to believe that this is an entirely new phenomenon and regard it more as a return to a pre-centralized information. While central states still try to control the information being passed, new technologies have disrupted this centralized information flow, bringing back a delocalized and disseminated version of the tribal information channels, where information varies wildly according to the group you belong to.

But, of course, the strategic position of Surkov as a trusted advisor to Vladimir Putin, and the persistent rumors about Russian "troll farms" and "fake news bots", can't help positioning the story in such a light. However, "Without Sky" is not just a theoretical artifact, it is a piece of dystopian fiction, and I would like to examine it under such a tradition.

Dystopian influences

One can identify several clear connections of this short story with other dystopic literary works. Obviously, the most famous dystopian novel about bidimensionality is *Flatland*, by Edwin Abbott, a teacher and theologian, which describes a world of two-dimensional beings unable to perceive height, therefore confusing spheres with circles, and unable to grasp anything that escapes width or length. Even when a messenger arrives to announce the existence of a third dimension, only one Square listens to it, and goes on to consider the possibilities of other dimensions.

Flatland is usually regarded as a philosophical and mathematical parable about geometry, but it also entails a theological reflection about the existence of hidden dimensions of the human understanding, postulating the possibility that the reality we see is not the full reality of the world. It can also be read as a critique of the rigid Victorian society of strict class separation, with its different status for male and female citizens, and with the idea that any possibility of change is punished with threats and laws.

The popularity of the book renders it likely that Surkov must have heard about it and was counting on the possibility of being an intertextual element on the understanding of "Without Sky".

As Surkov is a regular writer of SF stories, it is more than passable the possibility that he was influenced by other dystopias. *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley, and *1984*, by George Orwell, with its hierarchies of citizens, constant warfare, and rigid control, are other possibilities of inspirations for the story, but I would argue that "Without Sky" seems to sustain the idea that the rural dwellers, with their limited knowledge and lower status, may actually have the upper hand, therefore turning their limited world-view into a strength. And in this, the story is radically opposed to the stories of oppressed citizens that define the works of Orwell and Huxley.

I would prefer to offer another classical dystopia, *The Sleeper Awakes*, by H.G. Wells, as a possible inspiration, or at least, an interesting contrast.

Written in 1910 by socialist and peace activist H.G. Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes* depicts a future world where workers live in misery, without security, and are deceived by a demagogical elite. The citizens are dominated by aerial warfare – like the one in "Without Sky" – and fooled by "babble machines" producing an endless stream of sensational news, designed to affect emotionally and confuse the masses, so that their understanding of the political situation is mostly bidimensional, of enthusiastic acceptance or rejection.

The masses of Wells end up rebelling with the awakening of the "Sleeper", the protagonist of the story, but fooled by demagogues, their lives are kept

in misery, and only false information keeps the population thinking that their lives have improved in any way.

I would argue that both "Without Sky" and *The Sleeper Awakes* can be understood as dystopias based on possibilities of messianic redemption through communication, or language. And in both, the lack of the depth of communication, that is, the bidimensionality of information, lost of any connection with a common ground of truth, is what generates the dystopia.

"Without Sky" proposes a sort of redemption, a rather ambiguous redemption, where the extremists, those who cannot understand anything but the extremities of language, are determined to overthrow any complexity of existence, towards a new, simpler, bidimensional world, where an elite, who supposedly controls knowledge, is destroyed.

The Sleeper Awakes clearly believes that a mass communication that it is not rational and honest erases any possibility of a fair and just society, as action without a clear discursive frame that enlightens it turns any kind of political intervention dubious or outright totalitarian.

Therefore, there is a clear connection between the position of language in society, and its political situation, and that leads me to consider the concept of "flatness" under a wider societal scope.

A flat mind in a flat world?

I believe flatness is now in fashion, again. I could mention the renewed popularity of the flat earth hypothesis, that has been vociferously – even if with very little scientific validity – defended by the Flat Earth Society. I could mention the flatness that cinema now aims for with its luxurious digital settings. I could mention the Material Design style, devised by Google, now popular in digital interfaces, that flatten virtual objects.

An article, published on *The New York Times* this year, called "How we lost the sky" (Weisbrode & Yeung, 2018) reflected on the occupation of the sky, not only with industrial debris, but also with atmospheric pollution

and warfaring and surveillance equipment, from satellites to drones, from space stations to airplanes, and even to warring electronic bug-like devices. Such development constitutes a sort of flattening of the sky, itself, that loses its role as mystical place, to become another field of human conflict and dispute, spatially confirming the flatness of the contemporary experience.

We could discuss the flatness of economy identified by Thomas L. Friedman in his book *The World is Flat*, that tell us that internet flattened global exchanges (Friedman, 2005). Such flatness can be even noticed in social relationships, flattened into digital social networks, where a close sibling has the same digital weight that a half-forgotten friend.

This assortment of examples – more literal or more metaphorical – serve as an introduction to my intuitive belief that "flatness", as a social concept, is something that exists in contemporary society and language, and probably has existed for a long time.

Although the concept of tridimensionality, in art, for instance, became the holy grail of the West, from the Renaissance until contemporary 3D computer generated graphics, bidimensionality always had an important role.

In the Middle Ages, for instance, the use of bidimensional painting was important to create a sense of the omnipresence of God and of the holy dimension and pervaded all instances of human life. Even the geometrical representation of the human pilgrimage on earth towards Heaven – represented by the spiral – was turned into medieval technologies, like the spring, the optical lens, and the screw, all of them tools to overcome spatial and temporal distance, and flatten the earthly experience: the spring to create clocks to measure time, the optical lens to look to distant objects, the screw to attach permanently different objects, therefore "flattening" them into new entities.

The Middle Ages even promoted the anonymous art, therefore getting rid of the author, which is always the depth of the work of art – the one who always establishes a subjective, ethical, and hierarchical dimension to the

immediacy of the relationship between the work and its receptor – like what happens with language, of course, as I mentioned early.

And the flattening of language is something that it is even more remote, going back to the emergence of Sophists in ancient Athens, when commercial and military success of the city-state brought into its public spaces multiple peoples and cultures, that raised the question of the common truth among multiple languages, practices and gods.

The Sophists were accused, by Plato (Platão, 2011), Aristotle and others, of using speech to hide or abolish the truth. The climax of this idea seems to have been Gorgias, who sustained that truth was nothing more than opinion, and no truth was possible or knowable.

For that reason, for centuries the Sophists became the target of prejudice and ridicule. To be a sophist was to be a liar or a crook.

However, in a modest attempt to redeem their honor, I would argue that the Sophists role in ancient Greece was quite clear: they were trying to bridge the previous forms of knowledge – the mythical knowledge of Homer and Hesiod, that is, the "mythical knowledge", with the practical and operative knowledge, the *sophia*, of the rising discipline of philosophy.

Mythical knowledge was largely the knowledge that placed human beings in the passive role of understanding how the world is, through narrative and poetical devices, while philosophical knowledge was the knowledge that told humans how to act on the world, and therefore concerned itself with the explaining of the world (Colli, 2000).

The Sophists bridged the two ancient knowledge systems of Ancient Greece by developing Rhetorics, the engagement of speech with political action. Rhetorics, therefore, became a language that does not reflect reality, but attempts to shape it. It is a form of literary creation, and probably a direct ancestor of science fiction: the literary genre of Science Fiction tries to imagine society reshaped by technology, while Rhetorics tries to imagine society reshaped by language.

This is different from mythical language, that attempts to explain the world through metaphor, being purely descriptive, but also different from philosophical language, that tries to operate on the world by relying on a precondition that language must correspond to a source of truth, that is common to all those involved in the social debate.

Or was, until the 20th century, when this connection between language and truth, that previously was based on ideas, as in Plato, observation of nature, in the case of Aristotle, God, for medieval theologians, and on a scientific method, from René Descartes onwards, became problematic in itself, and was turned into the main issue of contemporary philosophical debate, discussed by thinkers like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, John Searle, Michel Foucault, Teun Van Dyck, George Lakoff, etc. In a way, thinkers that show that language lost its sky, its tridimensionality, its hierarchy and ethics, its common source of truth.

Obviously, this loss of a clear source of truth predates the internet. It predates the cognitive warfare I mentioned before, even if cyberdisinformation massified and clarified some of its effects. After all, cyberinformation has no definite space, but circulates endlessly; it has no specific time, but it can outlast the normal duration of a discredited or old story; it can be confirmed by the constant sharing of the same information, through reposting, retweeting, etc.; it becomes international in its instant sharing, promoting the idea that being shared by people of different backgrounds confirms its validity as consensus.

In a way, cyberspace became the *Agora* of Athens of the 21st century, where different identities, in a retribalized society, struggle to define a common tridimensionality, before increasingly powerless gatekeepers, institutions and governments, whose ethics, hierarchy. "height" are less and less accepted. In the real world there aren't just city-dwellers and country-dwellers, like in "Without Sky", but different factions with different sources of truth fighting for them on a common ground.

Habermas quotes C.F. von Weizsäcker, who proposed that truth was a matter of adaptability, where beings connect with the surroundings and circumstances (Habermas, 2010: 219). In a way, "Without sky" seems to propose just that: the possibility of a world of cognitive mutilation, where losing the connection with the nuances of truth, which becomes adaptable and ever shifting, can become an endless political struggle – a "non-linear war". This cognitive mutilation derives from the possibility of "flattening" the knowledge of part of the population, radicalizing it. In opposition to *Flatland* and *The Sleeper Awakes*, "Without Sky" suggests the possibility that those who are denied the truth can be not just powerless, but they can take over power – power through ignorance, through the chase of an endlessly shifting truth that can lead humanity to the unknowable.

Literarily, this is a dystopia, yet, it can also be our real future.

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THE CONTROL OF SCREENS AND COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION. TV NEWS AND CONTEMPORARY ACTIVISM IN PORTUGAL

Naíde Müller[1]

Abstract: The deep crisis of confidence affecting advanced industrial democracies that extends to the new and more recent democracies is creating a fertile ground for the growth of "populisms" that can affect significant activist historical achievements regarding basic human and civil rights. The debates about how social networks are contributing to this reality reinforces the need to strengthen the basic institutional and democratic functions of traditional media. In Portugal and in Europe television remains the most common medium used by citizens to access information, so it is important to present citizens other possibilities for public participation with the capacity to assert a set of social "counter-powers". The production of fictional realities increased by digital environments can be seriously detrimental to some audiences and postmodern PR professionals will necessarily have to adopt a critical attitude and vigilant of "meaningless communication" patterns. This article presents preliminary data on the representation of contemporary activist movements in the television news of the four generalist Portuguese free-to-air channels and approaches the possibilities for media professionals, as *symbolmakers* in *hyperreality* contexts, on counteracting the tendencies towards the standardization of beliefs in ways that can contribute to help activists, who defend democratic values, to reach the television screens.

Key Words: Democracy; activism; public relations; media

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Introduction

In the history of liberal democracy, and hence of the democratic state, social movements have been considered as the fundamental intermediaries for civic participation. In European history they are directly related to the emergence of an open and active "public sphere". It has been under the pressure of social movements of various kinds that the system of representation has been constituted. Free association such as freedom of conscience, discourse, industry, religious belief and the press emerged as an invention that began to build institutions and practices for the recognition of collective identities (Della Porta, 2015: 768-770). Recently, significant social changes have taken place because contemporary social movements can become organized globally and are no longer limited to their places of action (Kunsch and Kunsch, 2007: 10).

Activism is an "action in the name of a cause, action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine" (Martin, 2007: 19). From a historical point of view, activism has played an important role in ending slavery, defying dictatorships, protecting workers from exploitation, protecting the environment, promoting equality for women, opposing racism and many other important issues, however, activism can also be used for other purposes such as attacking minorities or promoting war, so activism is not necessarily something good or bad. It all depends on the cause, actions and appreciation of each individual on what "is worth" to defend (Martin, 2007: 19).

In the process of social change in which the media have become increasingly influential in the various areas of the public sphere that we call mediatization (Esser and Stromback, 2014: 4), debates and concerns are arising about the inevitable involvement of media and the emergence of neo-populist movements, with sensationalistic media coverage of conflict (Mazzoleni, Stewart and Horsfield, 2003: 6-8). The proliferation of debates about how social networks are changing societies and the rise of populist leaders are now prominent in many countries (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 2) and reinforces the need to strengthen the basic functions of traditional media, as a

pillar institution of democratic societies, with several authors pointing out the real and inherent dangers of overly optimistic discourse and perception about the new media and what they represent for social changes around democratic values (Curran, 2012, Sandoval and Fuchs, 2010, Couldry, 2004). Since our experience is mediated almost entirely by technical means that disseminate content on a global scale, we see a "cognitive dependence of individuals on the media in mediated societies" (Biroli, 2011: 85-86) allowing the "controllers" of the screens to significantly influence the collective imagination. The cultures of celebrities and consumerism and the economic constraints of the media industries lead to practices and representations that tend to ignore the agenda of social movements (Hackett, 2000: 62), at a global moment in which these voices and "critical spirits" become increasingly pertinent. In this scenario, research that seeks to bring visibility to democratic resistance forces that are based on values of respect and tolerance of diversity becomes more relevant.

In Portugal, there has also been significant social changes resulting from the era of "network communication" (Cardoso, Costa, Coelho and Pereira, 2015: 11-12). But despite the fact that the digital environment has brought new configurations of political and social involvement and participation, as well as new and unexpected forms of collective mobilization and activism (Campos, Pereira and Simões, 2016: 28), television continues to be the privileged mean for the majority of citizens in Portugal to have access to information (Burnay and Ribeiro, 2016: 6) and "television news are, by their representativeness, one of the main sources for the social construction of reality" (Brandão, 2010: 134). Portugal follows an European trend, since, according to the Eurobarometer Standard survey (88) in autumn 2017, television (watched on TV or on the Internet) remains the most common medium used by European citizens: 84% attend every day or almost every day, an increase of two percentage points since the same survey in the autumn of 2016 (EB86).

This article presents a theoretical approach to contemporary activism in democratic and mediated society's connecting it with the work of *symbolmakers* in hyperreality contexts (Holtzhausen, 2002: 30-38). It also presents preliminary data on the representation of contemporary activist movements in the television news of the Portuguese free-to-air television channels. In 2015, 2016 and 2017 the news programs of the four Portuguese free-to-air channels (RTP1, RTP2, SIC and TVI) mentioned the words "activism" and "activists" 582 times. In general, the references to these concepts have been increasing in the news programs of all channels, with a high general increase between 2016 and 2017. This may be related, to a global tendency, identified by some researchers, that is connected to the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States (Marris, 2016; Yukich, 2018, Horsford, 2018). But, besides this, the general percentage of references on the news programs to these concepts is reduced.

Media, democracy and contemporary activism

The results of the Democracy Report of 2018, the second annual report of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem, 2018) project, recently released, positions Portugal at the 10th position in the ranking of democracies worldwide. On the other hand, the researchers alert to the fact that democratic space in the main countries on the democracy-autocracy spectrum side is shrinking. A much larger share of the world's population today is experiencing autocratization.

Meanwhile, Portuguese democracy is also experiencing a certain feeling of helplessness in civil society due to the emptiness that exists between the certainties given by the previous forms of social organization and the embryonic state of the new proposals of social change that are intended to bring the meaning of life in a defragmented perspective, for the various areas of social reality (Cardoso, Costa, Coelho and Pereira, 2015: 11-13).

As with the appearance of the press, the euphoria of the internet in the 1990s predicted an opportunity for democracy to march and that dictators

would fall because the internet inspired and demanded freedom, but many authoritarian governments around the world obtained only the best tools at their disposal and are in a better position to censor and alter content than what the mid-1990s ' cyber utopic' had predicted (Curran, 2012: 49-51). The strongly contested statements by Jair Bolsonaro, a candidate for the presidential elections in Brazil, on October 7, 2018, in a video broadcast live on his social networks to comment on the results of the first round of Brazilian presidential elections, are indicative of these trends: "Let's put an end to all activism in Brazil" (Folha de São Paulo, 12.10.2018). Regarding the optimistic 'apocalyptic statements' about this subject and not detracting from the obvious benefits that technological advances have brought to societies, it is important to remember that the new and old media are 'living' in an articulated way with the new complementing the old (Ribeiro, 2015: 212).

Recognizing that an active civil society and a free press and internet are very important hallmarks of liberal or representative democracies, we cannot deny that the Internet is increasingly presenting itself as a specific territory for public intervention and political and civic participation, particularly among young people. However, this "emancipatory, democratic and participatory role "also brings risks and challenges, particularly regarding to the balance between the traditional and "virtual" forms of activism and its different publics (Campos et al., 2016:42-43). Online activism has been criticized for not being followed or complemented by forms of offline participation, and often rejected as *clicativism* or *slacktivism* (Gladwell, 2011; Halupka, 2014; Karpf, 2010; Morozov, 2009; Shulman, 2009) supposedly fulfilling only the desire for instantaneous self-satisfaction and having little or no impact on the actual political processes and the actual actions of the citizens. Some authors have rejected the perspective of digital democracy as a myth, with online politics showing more similarities than traditional politics differences (Hindman, 2009).

Although there are perspectives that believe that the media reconfiguration brought by the digital environment will make television, in the short and

medium term, an irrelevant medium of communication, especially among the younger demographics, the evidence points to a scenario of complementarity (Vicente, 2016). The study *New Power of Television* (2012) indicates that television consumption is driven by online, in an increasing multitasking behaviour, with TV content serving as an excuse for interaction, sharing and commentary on social networks and blogs. In addition, in Portugal there is a preoccupation concerning the younger demographics being little involved in civic and political activities (Lobo, Ferreira and Rowland 2015).

In the political field, several studies have shown that the mainstream media have passed from mere channels of communication to actors of the electoral process itself. However, media discourses do not reflect the plurality of perspectives existing in society, significantly affecting the exercise of democracy and distorting the integration of social diversity (Morais e Sousa, 2011:4-13). On the other hand, recent research has shown that some kinds of youth participation in the digital media sphere representing a new and significant form of political activism has been unrecognized or trivialized by the public at large (Jenkins et al, 2016).

The proliferation of debates and studies on how social networks are changing societies and the "rising phenomenon of populist leaders currently prominent in many countries" (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 2) reinforces the need for the "image renewal of protest movements", associating them with a construction that translates social consciousness, responsibility and exercise of citizenship rather than the usual association of common sense with "subversion", "revolution", "radicalism" and "political exaltation" (Assis, 2006; Batista, 2012).

What counts as activism depends on what is conventional. In societies where freedom of expression is respected and protected, making government complaints is a routine occurrence. But in a dictatorship, such complaints can be seen as subversive and those responsible can be punished. It is usually those who hold less power in society who resort to activism since those

who hold positions of power and influence can usually achieve their goals through conventional means (Martin, 2007: 19-20).

In a scenario in which the public debate, online and offline, continues to mirror Michel Foucault's "torture" system of punishment and discipline, controlling the population by creating oppositions within them and the so-called civilized screens resemble "a furnace that lights up violence" (Foucalt, 1999:13), the challenge for contemporary activists in the areas of social innovation, protection of the fundamental rights and dignity of all life on the planet will be the reconfiguration of their action, between the real and the virtual, with the aim of winning a credible voice on mainstream screens that "try to resist the forms of dominant power" (Holtzhausen and Voto, 2002).

Symbolmakers in *hyperreality* contexts

We're living in a new sociocommunicational paradigm of great complexity in which the capacity to effectively decode and encode information presents itself as a "determinant for full social integration" (Lopes, 2011: 02). We live the future of Huxley (2002) in this kind of "civilized chaos" that immerses us in waves of information, stimuli, acceleration, sensations, emotions and possibilities (Ilharco, 2014). Edward Wilson challenges us with the statement that we are "drowning in information and thirsty for wisdom" (Wilson: 1998: 294).

The illusion of civilization is confused with an "anti-nature" extreme organization where everyone is controlled and the process of 'McDonaldization' spreads to the production and consumption of images, visual culture and lifestyles (Ritzer, 1993). The new castes of this contemporary "Brave New World", the ones that generate the most evolved beings, are now based on access to technology and first-level education. The protected organs of the original panopticon of the industrial process gave way to the cybernetic panopticon of digital capitalism that "produces docile minds locked in their screens" (Hand and Sandywell, 2002:204).

The representations of these realities exist, not because an order is objectively true, but "because believing in it enables us to cooperate effectively and to forge a stronger society". A natural order is stable, otherwise gravity could cease to function tomorrow, but we continue to nurture the "imagined order" that depends on myths that disappear when people stop believing in them" (Yuval, 2017:134-137).

In his book *The Burnout Society*, the German philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2014) presents hyper communication as a modality of positive society violence, this is linked to various excesses, particularly to a productivity overload and media stimuli. Because of the fragmentation and dispersion of perception and the technique of multitasking, associated with this dispersion, the deep and contemplative attention of cultural life has been supplanted by a "hyperattention" that gives place to an "alienating fatigue" (Han, 2014: 26).

The human need to control reality creates the "normotics of informational culture". This "Normose" is the result of a set of beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behaviors considered normal. There is a consensus of normality that can have pathological and/or lethal consequences. Some examples of these norms are: food uses like sugar, use of agrochemicals and insecticides, drug use such as cigarettes or alcohol, the Newtonian paradigm and the subject-object dualism fantasy in science, the consumerism associated with the destruction of life on the planet (Weil, 2000:62). It is useful to remind Dostoiévski (2008: 34-36) in the defense that "it can be very fruitful for man to go against the normal interest, positive, secured by the arguments of reason and arithmetic" (...). "Two and two are four for me is an impertinence (...). It can be much better two and two to be five?"

Several authors advocate emerging theories that seek to counteract the tendencies towards the standardization of beliefs. These defend, for example, that human rights advocacy in the 20th century should be extended to the non-human world (animals and nature) in the 21st century to ease the il-

lusion of human control over nature and other forms of life on the planet (Cavalieri, 2002; Cullinan, 2011; Klein, 2014; Nash, 1989; Singer, 2009). By their "collective attempts to infuse new beliefs, norms, and values into social structures", activism and social movements can create social and institutional changes depending upon framing processes, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities (Rao, Morrill and Zald, 2000: 239-242).

Public Relations (PR) have a complicated relationship with activism because historically activism has justified the organizational investment in PR services to avoid public criticism (L'Etang, 2016: 207). The operational area of media relations has been largely censored for creating a "hyperreality that leads to the conception of a hypercivilization that has no factual existence" (Holtzhausen, 2002: 29). However, postmodern perspectives on technology argue that the role of media relations in PR will be more sought after than ever. Digital environments will increasingly enable organizations to obscure their real intentions and produce fictional realities by providing "useless information" that can be seriously detrimental to some audiences and postmodern PR professionals will necessarily have to adopt a critical attitude and vigilant of this "meaningless communication" to ensure that all audiences are fully informed and participate in the discussions (Holtzhausen, 2002: 30-38). The allocation of power and the dominant ideology can been seen through a critical view of the signs and symbols of a culture. "Public relations practitioners can be called symbolmakers if one considers their work is largely word and image" (Mickey, 1997:271). And it is also known that 50% to 75% of mainstream media content is provided or significantly influenced by Public Relations (PR) professionals (Macnamara, 2015: 118).

So the same advertising, social marketing, and PR strategies that successfully established mass consumption in big screens as a way of life can serve to promote sustainable consumption as an alternative lifestyle (Muratovski, 2013: 1). There are authors analysing the role of PR in the growth of generalized sustainable consumption (Tafra-Vlahović, 2012; Acaroglu, 2014: 19) and

this can be applied for analysing the image of social movements defending alternative perspectives of reality.

In interpreting symbolic forms, individuals incorporate them into their understanding of themselves and others. The receivers are currently participating in a structured process of symbolic transmission, and mediated communication is always a contextualized social phenomenon. "When humans use the media they are making networks of meanings for themselves" (Thompson, 1995: 11). Hence, individuals who occupy dominant positions in large institutions may have vast resources at their disposal, enabling them to make decisions and pursue goals that will have long-term consequences (Thompson, 1995: 12-14).

Human beings are called upon to make decisions on complex issues, even without having reasonable knowledge about them, which imposes an interpretation of reality according to the partial, possibly naive, perspective of reality. Lippman argues that the ideas and impressions that we form about the facts depend on "where we stand and the habits of our eyes" (Lippmann, 2008 [1922]: 22-84). Political or technological changes do not take place without cultural or institutional changes that depend on clarification and individual and collective capacity to reinterpret reality (Illich, 1971: 148-156). If societies do not have this culture, if citizens are not accustomed to being exposed, in the mainstream media, to content that defies the collective misconception of what it is to be human and about life on the planet, the new social movements will not succeed only by the hypertechnological structure (Marchioni, 1991: 40).

Method of data collection and research questions

In our study, we have identified the TV news programs that made use of the words "activism" and "activists" aired on the four Portuguese free-to-air channels between 2015 and 2017.

The choice of these channels was based on the fact that their content is representative of the information produced in Portuguese newsrooms. Furthermore, these are the channels that reach a larger number of viewers, according to CAEM / GFK audiometry data. A significant part of the population considers that these channels offer "sufficient programs for the satisfaction of [their] informative and recreational needs" (Burnay and Ribeiro, 2016: 25).

The programs covered in our analysis are: RTP 1 – Bom Dia Portugal (from Monday to Friday); Jornal da Tarde (daily); Telejornal (Daily), Sexta às 9 (Friday's) || RTP2 - Euronews (from Monday to Friday); Journal 2 (Daily); || SIC – Edição da Manhã (from Monday to Friday); Primeiro Jornal (daily); Jornal da Noite (Daily); || TVI - Diário da Manhã (from 2nd to 6th F); Jornal da Uma (daily); and Jornal das 8 (daily).

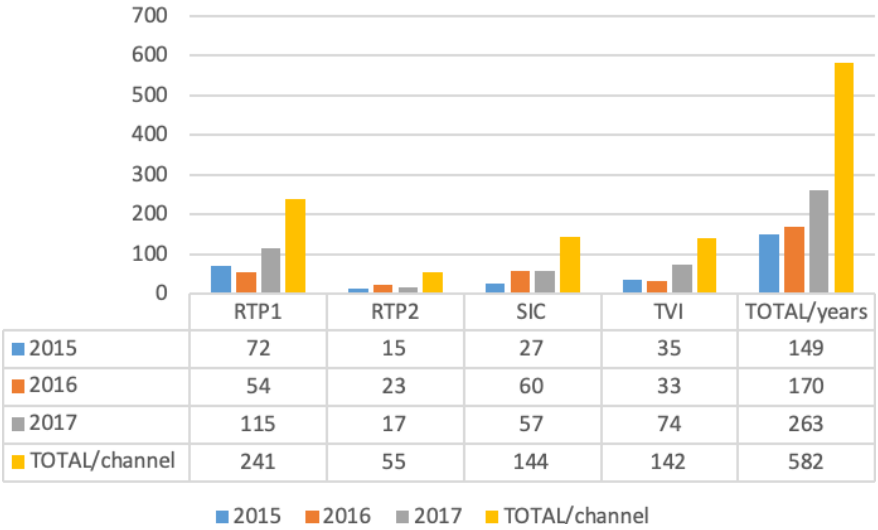
We intend to answer the following research questions:

1. How many times information news programs of the Portuguese generalist television free-to-air channels mentioned the "words "activism" and "activists" between 2015 and 2017?

2. How much airtime was given in 2017 to news pieces dealing with the concepts of activist and activism movements in Portuguese generalist television free-to-air channels?

Results and analyze

The first objective was to quantify how many times the words "activism" and "activists" were mentioned in the news information of the four Portuguese generalist free-to-air channels RTP1, RTP2, SIC and TVI in the period between 2015 and 2017. The following results were obtained:



	RTP1	RTP2	SIC	TVI	TOTAL/years
2015	72	15	27	35	149
2016	54	23	60	33	170
2017	115	17	57	74	263
TOTAL/channel	241	55	144	142	582

Graphic 1 - Number of references of the words "activism" and "activists" in the news programs of the Portuguese generalist television free-to-air channels between 2015 and 1017 By Cision Ltd

In these three years the news programs of the Portuguese free-to-air television channels mentioned the words "activism" and "activists" 582 times. It is possible to see that the references to these concepts have been increasing in the news programs of all channels, with a high general increase between 2016 and 2017- total of 170 references in 2016 and a total of 263 references in 2017. The continuation of the research is expected to provide the detailed analysis of the news content of the 2017 television news programs that referred the concepts of "activism" and "activists". In any case, the significant increase in the references to these terms may be related to a global tendency, identified by some researchers, that is connected to the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. Some authors argued that this election has created an urge for a new wave of active social participation and activist leadership in different areas of society since arts, education, religion and science to reinforce the defense of climate activism, civil and human rights, and the value of science and progressive values (Marris, 2016; Yukich, 2018, Horsford, 2018). On the other hand it is possible to see that the Portuguese public television channel (RTP 1) was the

one that mentioned most these concepts - 241 times. This may be related to the discussion about the role of public television in stimulating participation as a space for informed citizenship (Brandão, 2010: 164). The substantial quantitative increase of the reference to these concepts in 2017 is, for itself, a phenomenon that inspires further investigation and reflection on the relationship between contemporary activism and the production of television news.

Program/Channel	Nº of Emissions/2017	Nº News. No Ref/Activ.	% Progr. With Ref. Ativ.
Bom dia Portugal (RTP1)	250	195	22%
Jornal da Tarde (RTP1)	365	340	6.8 %
Telejornal (RTP 1)	365	340	6.8%
Sexta às 9 (RTP 1)	52	51	1.9%
Euronews (RTP 2)	250	250	0%
Jornal 2 (RTP2)	365	350	4.1%
Edição da Manhã (SIC)	250	222	11.2%
Primeiro Jornal (SIC)	365	348	4.6%
Jornal da Noite (SIC)	365	353	3.2%
Diário da Manhã (TVI)	250	217	13.2%
Jornal da Uma (TVI)	365	346	5.2%
Jornal das Oito (TVI)	365	343	6%

Table 1 – Broadcasts of news programs of the free-to-air generalist Portuguese channels with and without reference to the concepts of "activists" and "activism" in 2017

During 2017 the four free-to-air television channels (RTP1, RTP2, SIC, TVI) broadcast 3607 news programs and 263 of these contained references to the concepts of "activism" and "activists". Despite 2017 having been a year with a high general increase of references to these concepts, only 7% of the total news programs aired these channels have referred to them. It is possible to see that the news program that most referred these concepts is the morning news "Bom Dia Portugal" from the public Portuguese television channel, with 22% of the programs broadcast referring to the concept of "activists" or "activism". The morning news programs are, in general, the ones that mention more these concepts – Edição da Manhã (SIC); Diário da Manhã (TVI). But besides this, the percentage of references on the news programs of the four Portuguese free-to-air channels is reduced. In further research the objective is to better understand why these happens and how the interaction between PR and journalists is, or can be, connect to this phenomenon.

Conclusions

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a paradigm change in the international policies on development cooperation but this can only be achieved with a strong commitment to go beyond the situations of paradigmatic invisibility. Journalists and PR professionals have a huge challenge in this process reconfiguring the counterintuitive effect of messages and understanding that fear disables action (Acaroglu, 2014: 19). If publics are confronted everywhere with narratives about a world full of problems without solutions, and they believe it, the next step will be avoid this dramatic hyper-reality and assume that they have no power or choice to change it. Besides their useful function of warning about dangerous directions, dystopias can create additive systems about a world that is going to be even worse than the one we are living in, discarding the human capacity to mobilize and get out of these externalities. Otherwise historic rebellion would be a fraud only to be used by the brands of counterculture products. It is a case to say "get out of the Matrix" referring to the movie where in a dystopian future reality as perceived by most humans is actually a simulated reality called "the Matrix" (Andy Wachowski & Larry Wachowski, 1999).

If technologies have brought a new space of visibility to activist organizations that defend human, civil, environmental and animal rights, they have also made it possible for extremist organizations and totalitarian movements to create virtual spaces that naturally undermine public confidence in elections, in the courts, in the traditional media and in science, with conspiracy theories, false narratives and ignorant perspectives on religion and race (Albright, 2018: 20-30).

In this context, those who define and seek to influence what is reported in the TV news programs (journalists and PR), have a greater responsibility and interest to provide perspectives that allow us greater independence from the most varied attempts of "intellectual subjugation" inherent to the

production and dissemination of information (Tornero and Varis, 2010: 24-26). On one side, this preliminary data analysis confirms an increase of the reference to the concepts of "activism" and "activists" between 2016 and 2017 in news programs of the Portuguese free to air television channels and, on the other, indicates a reduced general reference (only 7%) to these concepts in the news of these channels in 2017.

The deep crisis of confidence affecting advanced industrial democracies that extends to the new and more recent democracies is creating a fertile ground for the growth of "populisms" that are offering to, increasingly discontented citizens, a simplistic discourse in an accessible language, vulgar and particularly, "attractive and mobilizing" (Teixeira, 2018: 123-127). To counterbalance this state of things, it is important to present citizens with other possibilities for public participation with the capacity to assert a set of social "counter-powers". A kind of "parallel system that, far from being undemocratic, presupposes a healthy relationship between governors and the governed", based on the use of instruments of evaluation, control and accountability of the actions of the governments that, by consecrating impartiality, plurality and proximity, are capable of limiting the "absolutism" of the legitimized rulers by the consecration of the elections (Teixeira, 2018: 123-127).

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FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 12.10.2018

NETWORKED AUTHORITARIANISM IN RUSSIA AND ITS POSITION ON PUBLIC DEBATES IN SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CASE OF INSTAGRAM FLASH MOB

Daria Dergacheva[1]

Abstract: Countries with competitive authoritarianism are the most common among the autocracies of the world, more so than military dictatorships, monarchies or single party regimes (Magaloni: 2010 p. 751). Russia has long been cited as one of the examples of competitive authoritarianism regimes (Levitsky, Way: 2002; Hale: 2010; Petrov, Lipman & Hale: 2013; Schedler: 2013; Golosov: 2015; Sakwa: 2017, Robinson and Milne: 2017), and the list of such countries is increasing every year. For some researches, now even the EU member states Hungary and Poland are close to fitting into this definition (Bustikova and Guasti: 2017; Mechkova, Lührmann, Lindberg: 2017). However, we know little about whether and how these regimes work with the new online environments, including social media. This research seeks to contribute towards examining whether ideological conservative turn of the regime in Russia is being partly promoted by the pro-government media and through social networks, using a case study of Instagram-based flash mob phenomenon. Russia is a hybrid regime of competitive authoritarianism, and like the majority of autocracies at present, there is a need to explain what mechanisms does this regime use to stay in power and support its hybridity. As a case study, I took news about

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murder and rape of a young female student in Moscow in January 2018, and a following Instagram flashmob. Instagram did not prove to be a place where media accounts had an important say on the matter. Instagram influencers and bloggers were the ones with the most involvement on their posts. While appearing as a reaction to media publications blaming the victim, the posts with the most influence were not connected to the media themselves. The word usage in Instagram posts also had mostly a positive connotation. Some of the big media accounts are also gaining momentum, and were included in the most discussed posts on the topic in Instagram.

Keywords: Social Media; Competitive Authoritarianism; Instagram; Government and Media

Competitive Authoritarianism in Russia

Steven Levitsky, Harvard professor of Government and one of the authors of the term 'competitive authoritarianism", has recently co-authored an opinion piece in "The Guardian", which is titled "This is How Democracies Die". In this column, he is describing the most widespread 'death' of the democracy that keeps occurring in the world now: the breakdowns of democracies not by military coup or foreign intervention, but by the elected governments themselves (Levitsky, Ziblatt: 2018). Since the transition is not immediate, people continue to believe they are living under democracy, while bit by bit, mostly by legal means approved by the legislation, press starts to function under self-censorship or is bought-off, government critics face legal problems, judicial branches are being subjected to executive control. Levitsky and Ziblatt call it 'backsliding' of democracies, and cite Georgia, Hungary, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Ukraine as the countries where elected leaders have at some point in the recent years subverted democratic institutions (Levitsky, Ziblatt: 2018). Hungary and Poland, members of the European Union since 2004, are largely defined as countries that are 'backsliding' from liberal democracy, with some claiming them becoming authoritarian states today (Bustikova and Guasti: 2017; Mechkova, Lührmann, Lindberg: 2017). Turkey is another

major example of the defeat of democratic principles of governance (Tansel: 2018; Akyuz & Hess: 2018; Gunter: 2018).

Moreover, a lot of journalists, among them Eduard Luce of the "Financial Times", write about the overall 'retreat' of Western liberalism, which is bringing about nationalism and populism not only in former Soviet bloc countries or Turkey but also in the US and other Western democracies (Luce: 2018). New York Times' columnist David Brooks echoes with 'degradation of democracy in the US' statement (Brooks: 2018). Academic research on this issue is also emerging. However, it is already becoming clear that the electoral, or competitive authoritarianism is often substituting democracy in many countries of the world.

Indeed, in the 1990s many post-Cold War countries blended authoritarian governments and democratic mechanisms. Among such entities, a lot of African (Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe), Latin American (Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru) and Eurasian countries are being named (Albania, Croatia, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine) (Levitsky, Way: 2002).

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, more and more autocracies start to adapt nominally democratic institutions which in many ways help to stabilize the current regimes. Indeed, the first decade of a century has seen roughly 70% of all the authoritarian states who went through the elections of legislative body and over 80% – with the executive elections. Moreover, the vast majority of these authoritarian states have also allowed multiparty elections (Brancati: 2014 p. 314). After the Cold War ended, the 'multiparty autocracy' has appeared to be the most common among the autocracies of the world, more so than military dictatorships, monarchies or single party regimes (Magaloni: 2010 p. 751)

By the beginning of the 2000s, a notion of "competitive" or "electoral" authoritarianism appeared. Diamond also calls it a 'pseudodemocracy', since only after the end of the Cold War the only 'broadly legitimate' form of the regime in the 2000s became the form of democracy under international

and domestic pressure. Thus 'hybrid' regimes are adapting and mimicking democratic institutions, such as, in most cases, – multiparty elections (Diamond: 2002).

Hybrid regimes use democratic mechanisms and institutions to stabilize and preserve the status quo of authoritarian government. They do so by using such mechanisms as multi-party elections and legislative bodies. They use them for several purposes, such as: signaling the possible opponents about the regime's strength, acquiring information or managing social discontent, patronizing distribution to buying off the political elites, monitoring the dictator by the elites as well as the low-level regime elites by the dictator, and establishing credible commitment which suggests security for domestic and foreign investments (Brancati: 2014).

The political science in the last decade has mostly used a four-fold regime typology with closed and electoral autocracies on the one end of the spectrum and liberal and electoral democracies on the other end (Lührmann, Tannenberg and Lindberg: 2018 p. 62). Such four-fold typology has been used both by Schedler (2013), as well as earlier – by Diamond (2002), Levitsky & Way (2002), and others.

Levitsky and Way define 'competitive authoritarianism' as the one where formal institutes of democracy are considered the main modes of obtaining and using political authority. The rulers often and largely breach the rules of those institutions, thus the regime can not be considered democratic according to minimal standards which apply to democracy. Some of the countries that have been existing under competitive authoritarianism include Serbia under Slobodan Milosevic, Russia under Vladimir Putin, Ukraine (note: before the 2004 revolution), Albania, Armenia, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, and Zambia in the 1990s (Levitsky, Way: 2002).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has undergone several stages of drastic political changes. A 'bloodless democratic revolution' which overthrew the Soviet regime (Sakwa: 2018) did not lead to the appearance of democratic mechanisms, since the first Russian president Yeltsin and his

team did not immediately announce national or regional elections but relied instead on the old elite and nomenclatura that has already been in place, especially in the regions (Golosov: 2015). In addition, Russia was declared a 'continuer-state' after the USSR's dissolution, and has not only assumed the responsibility of the former 'Soviet Empire' in the international treaties and acquired its nuclear arsenal but has also inherited the Soviet institutions and their elite. This continuity had its long-lasting impact and resulted in reproduction of the 'neo-imperial' aspirations; however, it was somewhat balanced by the adaptation of the liberal constitution in ...(Sakwa: 2018). Balzer in 2003 defined the beginning years of Vladimir Putin's presidency as 'managed pluralism', referring to the regime's attempts to both support and limit diversity, while being outside of categories of 'pure' authoritarianism as well as democracy (Blazer: 2003). In 2010, Lipman, Petrov and Hale called the Russian political order of the Putin's second term onward an 'over-managed democracy', which, while being a hybrid regime, combines central position of the state with partial destruction of democratic institutions. The latter still have some of their initial functions but never to the extent of challenging the current rulers (Petrov, Lipman & Hale: 2010). After 2010, practically none of the researchers used the term 'democracy' describing the Russian regime. Researchers have come to a number of conclusions that Russia under Vladimir Putin has demonstrated: "Outrageously unfair and fraudulent elections, the coexistence of weak and impotent political parties with a dominant "party of power," a heavily censored (often self-censored) media, rubber-stamping legislatures at the national and sub-national levels, politically subordinated courts, arbitrary use of the economic powers of the state, and widespread corruption." (Gelman: 2014, p. 503).

At the same time, the regime in Russia of the latest decade has been defined as 'competitive authoritarianism' or 'electoral authoritarianism' by various researchers (Levitsky, Way: 2002; Hale: 2010; Petrov, Lipman & Hale: 2013; Schedler: 2013; Golosov: 2015; Gelman: 2015; White & Herzog: 2016; Sakwa: 2017, Robinson & Milne: 2017).

Although it has also been named as another form of authoritarianism by some, in particular, a 'consolidated authoritarian regime' (Kuzuo: 2016; Freedom House: 2018;) or fascist political system (Motyl: 2016), these instances of definitions are rather rare. The majority of academic works are focused on observing and defining the Russian political regime as 'competitive', or 'electoral', authoritarianism, and this will be the case in this research as well.

'Cultural turn' and the conservative rhetoric

Since Russia is a hybrid regime of competitive authoritarianism, like the majority of autocracies at present, there is a need to explain what mechanisms does this regime use to stay in power and support its hybridity.

One of such mechanisms, according to Robinson and Milne (2017) is developing populism to explain democratic shortcomings. In Russia, this stage started during the third term of president Vladimir Putin, when populist rhetoric started to be used actively in his speeches, legislation and the media. The end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012 saw a series of opposition demonstrations against the election fraud in Russia. Elections that were held at that time were different from those that have been won by Putin and the government party, United Russia, in the two previous election cycles. While the victory in previous elections (in 2003 and 2008) had been achieved with the promise of political stability, economic growth and the growth of living standards, all of those fulfilled or partly fulfilled (McAllister & White 2008), the 2011 elections did not follow suit. Recession of 2008 has stopped or lessened the economic growth and with that, some of the voters (mostly urban middle class) started doubting in the economic model provided by the current regime (Robinson: 2013). These 'urban dwellers' went out to the streets to show their dissatisfaction with the election fraud, and thus undermined the regime's legitimacy. Kremlin, and Putin in particular, responded by introducing populist rhetoric, framing the protestors as representatives of the 'foreign' values and creating what Richard Sakwa calls a 'cultural turn' in Russian politics. The main aim of this 'cultural turn'

included introducing social, political, and cultural conservative themes in official political discourse (Robinson: 2014). "Conservative-traditional values, argued Putin, were core popular values around which the Russian 'people' could unite in opposition to the 'other' of cosmopolitanism and its domestic and international representatives. For Putin, Russia is an example of a 'state-civilisation' in which the state is underpinned by a particular set of values that make up a civilisation. In Russia's case, these values are a common belief in traditional social values that unites the various religious faiths that exist within Russia" (Robinson: 2014).

Other institutes of competitive authoritarianism – the media and the legislative branch, continued the trend. Introduction of the conservative--traditionalist rhetoric in response to the protests of 2011-2012, has seen conservative mobilization against the liberal vision of gender equality by the Russian government, evidenced by restrictions on sexual and reproductive rights through law and policy, such as restrictions on abortion (2011), legislation limiting the discussion of LGBT issues (the so-called 'gay propaganda' law, 2013) (Zdravomyslova, Temkina: 2014), and just recently – legislation partially decriminalizing gender-based violence (2017). The media have been a key social field where "traditional values" have been promoted in order to cultivate a brand of "virtual patriotism" aimed to rally the nation against supposedly Western values of gender equality (Simons, Samoilenko: 2015). "Discourses about the national interest, national identity and patriotism in contemporary Russia promote a specific brand of sexual conservatism as a shared value, as well as specific sexual and gender normatives which are constructed as 'traditionally Russian' (Stella & Narova: 2015 p. 18). In contrast with Europe, which is "downed in sins" of homosexuality, same--sex marriages and feminism, Russia within its main discourse acts as the country where "morality" and "normality" prevail, and the authorities act as backers of those (Ryabov & Ryabova: 2014).

In addition, the current conservative ideology of the state involves "rallying the nation in the face of threats from an external enemy and an internal "fifth column"; a rejection of Western experience and culture; a search for

a “spiritual brace”; appeal to traditional moral values like order, the family, and stability; a stronger government; the “empire”; and a growth in the influence of official Orthodoxy and clerical circles. The ideological agenda is now usually set by radical circles, while society itself is starting to exhibit more noticeable forms of mutual aggression and intolerance.” (Byzov: 2017, p. 1).

However, some studies suggest that the ‘traditional values’ discourse in Russia could also be a part of a larger discourse on morality and ethics, or good versus bad. As Elena Gapova notes, the countries of former Soviet bloc in the 1990s minimized the features of a socialist welfare state, diminishing protection of women, disabled and elderly (in “exchange” to their presumed individual freedoms), and replaced them with a ‘shock therapy’ of market liberal reforms. It soon became obvious that the groups mentioned above were the losers of the free market. The voting pattern, therefore, in many of these countries showed later on that the support went to leftist, socialist, or in some cases – authoritarian regimes (Gapova: 2016).

“As a way to legitimize this shift, the gendered issues of demography, abortion, gender roles, child care, single-parent households, sexuality etc. began to be addressed in public debates on a permanent basis, as they can be easily “stretched” to involve social justice and thus serve as a displaced way to argue on behalf of protection.” (Gapova: 2016, p. 10).

Byzov doubts that this kind of ‘postponed’ reaction, an evident change in the ‘psychological atmosphere’ and evolution of a value system in Russia towards conservative, which gained momentum in the last 15 years, marked by the deep polarization in the society, has not been ‘superimposed’ on this ‘natural’ process by the Putin’s “meta-ideology”. (Byzov: 2017, p. 4- 5). This is not surprising, he continues, since starting from after the mass protests of 2011-12, the official state ideology becomes conservative, and Putin himself during his speech to the Federal Assembly in 2012 stresses that “Russia will be able to stand up against the erosion of moral norms and the “chaotic darkness of the Middle Ages” coming from the West.” (Byzov: 2017, p.8).

Networked authoritarianism: how do states in competitive authoritarianism deal with the online environment

'Networked authoritarianism' is the term describing controlling techniques used by the authoritarian governments on the Internet to limit dissent and opposition. These techniques include content censorship, legal restrictions of online speech, ban of certain sites, use of the Internet trolls. While networked authoritarianism does not exercise a complete control over the Internet, allowing a degree of freedom of communication, the government puts in place systematic censorship, control and public opinion manipulation (McKinnon, 2011). Under this approach, the main way to sustain legitimacy and stability of the regime, rather than completely suppressing the criticism online, is to allow some degree of freedom of communication on selected issues.

The case of China shows in which way the authoritarian regimes can adapt to the Internet and strengthen the regime's legitimacy through networked technologies (McKinnon: 2011). As noted in Hyun, Kim, & Sun, the use of social media, in the conditions of networked authoritarianism, can actually result in support of the regime and its articulated ideologies (Hyun, Kim, & Sun, 2014). The authoritarian countries can not shy themselves away from the technologies of the new media if they intend to develop socially and economically in the world today; however, they also use the Internet as a way to strengthen the legitimacy of the regime and uphold societal stability (Li and Lee: 2015).

While Russia is a country with competitive authoritarianism, there has not been a lot of research of its relationship with the new media and with social networks in particular. Does the regime engage in forming public opinion in the online media and in social networks? Does it do it on topics associated with the conservative cultural turn: gender issues, LGBT, traditional family, and Orthodoxy? In other words, can one find evidence of the competitive authoritarianism, getting involved in supporting the articulated ideologies through social networks?

Empirical Research: first results

This research was aimed at discovering whether the Russian government's conservative traditional rhetoric is being promoted with the hefty assistance of media and internet trolls in the social networks. In particular, whether sensitive issues which concern gender or feminism are seeing an increased activity of the pro-government media and views within the major social networks.

While the larger research where I am going to analyse more social media campaigns on similar issue is still going on, here I am presenting some of the preliminary results of the content analysis of one of the campaigns in social networks around media presentation and social media discussions around gender issues on Instagram.

As one of the case studies, I took news about murder and rape of a young female student in Moscow in January 2018, and an Instagram flashmob #ThisIsNotaReasonToKill which followed. The research intended to discover ways in which the pro-government media have covered an incident as well as the following feminist flashmob, and analyse in detail the media sources' participation in this social media campaign. Another objective was to find out whether there existed patterns of answers and signs of organized participation of possibly hired commentators and trolls on this particular topic. And finally, I intended to discover the role of the activists, or who the most influential users in the campaign were.

The first stage of the empirical research examined the media publications written in the two weeks following the incident, from January 23rd 2018 till February 7th, 2018.

132 publications were published in various Russian-speaking online media during this period. Among the publishers, there were all the largest news outlets, such as the largest in Russia printed newspapers ("Komsomolskaya Pravda", "MK", "Izvestiya", affiliated with the government through ownership), and the largest online-only media (Lenta.Ru, Gazeta.Ru which belong to GazpromMedia, Dni.Ru, whose ownership has been revealed

as also connected to the government (Malutin: 2017), Russia Today (a government-sponsored outlet for foreign-language broadcast) and other smaller publishers). I have allocated these publications to three semantic clusters: a) neutral publications (17) b) publications using 'victim-blaming' rhetoric (37) and c) publications supporting the flashmob/ the victim (2). The overall majority of publications in the major Russian-language media outlets present online was using a victim-blaming and anti-feminist rhetoric mocking the flashmob.

Secondly, since the flashmob was initiated and carried out in the Instagram, I wanted to find out whether the overall trend of victim blaming dominant in the media would be also dominant in the social media. Instagram posts written from 23nd of January 2018 till 23rd of February 2018 were gathered and analyzed according to the search words and hashtags of the incident. In total, 3372 posts were published on the topic during this period. Among those, I analysed the involvement, or the most influential posts that were published during this period. Involvement in this case included the number of re-posts, shares, likes and comments a post has received.

Number of authors and posts, by day:

Date	Number of messages	Number of authors	Date	Number of messages	Number of authors
23.01.2018	28	22	07.02.2018	27	27
24.01.2018	322	306	08.02.2018	29	26
25.01.2018	621	573	09.02.2018	24	23
26.01.2018	738	658	10.02.2018	24	22
27.01.2018	464	414	11.02.2018	26	24
28.01.2018	258	209	12.02.2018	32	24
29.01.2018	151	128	13.02.2018	20	19
30.01.2018	108	83	14.02.2018	22	22
31.01.2018	78	63	15.02.2018	11	11
01.02.2018	68	64	16.02.2018	15	12
02.02.2018	48	44	17.02.2018	11	11
03.02.2018	50	40	18.02.2018	16	10
04.02.2018	43	35	19.02.2018	8	7
05.02.2018	35	33	20.02.2018	25	9
06.02.2018	31	28	21.02.2018	18	11

Posts with most involvement (with the most number of shares, likes and comments) – each blogger 1 post: УМНЫЙ БЛОГЕР САША МИТРОШИНА (Instagram influencer, feminist and fitness blogger Sasha Mitroshina: supporting the flashmob and the victim) – 41968 users involved; Ника Водвуд (Nika Vodvud: feminist blogger, supporting the flashmob and the victim) – 22842 users involved; тётя надя,канада,правда 21

(Kalinkalol: Fashion blogger, feminist, supporting the flashmob and the victim) – 15798 users involved; eva gurari (Eva Gurari: Musician, blogger; supporting the victim and the flashmob. Post now deleted) – 14410 users involved; Alina|Travel|Now: Germany (Instagram beauty blogger. Post supporting the victim and the flashmob) – 7379 users involved; Anna Bernadina (Model, Instagram blogger from the Ukraine, supporting the victim and the flashmob. Post now deleted) – 6755 users involved; Julia. Professor Of Economics (Instagram blogger. Her 2 posts were a warning to the flashmob participants of possible dangers posting explicit photos) – 6462 users involved; александрия василевская (Instagram blogger, supporting the victim and the flashmob) – 6283 users; and Катерина Ло | видео | фем | (Instagram blogger and feminist, supporting the victim and the flashmob) – 4545 users involved.

None of the media accounts or posts with the victim blaming have been indicated as having the most involvement. However, if we look at the most discussed posts, or those with the most number of comments, the results are quite different. At least three posts of the media outlets in Instagram are indicated as the most discussed. Of those, there are two posts belonging to Life News, a resource, which has also covered the incident as the media outlet, using the victim blaming and mocking the flash mob.

At this stage of the research, there was no possibility to code and group all the posts and comments to semantic meanings. However, I have made an analysis of the number of comments under the relevant media posts (229 in one case; 212 in another), and analyzed most frequent words inside the topic. Top twenty most used words (translated from Russian) were: 1) girl;

2) murder; 3) people; 4) artyom; 5) photo; 6) reason; 7) flashmob; 8) rapist; 9) student; 10) murderer; 11) violence; 12) victim; 13) life; 14) human; 15) iskhak; 16) law; 17) body; 18) world; 19) slut; 20) guy.

Of these, only one word, 'slut', had explicitly negative connotation; all others were either neutral or positive. This means that in the Instagram posts, the opposite discourse prevailed, other than victim blaming.

Conclusion

This research with its preliminary results was limited to Instagram and media publications on the topic of gender, victim blaming and feminism. The media coverage was mostly negative, many of the outlets publishing victim blaming stories and mocking the flash mob. This attitude of the media goes in line with the official populist conservative rhetoric which was used as a government discourse for the last five years.

Instagram did not prove to be a place where media accounts had an important say on the matter. Instagram influencers and bloggers were the ones with the most involvement on their posts. While appearing as a reaction to media publications blaming the victim, the posts with the most influence were not connected to the media themselves. The word usage in Instagram posts had mostly positive connotation. Some of the big media accounts, however, are also gaining momentum, and were included in the most discussed posts on the topic in Instagram. The evidence that there was an organized participation of commentators was not found in this case. Further research on similar topics connected to a more large-scale issue, such that would involve more media or public figures of the Russian politics, is needed.

With all the limitations that it provides, Instagram is only one of many social media platforms, and any of the findings could not be extended to Twitter or Facebook. Thus the database should be extended by further studies which examine more data from other social media as well as other, more large-scale incidents, should be analyzed, and I am going to continue this work during further research.

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FAKE PROFILES: THE LAUGH, THE DERISION, THE REVERSE

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Abstract: As a result of an exploratory research, we propose a typology of fake profiles on the Internet on three axes: the laugh, the derision and the reverse. Then, six of this profiles, created on the most popular social networking sites in Brazil (Facebook and Twitter), were deeply analyzed. The research foundations were the theories of the discourse and the cyberculture, on the perspective of Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, José Luiz Aidar Prado and Eugênio Trivinho, as long as Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of language and Algirdas J. Greimas's approach on the discursive semiotic. The hypothesis advocated here is that the profiles of the laugh and the derision, fetishized, occupy the position of nodal points of the discourse of cyberculture. They act as dispositives that shoot the subject into the ideological fantasy of cyberculture, seducing him to seek the satisfaction of his impulses of connection in cyberspace. The fake profiles of the reverse, by the other hand, erode the ideological fantasy of cyberculture and expose its constitutive lack, by denying the primacy of technology as the motor of social development.

Keywords: Cyberculture, Social networking sites, Discourse, Discursive semiotics, Fake profiles.

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Introduction

In the late 1960s, we saw the emergence of an ideology in which global networking connections would liberate humanity from political, economic, ethnic-racial and moral constraints. Thus, it would promote the free flow of meanings: all the antagonisms, all the voices and opinions, should become compossible in the global village. This ideology guided practical actions, such as the development of technological equipments and the ways of using them. More than this, it became an hegemonic discourse, which articulated the performance of subjects in the world.

With the advent of social media, the emblematic pattern of interactive digital communication, online profiles have become one of the privileged spaces in which connected subjects perform themselves. In these websites, users from diverse countries and cultures build personal presentations, usually autobiographical and confessional. Nevertheless some unusual profiles emerge from the crowd: fictional or covert characters, popularly called 'fake'. By the analysis of profiles from three different categories – the laugh, the derision and the reverse – we sought to understand the reverberations of the hegemonic discourse of cyberculture in social networking sites and some social dynamics capable of dislocating its senses.

The global community

Since before the raise of the Internet there were lots of expectations related to a future when networking connections, expanded to global scales, would free humanity from political, economic, ethnic, racial and moral coercions: all the voices and opinions, all the antagonisms would become compossible in the web, and the myriad of manifestations composed by the social diversity would be the basis for the construction of a global village (MCLUHAN, 1972), of a communal society (BELL, GRAUBARD, 1997) or of a collective intelligence (LÉVY, 1999), as some very popular metaphors proposed.

Those predictions related to technology, registered in publications such as *the American Academy's* Commission *on the* Year 2000 *reports, the books*

*from the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan, the cyberpunk romances, and magazines as Mondo 2000 and Wired, among lots of other cultural texts, contributed for the construction of an idea called 'cyberculture'. More than simple vehicles carrying information, these texts were (and are yet) performati*ve agents – they organize social relations and articulate subject positions. Cyberculture is built then as a discourse, which is a way of distributing power in society (FOUCAULT, 2006).

In line with Laclau and Mouffe (2004), we can assert that discourses constitute and organize social relations. This perspective is endorsed by various conceptual streams of discourse analysis, especially those influenced by Foucault (2002, 2005, 2006) and Althusser (2001). Discourse, therefore, is practice, since the actions undertaken by people or groups are meaningful action (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2004).

The notion of a cybernetic culture resulting from a widespread network, in which individuals could project themselves, developing knowledge, and also communicate more effectively than face to face, as ventured by the researchers of the 60s, guided the development of equipments that would make it possible – as well as the notion that people want (or should want) to be connected all the time, anywhere, guides the development of portable and mobile gadgets. More than that, the discourse of cyberculture also articulates ways of being-in-the-world, performing subjects.

Judith Butler (1993) explains that the performance of a subject who 'assumes' a certain discourse is not a set of actions, elaborations, meanings and procedures performed in accordance with this discourse; rather it is a set of actions mobilized by the normative effects of this discourse, which binds to the accumulation and dissimulation of references to it. "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (Ibid., p. 12). The connected, creative, interactive subject identified as a model of success in cyberculture is, also, discursively constructed.

At the same time that the computer-mediated communication, and the online communities were emerging, the imaginary around them also thickened: the virtual connection was given airs of disembodiment, mysticism and magic. Erick Davis (1994) discusses the contribution of cyberpunk literature for the construction of an informational space notion that, in many aspects, reiterates the digital-technological determinism:

> Far beyond Palo Alto and MIT, in the margins and on the nets, phantasms hover over the technologically mediated information processing that increasingly constitutes our experience. Today, there is so much pressure on 'information' – the word, the conceptual space, but also the stuff itself – that it crackles with energy, drawing to itself mythologies, metaphysics, hints of arcane magic. (Ibid., p. 30).

Davis highlights the importance of three fantastic environments in the articulation of people and proposals around technology: 'cyberspace' by William Gibson, the '*other plan'* by Vernor Vinge and the mystical notion of *VALIS* by Philip K. Dick.

The first of them appears for the first time in the novel *Neuromancer*, 1984. The term 'cyberspace' was the name of the allegorical environment accessed by the networking connection – a sort of collective hallucination of humanity. According to Davis, "Gibson's work actually created a social space, organizing the desires and intuitions of people operating in the widely disparate fields of journalism, law, media, psychedelic culture, and computer science" (Ibid., p. 30). This 'fantasy of information' intruded the social practice, so that the computer-mediated interaction became discursively constructed as a meeting in a 'parallel space'.

In the novel *True Names*, 1981, Vernor Vinge describes the 'other plan' as a 'data space' accessed by portals. The mystical space was full of elves and knights, spells, castles, reincarnations and a dense forest where everyone easily gets lost. Also the novel *VALIS* was launched in 1981 by Philip K. Dick. The title is an acronym of Vast and Active Live Intelligence System, compared by the writer to a system of artificial intelligence or a mega-computer.

A demiurgic entity had the ability to create false worlds, pseudo worlds fabricated and delivered directly into the heads of individuals. The parallel worlds were like an hologram that human beings 'processed' in their minds. This novel and many of the ideas of Philip K. Dick found shelter in the New Age culture and influenced the technological beliefs that widespread within the cyberculture.

The mystical belief in networking connections reiterated the inevitability of a cybercultural future in which all mankind would be connected, inhabiting a parallel information and communication space called cyberspace. At the same time, the pioneering experiments of interactive communication in the Internet was a 'sample' of what would be the global village in the future. In the 90s, the discourse of cyberculture was experienced as a reality in 'beta'[3] version. Connected people felt like privileged collaborators for the construction of the global community.

In the late 90s, BBS, IRC, chat rooms and other systems of interaction based on anonymity were replaced, in everyday practices, by individualized systems of message exchange like ICQ and Windows Messenger. In the first case, the user was identified by a number; in the second one, more detailed registration forms required information as 'name' and 'surname' as well as the 'username'.

The desire to only chat with already known people is not enough to explain the change of model, since private conversations were also possible in systems such as IRC. The millennium turn can be seen as a maturation moment for the informational capitalism. After a wave of intense financial appreciation in the 90s, several digital companies faced insolvency or bankruptcy in 2000. It was a time of discredit about the business model proposed by the 'dotcom' business. This crisis of confidence has been known as the 'dotcom bubble'.

3. Beta version is an unfinished version of a software, still under development, but available for users to test and eventually report problems to the developers.

After the crisis, some features became more and more prominent in tech-market: the development of complex databases on user behaviors, the tools to find out market trends and the social marketing emerged as a basis for the financial health of digital companies. Aligned to these trends, social networking sites become popular and gave impetus to the new business model.

The social networking sites soon became popular. Guidebooks and specialized websites offered to individual or companies tips to get the most out of these sites. Raised to the position of compelling, fundamental, necessary, social networking sites have become the tools that promote the connection of people with their friends and family, of workers with their jobs, of companies with their customers, of consumers with the best products and the best deals.

The social networking sites reiterate, in their own way, the discourse of cyberculture: the construction of a global community in which knowledge, creativity and opportunities can be expanded in a web of universal connection. Those who have not created their profiles on these sites will soon be integrated – from the point of view of the hegemonic discourse, the total integration of the planet is a matter of time. Meanwhile, the connected ones enjoy the benefits of the current technological setting, yet imperfect, but with the promise of constant improvement to the achievement of the imaginary technological future.

How to fake a profile

The discussions about the computer-mediated social interaction, and about social networking sites, often fall into the question of the "real" and the "true". Investigating avatars, David Gunkel (2010, p.129) competently addresses this question and remembered that "when things in the virtual environment get confused or exceedingly complicated, advocates and critics alike often appeal to the relatively safe and well-defined world of what is now called in a curious recursive, discursive gesture, 'real reality' [in opposition to a virtual or technological reality]." A more detailed comprehension

about this concept is convenient to understand the construction of profiles in cyberspace.

The real profiles is expected to be legitimated by the "material" proof of the world. Such conception of truth permeates all the philosophy history, in line with a metaphysical thought which dates back to Ancient Greece, and got amplitude with the works of Aristotle and his followers. This conception of truth is based into a 'correction', a correspondence between "measures" and the measured thing (HEIDEGGER, 2012, p. 111) and has become dominant in the occidental imaginary.

But, in the 20th century, critics to the Aristotelian metaphysics, to the Platonic idealism and to the Cartesian subjectivism contributed to a 'linguistic turn' – the understanding of the world from and by the language. From this perspective, language is no longer seen as a 'mirror' of reality; it is understood as the foundation of the real. This idea was present in the works of Wittgenstein (1975; 2000; 2011) and John L. Austin (1962), as well as in Heidegger's philosophy. Despite of the differences between these authors, they all ascribe to language a primacy in the construction of social reality.

The expression 'linguistic turn' gained popularity after the launch of *The Linguistic Turn: essays in philosophical method*, in 1967, a collection of essays edited by Richard Rorty (1992). To emphasize the arbitrary nature of the definition of truth, the philosophy of language provide a political perspective: the true and false are related less to the 'real' of an extra-discursive world and more – perhaps exclusively – to the context and institutions that legitimize and reaffirm a particular conception of truth, relegating to its opposite the status of false.

The social networking sites, by assuming a specific profile that is denoted as 'real' or 'true', need to convince users to adopt a specific way of being in the Internet. This profiles are based on the acceptance, by the user, in providing personal data and letting his/her web-navigation to be monitored. That differs from the previous, anonymous chats, like IRC. With this goal, the sites project themselves as enunciators that help the enunciatary to get

what is the 'best' in computer-mediated communication: the users whose registration follow the rules established by the site will be able to recognize and to be recognized by their friends, to be informed about dates and special events (as birthdays, marriages etc.), to receive personalized contents – news and advertisement – related to their tastes and interests, to use applications that allow them to discover new music, new movies or new trip destinations that "combine" with them, ultimately, they will have full access to what is revealed as an experience of whole connection and sociability online.

This call, in which the enunciator provides the 'map' that help the enunciatary to travel "between two symbolic points, in a time scale", receives from Prado (2013, p. 10) the name of biopolitical convocation. The path starts in the actual social life of the user and helps him/her to get where he/she wants to, in terms of interaction, participation and – why not? – popularity. The target point is idealized, projected by a certain life conception, and might be achieved by the services and products that the website offers now, and will offer in the next years, once the system in constantly improved. The regimes of biopolitical convocation are a discursive elaboration that "mold a latent demand, expressing it as a cultural will" (PRADO, 2013).

Internet users want a full experience of connectivity and sociability: this is the promise of the social networking sites. But the convocation is put as a previous degree: the very existence of social networking sites able to connect people in innovative, dynamic and personalized ways tells people,who had not realize their daily sociability as a boring one, that they have "limitations" in their disconnected lifestyle. They must recognize their own reality as incomplete and wish to be part of the cyberculture. The next step will be to create their own profiles in line with the rules of the site, in order to be considered a 'real' participant of the global community.

The discursive semiotic (GREIMAS; COURTÉS, 2008, p. 300-303) describes a set of manipulation strategies between the sender-manipulator and the receiver in the narrative structure of a text. This approach contributes to a

study of the performative feature of the discourse of cyberculture. The manipulation can be described as an "action of a man over another men, trying to make him execute a given program" (Ibid., p. 300). In the analysis of a semiotic text, it is sustained by a contract between a sender and a receiver, actantial roles assumed by subjects of the narrative:

> In effect, it is about a communication act (aimed to *make-to-know*) in which the sender-manipulator impels the receiver-manipulated to a position of lack of freedom (*cannot not-to-do*), close to being obligated to accept the proposed contract. So, what is at stake, at first view, is the transformation of a modal competence of the receiver-subject: if he/she, for example, unites the *cannot not-to-do* to a *having-to-do*, there is a provocation or intimidation; if he/she unites it to a *wanting-to-do*, there is a seduction or temptation. (Ibid., p. 301) .

Once the profiles in social networking sites must to be built according to the rules, it is the normative effect of these rules that legitimate what can be considered 'true' or 'real' – and what is not according to the rules is considered false or fake profiles.

Laugh with me

Once we set the field the fake profiles emerge, it is time to analyze the profiles found in the social networking sites. We aimed to understand *how subjects* interact through them and produce meanings in cyberspace. The hypothesis is that they are more than just talkative ones in the communicational mishmash of the web. The fake profiles sometimes act as a dispositive that throws the subject inside the *ideological fantasy* (ŽIŽEK, 1996; 1997; 2003) of cyberculture, and other times they deconstruct this fantasy by rendering visible its *constitutive lack*. And, if engendered in disparate processes, the fake profiles only can be so due to their diversity and ambivalence.

It is not possible to analyze the fake profiles unless from their linguistic manifestations and their inter-relations, as with other social texts, as with ideological trends in which they are inserted (and which they reproduce).

We used, then, a methodology that departed from the guidelines of discursive semiotic based on Algirdas Greimas (1966, 1970, 1973, 1983), and we introduced some elements of the post-structuralist discourse analysis to understand not only the senses produced *in the text*, but how those texts are inserted into a *context* that extrapolate themselves, with political implications related to the struggle for hegemony in the production of the meanings of cyberculture, and in the articulation of social practices and subject positions.

As a result of an exploratory research, we propose a typology of fake profiles on the Internet on three axes: the laugh, the derision and the reverse. Then, six of this profiles, created on the most popular social networking sites in Brazil (Facebook and Twitter), were deeply analyzed. The first axis, the *laugh* profiles, can be associated to the burlesque, to carnival, to irony. Celebrities, famous people from media or pop culture, historical personalities, or even abstract entities are represented topsy-turvy, acting into a funny way.

Two cases in which fake profiles gained wide repercussion and conquered social impact in Brazil composed a sample to be analyzed: we compiled biography and publications from Nair Bello on *Twitter* and Dilma Bolada (Cranky Dilma) on *Facebook*. The comic approach of Nair Bello and Dilma Bolada are their main attractive to conquer friends, followers, fans, likers and any other term that can be used as a synonym of links between profiles and/or pages on social networking sites. They are impertinent and prankish, based in parallelisms and cultural inter-texts.

The profile Nair Bello is ironic. It based into the opposition between the old and the new. Nair Bello, the locutor (the personage that assumes the action), euphorizes the elderly and tell her followers about her everyday fun: play card games, give food to birds, watch soap opera and make a 'promenade' from the living room to the kitchen. But it is clear that the enunciator (a projection of the subject writing the text) do not like this old-people life. The

enunciatary (the pressuposed reader) must to understand that it is a joke, that Nair Bello's life is not funny.

When it takes to Dilma Bolada profile, the enunciator proposes, and enunciatary must understand, that the comical effect is constructed by the inversions of meanings related to the public image of Dilma Rousseff, Brazilian former president. Dilma Bolada tries to rule even the things outside her scope. In her management, Dilma Rousseff was criticized by her oppositors, who said that she was not able to run the country, painting her into a position of subordination to alien interests. But the enunciated-text denies that Dilma Rousseff obeys any external designation: denying the submission, the funny profile affirms the ascendancy of Dilma Rousseff over all and everybody. Her fault is to 'rule too much'.

George Minois and Mikhail Bakhtin, both philosophers concerned about the humor laugh, depart from different perspectives to understand the popular culture – but they do recognize its ambivalence. While Bakhtin (2010) underlines the potential of the laugh in the suppression of hierarchy and codes of mores – even if only in the space and time of the party – Minois highlights the authoritarian and segregationist characters in it: "the medieval laughter is peremptory; unity is the rule" (MINOIS, 2003, p. 240).

Nair Bello and Dilma Bolada profiles appropriate and bring to new context the traditions of the laughter. If the uses of laugh to legitimize well-established powers and hegemonic discourses have so many historical records, the new fact here is the centrality of Internet in the elaboration and diffusion of the contemporary comical texts. This axis of fake profiles have conquered space, as an allowed exception, a 'consented disobedience'. Websites as *Facebook* and *Twitter* elaborate strategies to keep them in the website by creating special registering models, or by authorizing the profiles that identify themselves as irony or *fake* in their autobiographic description.

From charivari to cyberbullying

The link between laugh and oppression also follows the history of human civilization. In the Greek mythology there are many moments in which the enemies are mocked through the laugh. "The laugh humiliates and provokes. It is a doubtful weapon found in every conflicting situation", highlights Minois (2003, p. 43). In many cases, the laugh is used to exclude the different, and reinforce the laces of solidarity within the group.

In Middle Age, the *charivari* had an important normative role: the villagers mocked individuals whose behavior diverted from the moral patterns. "*Charivari* consists into a noisy group of villagers, among them some people wearing camouflage or beating cooking utensils; they meet in front of the residence of a person who is excluded by the group because of a reprehensible behavior." (MINOIS, 2003, p.170-171). The *charivari* was an instrument of self-discipline, of controlling the sociability and the marital habits of the villagers. It is pointed as "the tyranny of the group against the individual freedom" in that communities.

Nowadays, the *cyberbulling* profiles, with intimidation, racial or xenophobic offenses, recreate in the digital environment this derisory laugh of exclusion. Two profiles from this axis were analyzed: Sophia and Samira, both created in the name of young beautiful girls, in order to disseminate biased opinions. The attacks against a supposed enemy – the northeastern people or the black people, in the Sophia' case – as well as the recrimination and segregation of a member from the group – such as the Samira profile – are used to affirm the audience common values.

The enunciator, in this cases, is accusative and exposes his 'accused' to a popular jury formed by the audience – but the presupposition is an already-given sentence: the accused person is already convicted in the act of enunciation. This profiles get wide negative repercussion in the media vehicles, due to its potential to cause social exclusion and psychological damage.

In the first analyzed profile, the main opposition is between superiority and inferiority. Sophia, a fictional profile, advocates the white supremacy and mock from black people and foreign ones. Her followers reverberate the prejudiced opinion and promote racial segregation. The second profile was created in the name of a girl, Samira, pretending to be her. She is accused by the enunciator of being promiscuous. Samira's profile enthusiastic tells to the public her sexual adventures, in a mocking way. The locutor assumes the values of promiscuity and amorality, configured into the exclusion of the social group.

The axes of the laugh and the derision are opposed to each other. The laugh is beloved. At first sight, this profiles defy the coercive power of social networking site managers, circumventing the rules of users identification and creating fantastic, dissimulated or incoherent actors. But they became important components in the communitarian life: they promote the belonging laces that tie the subjects to the digital environment. When these profiles get famous, the creators get famous too. The fetish of the profiles of laugh put them in a highlighted position, the success stories of their creators are reproduced by the mediatic machine (CHARAUDEAU, 2006) as cognitive maps to the modalization of the creative-subject in the discourse of cyberculture. Their creators as celebrated as what people *must-to-be* in the digital era: innovative, creative, funny, and super connected. These profiles help to promote the active participation and the uncontested belief in values defended by the discourse of cyberculture. And, once the creativity is the fuel to contemporary capitalism, as affirmed by Sibilia (2008, p. 10), they replicate in terms of digital culture the actual system of production and consumption.

The derision profiles are hated. They became the evident proof of the power of Internet: its capacity of causing 'real' damage to people. *Cyberbulling* were turned by media into an irrefutable proof of the technology dissemination and impact in social life. Digitalization is presented, then, as an unavoidable trend. The future of humanity is the future of the digital nets – inclusive when relating to the militancy for its regulation. This profiles helps politi-

cians to justify laws to prevent digital crimes, which generally involves the prohibition of anonymity and other coercive measures.

The profiles of derision, besides being set in the place of a radical Otherness, become the model of what one *must-not-to-be*, also establishing cognitive maps that legitimate the regimens of biopolitical convocation that modalize the other users to adopt their 'real' identity in cyberspace.

The laugh as a main feature of digital communication should not be seen as something that happened by chance, nor even as a 'natural evolution' of the world automation. These fake/false profiles assume and put in practice the discourse of cyberculture. We have already pointed that discourse is practice, once the actions performed by people or groups are significative actions. The perspective that cyberspace is the extension of the body and mind of human beings, and that everybody is, or should be, or will be in cyberspace, has a performative effect. The virtual community, the global village, set in place of the imaginary future (BARBROOK, 2009) to the one humanity is being conducted, modalize social practices in the present accordingly to that future. In this perspective, the Internet is not experienced as a net of computers and modems: this material and contingent features are abstracted. The Internet becomes, by the sliding of meanings, the community itself where life must be performed, played, lived.

The reverse

Finally, there are those fake profiles of the *reverse,* used to spread virus, *spams,* commercialize followers, and other equivalent practices. Those profiles may or not present themselves in consistent enunciations, depending on their programming. Big part of them is created electronically by *robots.* The contamination of a computer by a virus causes the *débâcle* in the fantasy that supports the ideology of cyberculture. For a moment, users stop to feel as "a subject that got into the cyberspace" to realize s/he is just a user of a machine, in a net of technological equipments ruled by incomprehensible binary codes of programming. The phantasmatic support that creates the cyberculture (and the cyberspace) as a planetary community, in which the

social world would be lived in fullness, is deconstructed; the lack of this virtual space is traumatically evidenced, like a sudden irruption of the Real from the silicon and copper of processors crossed by electric pulses.

The fake profiles of the laugh and the *derision* are central promoters of the discourse of cyberculture; they are set into a privileged position, fetishized, seducing users to search for the satisfaction of their impulses of connection in the cyberspace by their cognitive maps. The profiles of the reverse, however, deny the primacy of technology as the motor of social development, because in these cases more technology is not synonymous with more personal interaction, nor with the expansion of professional, affective or any other kind of opportunities. They also deny the technical-technological domain as a vector of integration in the global village, since more aptitude for the use of these technologies does not translate into more social communion. They make clear that the fantasy of full connection, of which all antagonisms are compossible in cyberspace, says more about society than is says about technology.

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COMMUNICATIVE SILENCES IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Samuel Mateus[1]

Abstract: Traditionally, silence has been related to citizen disengagement and disempowerment. Indeed, at first light, the growth of silence is linked to deficits in democracy since silence is understood as passivity while action and speech are the dominant, and sometimes exclusive, modes of political *praxis*.

But silence can mean different things to politics. It can assume a coercive dimension when it is imposed over marginalized groups (the powerless); nevertheless, it can also assume a form of resistance and empowerment when it condenses self-assertion and becomes a form to navigate relations of power.

In this paper, we contribute to a politics of silence by examining how silence can be a factor of empowerment and liberty. Focusing on the notion of "communicative silences", we posit that silence is not a dysfunction of political communication but a significant element of democracy. Far from being a pathology, silence can also be another mode of communication, one that it is separate from speech.

Keywords: Political Communication; Silence; Democracy; Politics; Silent Citizenship;

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Introduction

We live in societies that do not tolerate well silences. We could almost say that we live in noisy societies where mutism is a threatened phenomenon. It has been suggested that the development of sound amplification is the most anti-social invention of modernity (Sim, 2007: 4). In effect, how can one express himself when he must hear all the time? Amplified sound and noise pollution can saturate the environment to the point the individual cannot escape it and cannot be heard. Modern media exorcise silence trying to avoid it fiercely: internet never stops streaming as television never ceases to broadcast. As media discourses become omnipresent and uninterrupted, silence becomes harder to achieve and to guarantee. Our culture is committed to the expansion of communication and, consequently to the contraction of silent moments.

Yet, silence has played a crucial role in human culture: they are critical in religion (ascetism), science (reflection) or the arts (silence as an artistic tool). The ability to be, to think and analyze and to create are dependent of a forbearance from speech or noise. Silence has been seen as an absence, as a lack or deficient of communication. Those who mention silence envisage silence as a threat to community, something akin to a failure or malfunction. "Silence is that which is imposed upon marginalized groups, for example, so it is easily assumed that silence must be overcome. Silence is indicative of miscommunication, so a model of community based on an image of language as transparent communication must eliminate silence" (Ferguson, 2004: 2). Silence is linked to the horror of lack of communication, of aporia, it has to do with the renouncement of the ties that unite fellow citizens.

To post-structuralism, silence can be fearful because it entails ideology as well as hierarchical and discursive orders (Foucault, 1971). The binary dichotomy speech/silence is a powerful tool to negotiate relationships as discourses produce their own silences. "There is not one but many silences and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (Foucault, 1990: 27). The famous adage: "*Whereof one cannot*

speak, thereof one must be silent" with which Wittgenstein concludes his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* can perhaps express this dialectic speech/silence. It is as an impotency of speaking but, mostly, as the recognition that there are limits to speech. Beyond those limits, it is the silence the stretches its domain. However, silence is not inevitably a form of violence. It can contain also a space of dialogue and encountering. It can also be a meeting space of possible hospitality to one another (Derrida, 2000). Derrida claims that silence is not a lack but the very origin and source of all speaking. It is silence that "bears and haunts language, outside and against which alone language can emerge" (Derrida, 1978: 54).

So, silence is not just miscommunication, it is not contrary to communication but may also be a form of communication. After all, there are meaningful silences (Glenn, 2004: 16). Silence is not the absence of meaning: there are silences that eloquently speak (Beville&McQuaid, 2012). Silence can, for instance, become a statement, a refusal to accept, a defiant attitude. It has some communicative functions that can be positive or negative: it can bond a group of people or divide them; it can hurt but it can also heal; it can reveal or conceal something (Jensen *apud* Sim, 2007: 14).

In this paper, we contribute to a politics of silence by examining how silence can be a factor of empowerment and liberty. Far from being just an absence of something, silence is at the very core of communication. We posit that silence may not be just a dysfunction of political communication but an important element of democracy. Far from being a pathology, silence is another mode of communication, one that is separate from speech.

We start by looking into the relations between silence and politics while underscoring three ways to conceive that relation (oppression, resistance and empowerment). Next, we discuss the vocal ideal of democracy (Gray, 2015: 476) and the hypothesis of silence in citizenship. We conclude with a brief presentation of the notion of "communicative silence" and its main advantages to cope with three political challenges (abstention, political representation and deliberation).

Silence and Politics

There are three main perspectives on how to envisage silence as a political act: silence as oppression, silence as resistance, and silence as empowerment.

Opression

One of the most pervasive associations between silence and politics consists in looking into silence as a tool of sociopolitical oppression and control (Jaworski, 1993). By silencing opposition or neglecting the free expression of political groups, the State can exert control over dominated groups.

Clair (1998: 21) emphasizes how dominant groups impose silence to marginalized ones in a variety of ways: through coercion, hegemony, discursive practices, systematic structuring of institutions or informal impositions on conversations. The author is, thus, stressing, how silence is related to a power differential that is latent in every social interaction: those who speak and those who remain silent, those that makes other listeners and those who can just to listen. Whether consciously or unconsciously we inhabit silent spaces that could mean a variation on the distribution of political power.

Political enforced silence is observed in various parts of the world and in different periods in history. Censorship is a traditional mode to superimpose silence on sensible topics and it is apanage in authoritarian regimes and dictatorships. It can be addressed to individual but also to social groups or journalistic institutions. Most totalitarian regimes refuse to allow opposition any political voice in the political agenda and sometimes even label them as rebels and insurgents in order to legitimize repression. "The myth is fostered in such instances that no opposition actually exists, which is very much to the advantage of the ruling elite in maintaining its hold over the populace" (Sim, 2007: 159). We can also testify this "art of silencing opponents" not just in Islamic fundamentalism but also in western democratic countries. For example, in *Silencing Dissent: How the Australian Government is Controlling Public Opinion and Stifling Debate*, Hamilton and Maddison

argue that the Howard Government in Australia, over ten years, "systematically dismantled democratic processes, stymied open and diverse debate and avoided making itself accountable to parliament or the community" (Hamilton & Maddison, 2007: 4). Southard (2007) contends that the National Woman's Party members- the "Silent Sentinels" - drew strength from restricting ideological forces to constitute a militant identity while they fought for providing political voice to women. Paradoxically, these suffragists battled political silence and fought for women suffrage while essaying to gain political voice through silent protests. Silence was here a symbol to the lack of political rights and it conveyed beautifully the message that there was a social group being silenced and deprived of the possibility to influence and vote on political matters. Another example comes, for instance, from 1917 and the Negro Silent Protest Parade where their silence was a means to silently resist the equilibrium of power between white and negro people.

Media are another key factor on the equation of silence and politics. Silencing the media is another ploy that governments resort to. China is known for having censors in Internet and to restrict or prohibit the broadcast of certain contents. Israel keeps a tight control over news coverage from the Occupied Territories and most often the military impose media blackouts (Sim, 2007: 162). Norris and Inglehart, for instance, point to the impact of restrictive media environments on regime support and how dissention is erased or obliterated by suppressing or limit public voicing (Norris &Inglehart, 2008).

So, silence can function as a means of severing political autonomy and the revindication of alternative points-of view. We are describing silence as being enforced or imposed. It was a kind of compulsory silence that oppresses minority groups and bounds the political powerless. Thus, silence can also be observed in the voicing of public opinion. Noelle-Neumann's (1993) spiral of silence – being the inability to publicly express, by the individual, his own political preferences in face of contrary public opinion - can be comprehended within this perspective that frames silence as an imposed (or self-imposed) restriction. Silence is, then, a symptom of an inegalitarian and powerless relation.

Resistance

When trying to understand the relation between silence and power, one should not only talk about the silence of the powerless (silencing subordinated groups) but also about the silence against the powerful (silencing as a deliberate act of fighting power).

In contrast to the perspective of silence as something that restricts and impairs political participation, we will now consider that silence can, too, be a tool of political resistance. These two silences acts get together to maintain hegemonic configurations of power (Jungkunz, 2012: 129). In fact, silence can be negotiated, not just superimposed. Suppression and refusal along with engagements and resistance work upon these relations of power. Just remember the political engagement of silent vigils, just like that ones occurred in 1971 in North-America as a protest to Vietnam war. There are plenty of pictures, in Internet, portraying young women with posters "*Until American stop killing and being killed in Vietnam*".

It is true that silence is traditionally conceived as a ceasing of participation or a withdrawal (from a conversation, political or business life). By cutting off external stimuli and inputs, silence offers a space of retreat that ultimately states a form of disavowal. Linked to this withdrawal perspective of silence, there is a more overt refusal to participate. This refusal can assume a form of resistance and confrontation: in fact, by silencing one may not me giving up but, on the contrary, silence may be an active and confrontational attitude. Silence can, then, prove to be powerful, not only as a proactive isolation but also as a social function of resistance.

One easy and familiar example would be the individual whose silence serves to resist the authority of policemen whose power cannot force an answer. By refusing to speak, the individual is using a constitutional right but is, at the same time, resisting to participate in the legitimated use of violence that police and military forces assume. "Silence can serve as resistance to any institution that requires verbal participation (as do virtually all). On a macroscopic political scale, states often require such participation

and subsequently employ a variety of means to compel it. The state-sponsored requirement to take an oath is a particularly overt form of obligatory speech" (Ferguson, 2004: 8).

Silence can become a form of resistance because silence is part of communication. By not engaging on conventional, ordered, regulatory or unitary discourses, silence can be an important way to disable disciplinaries discourses (Foucault, 1971). By doing so, silence transforms itself in a defensive function allowing for practices of freedom that would be otherwise unattainable. As Jungkunz (2012: 134) synthetizes: "silence becomes a way to negotiate around and between and even is spite of a given regulatory structure".

In effect, many practices of everyday resistance and elusion to surveillance involve silence. Silences that resist are attempts to protest but they do not involve litigations nor are straightforward, vocal ways to make claims. Instead, silences that resist are practiced as forms of subversion: subverting the man, the government, the economy, the system (Jungkunz, 2012: 141). Silence as resistance involves a political intervention that is not conventional and, mainly, that subverts the configuration of discourses and narratives. The resisting silence displays the intention not to tell, not to consent, not to confess, not to answer. This kind of silence is insubordinate and, most often, it is based on practices of deliberate exclusion and silencing (refusing policies, injustices and decisions). In one word, resisting silences are insubordinate in two senses: they highlight defiant and disobedient attitudes that aim to negotiate; and refuse or work around the control of social and political expression.

Silences that refuse and resist are, thus, not attempting to enlarge one's presence in the world: instead, these silences are about turning away a political world, a social life, an identity or a community. They silently propose the individual's own absence. By deploying silent attitudes, individuals maneuver between engagement and disengagement allowing alternative ways to do (and to be in) politics.

In sum, silences that resist are a way to deal with power by gaining (another kind of) power: they do so my refusing to line up to what was supposed to say and to build a silent symbolic statement.

Empowerment

Silence can, likewise, be a form of power: it resists things said negotiation the contours of political life. Silence can, indeed, be a way of unsaying, a refusal to speech and classification. From this perspective, silence is not just related with the powerless but with the powerful: there are silences that empower, silences that are about gaining access to the political, social, economic, etc. "Silences that empower manipulate norms surrounding silence, speech, absence, and presence in order to bring attention to the detrimental consequence of silencing" (Jungkunz, 2012: 136). Those who use silences to empower are focused on the possibility of exclusion. In social and political contexts where speech is fundamental, silence calls attention to the relationships of inequality and to the break-downs. It can emphasize the inadequacies, differences, dissimilarities. In this case, silence is drawing attention to the dysfunctional relationships between subjects.

Silence as empowerment and as a form of navigating and negotiating power relations supposes an active, selective and protective practice. It relieves the individual from the compulsion to answer, to talk, and to self-disclosure.

It is revealing that this same protective dimension of silence is also alluded in the *Discourse of Inequality* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1992). In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau describes nature's silence in the civilized state. According to him, silence does not entail apathy or an unreflective man. It is, on the contrary, a shield to the over-exposure of the self. Silence is the very state of nature: a nature without speech, therefore without its intrinsic oppressions.

Silence can mean different things to politics.

As we have pointed out, it can assume a coercive dimension when it is imposed over marginalized groups, but it can also assume a form of resistance

and empowerment when it condenses self-assertion and a form to negotiate relations of power.

So, we are starting to see that silences can be an important aspect of political life. But in order to examine the potentialities of silences to political communication, we should, first, consider the ways democratic theory has dealt with it.

The next section discusses how silence has been depreciatively measured by democratic theories. This is the first step to fully evaluate the importance of silence in political communication.

Silence and Democracy –the vocal ideal and silent citizenship

Silence can be ostensibly anti-democratic.

We say those who remain silent are consenting something (portuguese adage that can be translated in English as "silence gives consent") (Cardoso e Cunha, 2005). This idea is already present in Plato's *Cratylus* when he links silence into consent. "And since we grant this, Cratylus—for I take it that your silence gives consent (...) (435 b). Silence is treated as a way to cope or accept power. Defying the political tirant means to stop being silence and denounce his tyranny. Martin Luther King also says something similar. In a sermon in Selma, Alabama, on 8 March 1965, the day after "Bloody Sunday," on which civil rights protesters were attacked and beaten by police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he said: "A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.". This line was popularized on social media as the following quote: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter". Once more, we see this approach that equals silence into consent.

The hypothesis that silence can be a threat to democracy come from the fact citizens are less likely to vote (Franklin, 2004) but more important, from the fact they are less capable of influencing the agenda of politicians and policymakers (Bartels, 2008). Coleman (2013) and Urbinati (2014) both

draw attention to the growing deficits of voice in political decision-making. Citizens seldom manage to have their voices heard by governments. Developing this, Gray (2015: 474), for example, posits that contemporary democratic citizenship is becoming a *silent citizenship*.

Traditionally, silence has, at least in part, been related to citizen disengagement and disempowerment. At first light, the growth of silence is linked to deficits in democracy. "Silence is primarily interpreted to be a private withdrawal from politics that contrasts with voice (...)- a normative vacuum in which citizens are excluded from democratic political decision-making through lack of resources, opportunities, information or articulateness" (Gray, 2015: 475). Democratic theory usually characterizes silent citizens as those who are apathic, inattentive or negligent on public affairs. Silence has been, thus, associated with indifference and detachment from public debate or deliberation, and it is not unfrequently related to an inability or willingness to take action (electoral abstention).

Silence is understood as passivity (the realm of the powerless) while action and speech are the dominant, and sometimes exclusive, modes of political praxis. To be more exact, traditional democratic theory identifies silence with lack of speech. And since the creation and maintenance of community depends on communication, silence is viewed as being incompatible with community and society in general. Underlying this perspective, here is "a model which conflates community, communication and speech. Silence, whether that of a subaltern group or as perpetuated by institutional mechanisms, represents a threat to that nexus, and by extension a threat to politics" (Ferguson, 2004: 5).

Habermas' theory of the bourgeois public sphere is a great example of a social theory envisaging silence as a shortcoming of political communication and, more, as a threat to politics. Politics would only be attainable on public domain by the exercise of collective reasoning and critical voicing that could influence political affairs. The public sphere was a place where private individuals articulate, voice and critically discuss public matters. It served as a

counterweight to political authority as individuals gathered in face-to-face meetings (coffee houses, theaters, public squares, etc) as well as through media such as letters and books. To Habermas, the vibrant and influent activity of the public sphere was linked, not to silence, but with the strict and rigorous individual voicing and participation (Habermas, 1991).

Moreover, Habermas' later approach to contend social power and equality in contemporary times, took him to suggest a Universal Pragmatics and an "ideal speech situation". In fact, similarly to his theory of the public sphere, Habermas finds in the verbal encounter between individuals the solution to modern dilemmas. In *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984; 1987), and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996) he resorts to discourse theory and speech act theory to anchor core concepts like "communicative reason" or "communicative action". Habermas is, then, reducing freedom and justice to the availability of speech (Ferguson, 2004: 6). His normative theory of communicative action is crucially based on a view on democracy that depends fundamentally on speech, language and communication. Underlying Habermas' social and political thought, there is this assumption equating silence to a menace. His approach grounds community, understanding and justice into a normative view on language. Silence is positioned at the side of inequality and oppression. If, to him, based on Universal Pragmatics and Communicative Action, community is all about language and speech, it is no surprise that silence is a prelude to indifference, lack, and social fragmentation.

Democratic theory had always the tendency to put words and speech as the only possible mode to communication. This view that puts silence as a political menace is deeply ingrained, popular and widespread. Voice is the metaphor to public argument realizing the deepest aspirations of democratic citizenship. The vocal ideal of democratic citizenship (Gray, 2015: 476) entails a conception where having a voice and standing for it is the most elevated means of empowering those affected by political decisions. Dahl is very clear on this when he comments: "Silent citizens may be perfect

subjects for an authoritarian ruler; they would be a disaster for democracy" (Dahl, 1998: 97).

This attests how heavily democracy depends on political communication outside formal, governmental structures. But, most distinctively, it attests how political communication is averse to silences. Indeed, silence is being interpreted as an absence or failure of voice in politics, devoid of intent, content or meaning. According to this widespread perspective, "silent citizens are politically undemanding: those who are silent either prefer that democratic politics operate in the background of their lives, or are incapable of meaningfully contributing to collective decision-making processes. Silent citizens are also politically unorganized: mostly because those who are silent disproportionately lack access to politically relevant resources for voice, including time, money and education and civic skills" (Gray, 2015: 477-478). Because of these attributes, silent citizenship is thought as having negative effects on public opinion decreasing the diversity of voices being heard (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). In the same way, silence tends to tilt representation towards particular interests (the already wealthy and powerful) in detriment of those with less influence who tend to follow particular voices and, consequently, adopt conservative positions.

This dysphoric description is certainly well justified in some cases. But, at the same time, this vocal ideal of democratic citizenship (Gray, 2015: 476) can sometimes be overgeneralized within contemporary political theory.

Because the assumption the links democracy and political communication to voice and public speaking is such speech-centric, the domain of silent citizenship has remained a field underexplored. Given that communication is immediately associated with speech, and that democratic citizenship has a vocal scope, studies on political communication tended to forget silence and its conceptualization. We agree with Gray when he advocates that "the vocal ideal fails to provide the tools we need to account for other motivations citizens might have for remaining silent, besides disengagement and disempowerment" (Gray, 2015: 483).

If we are to ponder on the significance of silence in political communication, we should broaden the specter of possible meanings and distinguish potential dimensions of silence beyond lack, absence, failure or apathy. A comprehensive and relevant way to look to "the silence debate" in political communication would not exclusively consider democracy from be speech-centric point of view. Instead, it would consider *extrinsic* forms of silencing (distortions, ruptures, disbelief, disregard) but also *intrinsic* forms of silencing (that ways silencing is an act of communication and a central element of political discourses and negotiations of power). In other words, we are interested in highlighting positive, constructive and euphoric aspects of silence in political communication by focusing, not on the powerlessness side but on the empowerment side. By separating *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* forms of silence, we are differentiating between silence as imposition and silence as a choice; between silence that disempowers and silence that empowers. While stressing *intrinsic* forms of silence, we open space to reflect the communicative dimension contained in it. In effect, *we should include in our exam how citizens communicate preferences and judgments* in decision-making processes and acknowledge that the choice of silence, in itself conveys little information about the preferences and political attitudes of individuals. The vocal ideal of democracy has, first of all, interpreted that silence as expressing a negative political attitude. However, that perspective does not necessarily register silence as a communicative act. It comprehends silence as denial or negligence without posing the possibility that silence, instead of evidencing lack of motivation, could, in fact, configure *a certain kind of political motivation.*

Beyond this vocal, speech-centric, rhetorical idea of democracy and political communication, we encounter a crucial difference: the silence that is suffered due to lack of opportunities and capacities is qualitatively quite dissimilar from the silence that, despite the existence of healthy and numerous opportunities, opt, decide and choose to abstain from voice. *This is a silence of a radically new type: a communicative silence.*

Treating silence as a communicative function of political communication opens new possibilities for political theory to identify occurrences in which silence is not a symptom of deficit but, possibly, a symptom of enrichment and transformations of citizens' political participation.

Not all the silence is necessarily coercion or lack. A model of communicative silence can indeed anticipate special situations where the refusal to speak manifests a communicative power to state certain political positions in developed, complex, 21th century democracies. By contemplating a communicative model of silence in political communication, democratic theory can go beyond its speech-centric matrix and comprise an expansive understanding of political expression. Silences can, then becomes, another possibility to disclosure choices, affirm political commitments and reinforce political messages (such as distrust).

So, in the next section, we account silence as a distinct mode of communication separate from speech. By rejecting institutionalized pratices of power, communicative silence is not a detached or aloof gesture but possibly an exquisite and unexpected form of claiming a (outsider) role on political processes. Some types of silence, can, in this way, play a positive role in democracy.

Communicative Silences

In this section we suggest a renewed position on silent citizenship endorsing silence as a communicative event. Because traditional democratic theory identifies silences with absent voices or failed communication, it misses the motivations for political mutism or verbal discretion. They tend, so, to mix active and politically engaged attitudes with those that are not.

Some degrees of silent citizenship have been already discerned and they vary according to their level of engagement. Gray (2015: 475) differentiates between awareness, ambivalence, aversion and disaffection.

We will not dwell in the mapping of this attitudes behind silent citizenship. In alternative, we prefer to reflect on the general properties and advantag-

es of considering silence as a positive outcome on political communication. Once silence is recognized as having a communicative intent - like speech - we can surpass those conceptions that see silence as an effect of inequality and asymmetric distributions of power. In contrast to this view, *the hypothesis of communicative silence supposes that silence is a form of practicing power*. As such, silent does not directly mean exclusion or even seclusion. Perhaps, it is because silence can empower that we witness vulnerable citizens (such as gender or ethnic minorities) doing such an intensive and exhaustive use of silence (ex: the "Silent Sentinels"). It is at the moment they are vulnerable that citizens are empowered to use silence as a positive stance to wordlessly make their points they may start to feel they do have an impact (however small it may be) on public decisions and collective debates. It is true that they may not deliberate in the conventional sense; yet, silence does not unavoidably mean that they are not interested to discreetly make a point. Speaking is crucial in political communication but the growing prominence of silence and its variations (vigils, voting abstention, refuse to participate in political polls, silent protests, pacific occupation of public space, parades, marches, etc) should make us turn our heads into the realms of nonverbal communication.

We call "Communicative Silences" to those wordless political behaviors that express something with a clear objective and intentionality even if without verbal messages. They encompass the political attitudes that betray a given position but that are expressed by silent or wordless forms of communication. Without entering the Palo Alto school (Watzlawick *et ali*., 1967) discussion about the intentionality of communication and its concomitant adage "One cannot not to communicate", we put communicative silences as dependent of intentionality.Therefore, a silence has a communicative charge when he is intentionality used to convey certain meanings or when that silence is perceived to contain or evoke, implicitly or explicitly, an intention with communicative meaningful implications. For instance, Johannesen (1974) argues that in meaningful silences we have to assume that some thought processes are involved. And Jaworski (1993) signals that silence occurs and

is perceived as significant and meaningful when talk is expected and is intentionally withheld. This possibility of meaningful silences is just now being extended to the domains of political communication, but it is well known for many years in interpersonal communication. Wong (2003), for example, has concluded that, despite cultural differences, different groups of people demonstrate experience of using silence to convey feelings and thoughts. Wong talks, then, of the use of silence as a means of communication.

Silence becomes communication when it is intentionally manifested. Communicative silences include intentions or goals and involve a manifestation of purpose. Communicative silences are, then, reflective activities; but, instead of being symbolically express through language and speech, they produce a non-verbal discourse on political issues. There is still a "voice", but this is a paradoxical voice: one that cannot he hear and, yet, it screams a political position.

We are, then, dealing with a metaphorical sense of "voice" when we say that communicative silences produce an unhear, wordless, mute voice. These kinds of silences lie beneath nonlinguistic elements and are, mostly, inferred. We are taking into political communication the intentional uses of silences to convey meaningful messages that people naturally use. What is interesting in silence is that it is socially constructed (St. Clair, 2003: 87). In every culture is exists with communicative implications. Although it may be an accepted behavior (as in Japan) or a behavior to avoid (most western societies), silences possess an extensive pattern of social and cultural use. Wainberg (2017) distinguishes between 15 types of silence including "political silence", "rhetorical silence" and "sacred silence".

By acknowledging this variety, we are in conditions to accept communicative silence as a way that citizens have potentially at their disposal to transmit meaningful, even if subtle, political messages. It should be noted that by "political communication" we understand a broad field concerned with the spreading of information and its influences on politics, policy makers, the news media and citizens. It encompasses, among many other things, po-

litical campaigns, media debates, social media posts or formal speeches. Bringing silence into political communication studies underscores how silence can be an affirmative, planned and deliberated attitude to citizenship and democracy. We are not here dealing with silence in the sense as a rhetorical political strategy (Anderson, 2003). Nor are we referring exclusively to those particular silences who violates expectations that are held by the public as in cases of media blackouts, refusals to be give a public speech or denials to answer journalist's questions. This type of silence is situated on a micro-level of political communication (ex: the president refusing to speak on a pressing issue) (Brummet, 1980).

Instead, in this paper, we situate silence at the macro-level of political communication: silence not as a singular, individual, specific act but silence as some collective endeavors whose effects are projected as part of the decision-making process. So, we look to silences not so much as rhetorical maneuvers, used by politicians, to give emphasis, authority or denying importance and legitimacy; nor we focus on media coverage of silences affecting the public's perception of a political issue. Communicative silences include, in contrast, all the inferred meanings given by the different political actors to silence as an intentional and active expression of behavior.

Political communication may take multiple forms in today's democracies: by accenting silences as communicative constructs we give it a wider understanding. By on hand, we have direct vocal, rhetorical, linguistic expressions of political choice and decision-making (such as deliberations, campaigns, petitions, votes, political crowds, speeches and commentaries).

By other hand, by taking into account silence, we have now at our disposal nonlinguistic forms of communication. In this sense, communicative silences are indirect expressions of political choice that must be interpreted and inferred. So, silence is a kind of supplement to voice: not an unavoidable replacement but a possible alternative to the clarification of political positions. Seen as empowerment, communicative silences stress, not exclusion (marginalized groups to whom silence is compulsory) but inclusion. Inclusion

because those social groups found alternative ways to make themselves wordlessly "heard". Inclusion because the symbolic resources so be silent are incomparably more accessible and abundant that those required to publicly speak. In communicative silences, we have political actors who freely choose to become (temporarily or permanently) silent in order to prove a point that does not require linguistic resources, opportunity or identity means. There is no vocabulary to attend, nor intellectual abilities to critically examine reasons.

By not speaking, citizens are still acting because that particular silence becomes a communicative form to express a perspective over an issue. Of course, we must condescend: what is expressed through silence has not the richness, meaning or complexity of verbal signs that are propositional. Still, silence exists in a given social and political context that, along with pragmatics, can orient the interpretations and inferences that silence expresses including beliefs, expectations and projections. Most of the political communication studies dealt with political actors who voiced, spoke and critically reasoned. By incorporating communicative silences, political communication can now deal with silent actors that despite their subtlety could still be engaged in some form of politics. The major difference to other studies is that communicative silences are understood, not to entail a passive or negligent attitude towards politics but an active, although indirect and subtle, attitude to political issues.

Communicative silences could be dynamic, deliberate choices whose importance to political communication lies precisely in the fact that they may reveal (at some degree) citizens' dispositions, judgements and leanings. So, according to these assumptions, political communication can and should pay attention to the role of silences, and how they are used by citizens and political actors to politically communicate. These silences we call "communicative" are behaviors that ostensibly express a range of possible political meanings. So, it is not just voice that empowers political actors (as in traditional theories of democracy). Maybe silence has political significance beyond neglect and apathy. Silence can, in reality, be interpreted as an at-

tempt to call attention to the necessity of mutual agreement on sensitive or complex issues. For instance, media blackout, also referred to as a *silenzio stampa* (literally press silence), refers to the specific situation a football club or national team refuse to give interviews or in any other way cooperate with the press, often during important tournaments often due discontentment. They may feel that the media does not depict the club and their activities in an objective way and their vote to silence is a conspicuously form to express that very dissatisfaction.

Implications of Communicative Silences to Abstention, Political Representation and Deliberation

To conclude these necessarily brief comments on communicative silence, we want to refer to three theoretical implications. These assumptions are logic consequences that follow the theoretical framework we have put forth. They lack empirical confirmation. Still, they may take us to review our own perspective on silence citizenship and political silences.

First of all, by conceiving positively silence (as empowerment) we may have a renew point of view into a dominant phenomenon on elections: abstention.

We generally conceive abstention and silence as being related. Silence is here a symptom of unresponsiveness and lack of interest. But, what if, we put communicative silences in equation? If silences can be forms of expression, abstention must be considered at a new light. They would not be just effects of negligence or lack of interest but could also be treated as an alternative form to discipline political representatives. Abstention would, then, be a form of communicative silence where citizens passively answer to political agendas. Abstention could, thus, be an ostensive attitude of disfavor. It would mean discordance and disappointment. By looking into abstention (and its silent configuration) from a communicative standpoint, abstention would contain a range of possible meanings that contemporary politics could use to better get into citizens.

In this way, silence generates a great deal of information and enlightenment to the political process. Communicative silences assume a point of reference from which political actors can infer evaluative assessments that may direct, orient or influence their decisions.

Not all silences are communicative. But that does not mean that all political silences reveal oppression or lack of interest. To political communication and democracy theory research, the true question is not to pass over silences as minor faults of citizenship and politics. It is to take those same questions to a level where silences could be understood by what they are and not what the vocal ideal of democracy reasons they are.

Second, and following up the abstention topic, communicative silences raise new doubts about political representation.

Because voting assumes such a central place in the communication between politicians and citizens, when these fail to show on the polls and do not use their right to vote, we immediately tend to think of inattention, inaction or apathy. But if - at least some - silences empower citizens, the act of not voting could be viewed as a political attitude. Of course, it is difficult to discern what is the meaning of that: disagreement with political program; lack of identification with the candidate; democracy distrust?

However difficult to apprehend that should not deter us to identify silences with certain kinds of motivations associated with political representation. It may point to a myriad of different things (maybe citizens think they should be more often heard...). Indeed, it could manifest a form of political expression that has nothing to do with voicing and speech but, still, it indicates a certain kind of preoccupations (and contestations).

Third, communicative silences can also have important implications in consensus and deliberation.

Silences are key indicators of possible opposition or assent. Could not silent disagreement be a form of deliberation, in the sense of reflection or cogitation? Deliberative democracy is based on discursive intercourse. But, what

if silences could be also be a form of non-verbal discursive practice? After all, silences can be eloquent. And to be eloquent we need a discourse. So, by contemplating the hypothesis of communicative silences, we could displace deliberation and consensus to other domains that are not exclusively verbal or linguistic.

Once more, there are too many meaning nuances on silences. But that does not stop us to consider that some communicative silences function as alternative (minor or humble) forms of political deliberation. Silence may demonstrate genuine consensus (in a plenary voting, for example), but it can also evidence a conflict (ex: when political actors stop giving press conferences). In fact, when a consensus is reached and is putted into voting, political actors can vote their opposition and disagreement; or they can silently abstain to vote in a (not spoken) manifestation of dissent.

There are plenty of motivations to silence.

Our task here was not to exhaustively enumerate them nor proposing a typology. All we want was to consider silences as power mechanisms. We have briefly described communicative silences as positive and active expressions of political attitudes. The implication of silences as communication on abstention, political representation and deliberation were indicated and, hopefully, they can open new perspectives on the study of the meanings, intentions and purposes of the political use of silence on communicative processes.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper silence has been approached, not as a deficit, impairment or pathology of political communication but as an element we should pay attention since silence can also be a form of power in social relations.

This does not mean either that silence, even if it can have a communicative injunction, is considered as a virtuosity. Communicative silences have potential to impact political communication at macro-level but silence is not necessary a good thing. What we wanted to discuss was the singular possi-

bilities that transform silence, from a parasite of communication into a form of political communication.

To remain silent does not necessarily point to subordination and (imposed) lack of speech. It is also a right that may impose severe limitations to political affairs, it also a way to influence and (paradoxically) intervene. The effect of silence empowerment in democracies has been already suggested (Gray, 2015: 487). We took this possibility and claimed that some silences are intentional, have a political message and, as such, present a communicative dimension.

By talking in "communicative silences" in political communication we are not suggesting that speech-centric, vocal, rhetorical democratic theories are wrong. When we refer to "communicative silences" we do not, of course, criticize all the speech tradition of politics

We acknowledge those works and even say speech is central and essential to political communication. Speech enable a full reflection on matters and enables citizens to get together and recognize their identities. To Arendt (1958), for example, action and speech disclose to the world individuals own identities. They can reveal themselves as "who" they are, instead of "what" they are. Through speech we commit with ourselves and with others, gain refreshed perspectives and articulate our needs.

Instead, what we argued was that speech is not the exclusive mode of political communication. In contrast with democratic theories that put speech above other forms of non-verbal communication, we tried to show how silence deserves to be studied according to a positive role in political communication. It takes two individuals to enact a silence as silence affect human interaction. Silence may be, in some cases, just another way to navigate asymmetrical symbolic resources or unequal influence and knowledge. By emphasizing communicate silences, we open to silence multiple meanings.

So, silence is not necessarily an obstacle to democracy nor a deficit of political communication. It is also not necessarily a virtue.

To sum up, we have put silence as a potential communicative element that is relevant to democracy since it can influence political *praxis*. We are adopting an extended perspective on silence that separates its disempowering and empowering facets. Is seems silence can be used in positive ways and in alternative (not replacing it) to speech. There are claims that demand to be heard. But this public voice is predominantly produced in silent, without words or speech. It is other strategy: maybe a discursive strategy (cf. Foucault, 1990: 27) even if not a linguist, speech-centric discourse.

One of the most important things political communication research could do is to look into these discursive pauses and mutisms and trace a theory on its implications to political processes.

Possibly, it could be asked: why citizens turn into silent forms of political participation and why they have chosen those instead of more direct, traditional form of engagement? Why some citizens or political groups may think it is costlier and more dangerous to overtly speak? How silence strategies differ in its communicative intents? And is silent empirically effective or is it just a theoretical hypothesis? Do silence affect the perception of citizens about political actors in comparison with those that prefer verbal revindications?

There are many questions to ask that demand more hypothesis, observations and operationalizations. Only more studies could fully answer these questions. In this paper, we take a more modest goal and tried to ponder on the silent dimension of political communication.

Silence is a complex subject. But, its prominence in 21th century politics pushes contemporary researches to evaluate its limits and functions. The biased view on speech and silence must not prevent us to study the political implication of silence (and in particular its communicative forms).

As Jungkunz remembers: “By illuminating the promise of silences as participatory resources in our efforts to struggle for democracy as a way of life, we bring within our disciplinary field of vision practices and subjects who

have too often been placed at the margins of political science. Silences that empower, protest, resist, and refuse offer citizens, consumers, workers, friends, lovers, and thinkers ways to negotiate power dynamics beyond a one-dimensional emphasis upon speech" (Jungkunz, 2012: 149).

Silences can be drastically insistent as they become insubordinate, interpellators, or affirmative. It is this very complexity that cannot be exempted of a careful analysis as a tool to fight for democratic change. We must take into account silences and their inclusive ways to communicate different claims.

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FAHRENHEIT 451: THE TEMPERATURE AT WHICH DEMOCRACY BURNS

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Abstract: Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* provides us with a vivid picture of a future where books are outlawed and a particularly ubiquitous mass media industry dominates individuals' existence. The book, first published in 1953, makes some startling predictions about our contemporary existence, ranging from the more technical – such as flat-screen TVs, earbud headphones, and targeted advertising – to the more politico-philosophical. Regarding the latter, we intend to take a multidisciplinary approach to two key themes developed throughout *Fahrenheit*, which also represent especially pernicious pathologies of contemporary democratic societies: i) our constant exposure to – and dependence on – certain manifestations of technology (mass media, technological gadgets, social networking sites/apps, etc.), and ii) our increasing concessions to a degenerate form of political correctness which utterly rejects the prospect of potentially offending any particular interest group or minority.

By using *Fahrenheit 451* as a sort of lens through which one might cast a critical view at contemporary democratic societies, we intend to illuminate both said pathologies and their danger to a society where, on the one hand, a multiplicity of technological stimuli demand our constant attention and where facts have been displaced by beliefs, and, on the other, the increasing establishment of "not being liable to offend any such group in any way" as the main criterion for literature, art, journalism, and intellectual production in general

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threatens to render the latter completely sanitized – and thus utterly useless. That this poses a serious threat to the essence of democracy goes without saying, and certainly warrants further discussion.

Keywords: Democracy; Mass media; Social networks; Political correctness

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* provides us with a vivid picture of a future where books are outlawed and a particularly ubiquitous mass media industry dominates individuals' existence. The book, which was first published in 1953, makes some very interesting and noteworthy predictions about our contemporary existence. In the technological realm, for instance, Bradbury depicts devices which can be likened – in both function and appearance – to things such as modern flat-screen TVs, earbud headphones, and targeted advertising. His predictions regarding our sociopolitical reality, however, are perhaps even more startlingly accurate and thought-provoking. Throughout this paper, we intend to focus on two such predictions, which not only represent two of the key themes developed throughout *Fahrenheit 451*, but also two especially pernicious pathologies of contemporary democratic societies: i) our constant exposure to – and dependence on – certain manifestations of technology (mass media, technological gadgets, social networking sites/apps, etc.), and ii) our increasing concessions to a degenerate form of political correctness which utterly rejects the prospect of potentially offending any particular interest group or minority. Both issues are undeniably critical towards the continued sustainability of truly democratic societies and yet – particularly in the case of the second one – the amount of controversy they tend to instantly generate have often caused us to shy away from serious discussion about them. Our intention in what follows is precisely to contribute to that much needed discussion, employing Bradbury's novel as a sort of critical lens through which these problems – and their implications – can be more easily perceived.

1. Life in the fast lane: the consequences of ubiquitous technology in everyday life

Fahrenheit 451 begins *in media res* regarding the state of affairs that provides its sociopolitical backdrop, and appears to be deliberately cryptic throughout concerning the reasons behind how the latter came to be – indeed, a significant feature of that state of affairs is precisely the fact that almost no one really knew why or how things came to be how they were, *nor much cared to find out*. Besides the occasional flashes of understanding provided by certain literary crumbles left to excite readers' imaginations, the critical moment of exposition regarding this mystery is provided via the novel's most personalized antagonist, Captain Beatty. The latter, being a veteran and savvy fire chief, is clearly privy to a knowledge of the situation's origin and evolution that few others outside of the political elites shared. It is thus through his voice and intentional torment of the novel's protagonist – Guy Montag – that Bradbury paints a picture of the issues mentioned above, as well as their genealogy.

In illuminating the first of those pathologies, Bradbury starts by depicting a society not only dominated by technology, but where the latter's prowess is geared towards one crucial goal: *entertainment*. In this world where books have been abolished, facts, truth, and critical thinking appear to have followed suit. Movies and television programs have been reduced to mindless and politically innocuous drama; living rooms, covered by interactive walls of picture and sound, are where denizens lose themselves in the daily drama of their virtual "family"; commercials are ubiquitous and target unwary individuals; and even information has been geared towards entertainment.

Underpinning this process, as Bradbury saw it, was a gradual transition from "conventional" media to mass media. As population increased and everyday life accelerated, people no longer had the time – or inclination – for books and all else that could be dismissed as the "high culture" pursuits of snobbish intellectuals. Thus, as Captain Beatty tells us:

> "classics [were] cut to fit 15 minutes radio shows, then cut again to fill a two-minute book column, winding up at last as a ten- or twelve-line dictionary resume. I exaggerate, of course. The dictionaries were for reference. But many were those whose sole knowledge of *Hamlet* [...] was a one-page digest in book that claimed: *now at last you can read all the classics; keep up with your neighbours.*" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 52)

This simplification of culture, now intended to suit not "the cultured" but the mass audience, assured a sort of level playing field where everyone could be equal to their neighbor, a perfectly "democratic" process with all with but one minor problem: that leveling was made at the expense of whatever made cultural production substantial and significant. Alongside this phenomenon, and working almost symbiotically with it, the pace of quotidian life gradually accelerated and became increasingly instantaneous – that is, both focused on the instant as the main time unit around which life is organized, and (consequently) concerned with instant gratification. Understandably, this latter process contributed to deepen the problem; as a result of it, "school is shortened, disciplines relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped. [...] Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 53).

In reading Bradbury's descriptions of these phenomena, it becomes almost impossible not to think about our current debates regarding the growing distaste for substantial literature (for those works considered classics of world literature, for instance) and increasingly shortened attention span of young generations today. Granted, some of that debate may be rightfully dismissed as the customary exaggerated disillusionment of older generations concerning those that follow them, but much of it arises from a legitimate concern regarding the implicit education being imposed upon individuals today by a culture increasingly dominated by expectations of immediacy and instant gratification – towards which the growing technologization of human relations has undoubtedly contributed.

As a whole, however, any situation that seeks to establish the kind of social uniformization mentioned above inevitably faces certain hurdles to overcome in order to become sustainable – from a sociological standpoint – in a modern westernized society. After all, the need to perceive themselves as unique, free, and autonomous has become something of an essential psychological necessity for the post-Enlightenment individuals that constitute the political citizenship of such societies. Thus, a clear need arises for what the famous French philosopher Blaise Pascal termed *divertissements*, provided in a steady and sufficient dose[2]. In the words of Captain Beatty, "life becomes one big pratfall, Montag. Everything bang, boff, and wow! [...] Empty the theaters save for clowns and furnish the rooms with glass walls and pretty colors" (*Idem*).

In the context of the novel, these *divertissements* come from fairly familiar sources: television, movies, broadcasts of sporting events, and so on provide the much needed (and entertaining) distraction from an increasingly dehumanized existence – in a phrase, *panem et circenses*. Translating the situation to our contemporary reality, we might even add a few more to the list, such as smartphones, social networking apps, dating apps, etc. But perhaps the most telling concrete example of this growing need for constant entertainment that seems to have become the hallmark of our time is the gradual progression from information to *infotainment* that we have witnessed in the last two decades or so.

In this regard, an interesting illustration of the phenomenon is provided by the standing of satirical news programs such as *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, and so on. That such programs were rapidly ascending to the level of conventional news programs in terms of viewership and perceived reliability as news sources is something that had been noticed as early as 2004, when a Pew Research Center poll showed

2. Pascal's argument regarding *divertissements* ("diversions" or "distractions", in the English translation) bears a complex relationship with his understanding of human beings' inherent and inescapable unhappiness regarding the human condition, but is perhaps best surmised for our current purposes as follows: "However unhappy we are, if we can be persuaded to take up some distraction we will be perfectly happy for the time being. [...] Without entertainment there is no joy. With it there is no sadness" (Pascal, 1999, p. 48).

that 21% of under-30 years old respondents relied on programs such as *The Daily Show* for political information, while 23% of respondents in the same age group reportedly relied on conventional news programs for the same purpose – a meager 2% gap that clearly shows the perceived equivalence between both kinds of programs among viewers seeking to inform themselves about key political matters.

Perhaps even more revealing is the fact that a 2007 study by Julia Fox, Glory Koloen, and Volkan Sahin was able to employ a content analysis approach to demonstrate that *The Daily Show* (at the time, hosted by Jon Stewart) was roughly the equivalent to the evening news programs of the main television networks in terms of *substantial news content* – a conclusion reached by examining the amount of actual news footage (video and audio) displayed by either type of program. Ultimately, this statistical equivalence was largely attributed to the fact that both adopted an infotainment-based approach to news coverage – a diagnosis which should come as little surprise to any who today cast a critical glance at the programming of television networks such as CNN, which were once renowned for serious journalistic standards and an almost exclusive attention to hard news.

Now, faced with evidence of this kind concerning the viewing habits of politically-involved individuals who ultimately constitute a substantial piece of the electorate, some have chosen to take the optimistic approach, by viewing it as a reassurance that the growing reliance of voters in non-conventional news sources does not necessarily threatens to subvert the democratic process – insofar as the substantial news content of those source seems be (potentially) equal to that of conventional ones. There is, however, also a pessimistic interpretation of the facts at hand that is at least as valid as the former, and which would express dire concern at the fact that the journalistic standards of purportedly "hard news programs" has seemingly *dropped to the level of entertainment shows*.

In the years since 2007, the tendency to rely increasingly on non-conventional news sources has quite evidently only been accentuated by the near om-

nipresence of things like smartphones permanently connected to social networking sites/apps, which cause individuals to be ever immersed in the flow of infotainment, increasingly influenced and sometimes consumed by it. The recent prevalence of the concept of "fake news", which became a journalistic and scholarly hot topic in the wake of Donald Trump's election in 2016 and the role played by social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter in the latter, provides a clear illustration of this – just as the subsequently successful electoral campaigns of Lega Nord/Movimento 5 Stelle in Italy or of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. As a whole, it amounts to a sort of cultural shift in our relationship with (political) news and our expectations regarding the reception of the latter – they must now be "quick and easy", both immediately grasped (synthesized in short slogans/headlines) and instantly engaging (delivered to us via an *entertaining* medium). It is, ultimately, a shift that justifies Bradbury's concerns regarding the serious and evident threat it poses towards the democratic process.

2. Tocqueville 2.0: Tyranny updated for the 21st century

Following his treatment of this first issue, Bradbury turns his attention to the second pathology mentioned above – which, in many ways, is intimately connected with the first – and that can be seen as a cautionary tale regarding what came to be our complicated relationship with the notion of *political correctness*.

Before we delve into that problem, however, let us introduce a brief caveat about the overarching theme of *Fahrenheit 451*: although it has widely been assumed that a book about the burning of books must intend to alert us to the dangers of censorship – and rightly so – *Fahrenheit 451* is not a novel about censorship understood in the traditional manner (something that Bradbury himself confirmed in some of his later interviews). Indeed, *Fahrenheit* is almost unique in the way in which it portrays the roots of censorship as a politically motivated phenomenon. What we mean to say by this is that if one looks at some of the most culturally significant dystopian novels where censorship plays a crucial role – Orwell's 1984, for instance –

one finds that the latter is consistently depicted as an instrument of political and social control, employed by those in positions of power to enforce their agenda and political will. Thus, understood in this fashion, censorship must undeniably be viewed as an attempt at political coercion that proceeds *top--down* – i.e., from the powerful to the masses.

Bradbury's novel, on the other hand, completely inverts this logic and chooses to portray the rise of censorship as *originating in a sort of bottom-up motion*. In *Fahrenheit 451* it is not the government or the powerful that pave the way for the descent into dystopia, but the people. To fully understand what we mean by this, let us once again turn to the words of Captain Beatty, who lays out the genealogy of the novel's status quo to its protagonist:

> "Now, let's take up the minorities in our civilization, shall we? Bigger the population, the more minorities. Don't step on the toes of the dog-lovers, the cat-lovers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons, Baptists, Unitarians, second-generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Texans, Brooklynites, Irishmen, people from Oregon or Mexico. [...] You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred. Ask yourself, what do we want in this country, above all? People want to be happy, isn't that right? Haven't you heard it all your life?" (Bradbury, 2012, pp. 54-6)

From which logically follows:

> "Colored people don't like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don't feel good about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Burn it. Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag. Take your fight outside. Better yet, to the incinerator." (Bradbury, 2012, p. 57)

Thus, at the end of the day, the situation portrayed in *Fahrenheit* "didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God!" (*Idem*, p. 55). An undeniably controversial point, this reference to minority pressure is nevertheless con-

vincingly explained by Bradbury, and thus warrants further discussion. In a multicultural and multifaceted society, the number of minority groups increases almost exponentially. If one establishes "not being liable to offend any such group in any way" as the sole criterion for literature, art, journalism, and intellectual production in general, the former will necessarily see itself censored until it becomes completely sanitized – and thus utterly useless. It is a point that, on the one hand, allows us to fully understand what it meant above by bottom-up censorship – which, unlike top-down censorship, is an almost exclusively democratic kind of pathology, inasmuch as it is born chiefly out of a shared concern for social justice and equality. On the other, it is also a problem which, described as it is in Bradbury's novel, should lead us to consider a very widespread and often heated debate in contemporary societies: the debate about political correctness.

From the very onset, political correctness is a complicated subject, because the term itself has a dubious history and ambiguous meaning. It was perhaps first used in its most literal sense, to represent political views that were "correct" in light of the orthodoxy of a given party or political ideology. Later, it appears to have come to be used in a mostly ironic manner, a way of simultaneously referencing and criticizing that first usage – thus being employed as a colloquial safeguard against overbearing orthodoxy (in the sense of one who sarcastically states "You better be careful with what you're saying; that's not very 'politically correct'"). In the 1980's, however, and particularly after the publication of Allan Bloom's highly influential *The Closing of the American Mind,* political correctness gradually came to represent the excessive relativization/neutralization of sociopolitical ideas and values that Bloom denounced as being increasingly pervasive in the American academia, and which posed a severe threat to the proper civic and general education of students. And although Bloom himself shied away from employing the phrase "political correctness", his book nevertheless saw him touted as a standard-bearer for those who regarded political correctness as representing widespread a process of increasing social and cultural sterilization. Curiously enough, Bloom was a self-confessed proponent of the so-called "Great Books Education", and many of his concerns

regarding American students at the time – namely, the fact that they largely ignored the classic works of world literature, lacking both the taste and the inclination to ever read them – echoed Bradbury's own descriptions of events leading up to his dystopian future.

Tracking the issue of political correctness to present day, we may realize that the latter retains much of its ambiguous nature, often split between representing a legitimate concern and being employed as fuel for conspiratorial ideas intended to inflame certain political sentiments (weaponized in so-called "culture war" of the 20th and 21st centuries). Before we go any further, it is perhaps important to clarify our stance regarding the first of those understandings – that is, the view of political correctness as a legitimate concern, embodied in the perceived necessity to remove inherently and objectively unacceptable expressions and practices in the context of a pluralist and multicultural society. That such an understanding of political correctness holds both political legitimacy and social worth seems, to us, absolutely undeniable – despite whatever discussion might (and certainly will) arise regarding the objective criteria that could be employed to render sound judgment on such matters. It is, however, blatantly obvious that to delve into that issue with any acceptable degree of depth and consequence would entail theoretical and methodological demands far exceeding the scope of the present work. As such, we will choose to focus instead on opposite other side of the equation – precisely, the one that we can connect with both *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Closing of the American Mind* – which has to do with the consequences of a sort of degenerescence of that legitimate form of political correctness, causing the latter to overstep its bounds.

While it may be difficult to define exactly the bounds of what might constitute a "degenerate" or "exacerbated" form of political correctness, one may presently find many instances which are almost intuitively acknowledged as examples of this, examples that all but mimic the concerns voiced by Bradbury in *Fahrenheit 451*. They range from simple things – such as the impropriety of the use of male pronouns when writing in the English language, or of the use of the capitalized "Man" to represent "Humanity"

– to more complex issues, such as the reticence in acknowledging someone's racial and ethnic background (particularly striking are the anecdotal examples of the boxing commentator who will exhaust all other possible distinguishing features before two boxers before employing the most obvious one, or even the case of the flustered American tourist that refers to a black man in Britain as "African-American").

Especially relevant to this discussion on the exacerbation of political correctness is also the rise of a something we might dub a "culture of the offended", that is becoming prevalent in universities and amplified by social networking sites/apps such as Facebook and Twitter. It is a phenomenon that has recently manifested itself in strange and often counter-intuitive – if not outright paradoxical – ways, causing conservative pundits to be barred from speaking at American universities that normally champion free-speech, provoking significant backlash for health professionals who publicly state that being overweight is unhealthy, leading to firings based on seemingly innocuous Facebook posts later deemed "politically unacceptable", etc. And in the journalistic field, there are also those – such as William McGowan (*Coloring the News: How Political Correctness has Corrupted American Journalism*, 2003) – who have expressed concern at how this culture of the offended and exacerbated political correctness may illegitimately skew news coverage, causing reporters to self-censor news stories out of fear of offending some percentage of their audience – and thereby possibly excluding critical points of view.

Alexis de Tocqueville, who presented his critical view of the burgeoning democratic process in the New World in 1835 book *Democracy in America*, famously expressed his concern regarding what he called the "tyranny of the majority", an exclusively democratic phenomenon that he (and John Stuart Mill after him) described as the danger posed by a misguided political majority that behaves despotically towards individuals and minorities, forcibly imposing their will upon the latter. While the situation described by Bradbury and reinforced by the aforementioned degenerate understanding of political correctness does not totally reverse that logic – one cannot right-

fully speak of a "tyranny of the minority" as such – it adds to it a degree of subtlety that might possibly render it even more democratically dangerous than the phenomenon originally identified by Tocqueville: it remains a tyranny of the majority *de facto*, but one which is *de jure* justified and legitimized via a purported concern for the well-being of the minorities; it is, in a sense, a tyranny of a majority of minority interests, reflected in a misguided general will which believes to be following the only available course to preserve such interests. And as Tocqueville and Stuart Mill accurately perceived, this poses a much greater threat to democratic polities; after all, when society itself becomes the tyrant, "it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since [...] it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself" (Stuart Mill, 2008, pp. 8-9).

This diagnosis by Stuart Mill leads us to yet another danger of the degeneration of political correctness, one that might possibly be even more damaging than the direct effects of the latter in itself: the *reaction against it*. Indeed, when individuals who are citizens of a democratic polity feel stifled by what they perceive to be exacerbated form of political correctness, they come to resent the later as representing the heavy-handedness of a societal or institutional repression that borders on censorship. As a general rule, their natural reaction – habituated as they are to the principal notion of individual liberty – is to rebel against this heavy-handedness; in doing so, they will not only reject "exacerbated" political correctness, but political correctness *as a whole* – dismissing both its degenerate and its undeniably necessary dimensions. And if democratic politics has taught us anything in recent years it is precisely the painful fact that when such an outright rejection of political correctness takes place, those who embrace it usually play right into the hands of demagogues and populists who "tell it like it is" and publicly (and proudly) reject the "politically correct orthodoxy"[3].

3. Bear in mind that, virtually in every instance, this fact is not view as a circumstantial aspect of a given candidate/candidacy, but rather as a *key defining feature* of the latter, and his or her platforms; that was the case with Duterte, Orbán, Trump, Salvini, Bolsonaro, etc.

Viewed in this way, it become clear that such an exacerbated political correctness ultimately has an erosive effect on the democratic process; much like the story of the boy who cried wolf, it is important *for the sake of political correctness* – of its legitimate and necessary dimension – that its advocates are able to accurately ascertain which causes are truly worth fighting for, and which ones are not. To espouse all as if the future of the polity hinged on each is not only unreasonable; it is actually *counterproductive*. For with every issue championed by advocates of political correctness that the latter's critics are able to demonstrably and plausibly portray as blatant exaggeration, the general public acceptance to consider truly critical problems in that arena will decrease substantially. By progressing in this fashion, eventually all social issues that can be collected under the epithet of "political correctness" – even those whose social and political importance can hardly be overstated, such as enduring instances of actual racial and gender discrimination (salary inequality comes to mind) – will be liable to be dismissed by a society exhausted by pointless claims of political incorrectness. This, in turn, will open the door for the proliferation of the kind of demagogy mentioned above, increasing permeability to it not only on the part of the kind of voters who would already be more susceptible to political extremism, but also on the part of otherwise politically moderate voters, who have simply lost patience with the demands of "political correctness". Ironically, then, it becomes entirely possible that this new form of tyranny of the majority, disguised as an advocacy for the right of minorities to not be "offended", may in fact ultimately lead us to a tyranny in the classical sense.

At the end of the day, it seems clear that there is certainly a virtuous balance to be sought regarding the issue of political correctness, one which allows us to achieve a situation in which minorities aren't silenced or perpetually targeted by insidious prejudices, but which does not degenerate into a kind of self-censorship, creates new and unwarranted taboos, and ultimately ends up diminishing the quality of our political existence and discourse. The lesson to be learned from *Fahrenheit 451* in this regard is that, if we let ourselves be consumed by the immediacy of our lives and the

plethora of technological *divertissements* of our time, we may very well miss the moment when our lack of attention to crucial phenomena such as the degeneration of political correctness robs us of a truly democratic existence. In the end, after all, one might realize that a tyranny of the *misunderstood needs of the minority* may be just as dangerous to democracy as a tyranny of the majority.

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SCANDOLOGY: VIEWPOINTS, PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND MEDIATED CONSTRUCTION

Hélder Prior

Abstract: The following essay seeks to analyze the media reconstruction and the social representation of the political scandal as a media event. We will examine aspects of the media communication that convert scandal into a media event, that is, into a selected event, framed and constructed by the media. The first part of this research amount to a theorizing effort about political scandal. The empirical illustration will seek to assess the use of linguistic, rhetorical and significant resources inherent to scandal as a media artifact.

Key concepts: Political Scandal; Personalization; Meaning effects.

Introduction

In the last decades the public life has been marked by a succession of political scandals in many liberal democracies, particularly in Brazil with allegations of corruption widely mediatised in the national and international press. It may be possible, in fact, to talk about a culture of political scandal or about a politics of scandal in the contemporary public sphere. The problem of political corruption and its media coverage and its effect on public confidence in the functioning of the political system are often associated with scandal. However, if the political scandal often reveals situations of corruption, abuse and perversion of the exercise of power, in other cases the role of the media in the research, publication, setting, framing and construction of media narratives about the social and political events stands out. These

narratives influence decisively the social representation of the phenomenon in shaping the "public opinion".

We must not forget that the media are a "device" of social construction and, therefore, the media events are a reality in "second hand". Based on crystallizing procedures of experience and using cognitive schemes typical of journalism, the media events adhere to pre-existing narratives formulas that make informative reality be a process of social construction in which routines, typifications, and rhetorical codes typical of the manufacturing process of information intervene. This way, the media scandal does not escape to a construction and configuration logic inherent to symbolic mediation devices. In the narrative machine of the media, the events are mediated by communication schemes that frame, shape, configure, "fable" (Vattimo, 1992) and, in some cases, deform reality, because to scandal is inherent an artefactual logic and of makeup characteristic of the discursive strategies and media interests. There was a *Watergate* that preceded scandals as the *Irangate* or *Monicagate*, in the same way there was a *Mensalão* which preceded the *Paulista Trensalão* or the recent *Petrolão*.

During this process, the journalism evokes rhetorical procedures and structured enunciative strategies at the level of the speech that express certain narrative conventions and professional practices that become visible in the configuration of the media event. Therefore, it is an illusion to think that the media enable us to experience the world as it is, the mimetic experience of reality. Any event reported is mediated and rebuilt by the media schemas and moulds. Thus, reality is for us a mediated reality, (Innerarity, 2010), which refers to observations, symbols and fictions, even if the constructed reality elicits the nostalgia of an "authentic reality". As Luhmann says, "all information relies on categorizations which mark out spaces of possibility within these spaces a selective range is prestructured" (Luhmann, 1996, p. 38).

Therefore, the configuration of the media scandal is not only related to the severity of a transgression or reprehensible behaviour of a political leader,

but essentially depends on the flow, nature, prominence and the resonance of the informative coverage (Entman, 2012; Thompson, 2000; Nyhan, 2014). Otherwise, the media scandal is often configured by the role played by political parties willing to obtain some electoral benefit. Party-political institutions, together with groups of interest and pressure connected to them, often use scandal as a "political weapon". This is what in American politics became known as dirty tricks or negative campaigns. The 2014 Brazilian elections were fertile in this type of strategy, with Dilma Rousseff's opponents, particularly Aécio Neves in the second round, to use the electoral schedule to disseminate messages against corruption at a time when the *Operação Lava Jato* (*Car Wash Operation)* affected, above all, the Workers ' party.

The Anatomy of Political Scandal

The study of political scandal represents a privileged opportunity to understand the interface between the spheres of communication, politics and justice in contemporary liberal democracies. On the other hand, *Scandalogy*[1] will make it possible to uncover the pragmatic, discursive and symbolic dimension, as well as the effects of sense that are carried out in the reconfiguration of scandal as an analytical object. Although it constitutes an extremely current event, the scandal has a secular tradition, moreover proved by the very etymology of the concept derived from the sacred writings. According to the meaning which can be drawn from the *Septuaginta*, the Greek translation of the *Hebrew Old Testament,* the word *skandalon* was used to indicate an "obstacle", "an error falling moment for the weak", or "an occasion of stumbling". In theological meaning, *skandalon* refers, therefore, to a sinful behaviour, a "stumbling stone" that can lead someone to the fall, to the ruin. According to Saint Mark, the scandal is an outrage resulting from an occasion of sin that deserves a "divine punishment". It is "an indignation produced by bad examples", as it can be read in the *Grande Dicionário*

1. Scandology is a subdiscipline of Political Science first proposed by Anthony King in "Sex, Money and Power "(1986). The study of *scandololy* was developed by Andrei S. Markovits and Mark Silverstein in *The Politics of Scandal: Power and Process in Liberal Democracies*, 1988.

da Língua Portuguesa. However, with the emergence of Romance variations during the Middle Age, as the words *scandalum*, "*escandre*", *escandalho*, and *escandêlo*[2], *scandalo* and *escándalo*, the religious meaning ended up eventually by being progressively mitigated and the phenomenon has acquired a meaning far beyond the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Therefore, from a sociological point of view, the scandal can be interpreted as a societal provocation, as the derogation of values socially shared by individuals. In a classic text, originally published in 1954, Eric Dampierre considers that the scandal involves the "existence of values shared by a particular social group and the existence, or the possibility of the existence of an audience" (Dampierre, 1954, p. 330). In accordance with the reading that can be surmised from Dampierre's text, the scandal involves the transgression of certain social, political, religious or moral values or codes, and, on the other hand, the transgression publicizing and the existence of a public that recognizes it, that feels offended by it and that publicly expresses its indignation or disapproval in the public sphere. This way, the scandal implies the existence of a transgression that, when individuals who are not directly involved in this transgression, when it is publicised know it, it creates feelings of disapproval, it generates the manifestation a certain accusatory and simultaneously moralising speech. It is for this reason that from the moment we witnessed the publicizing of a transgression, the scandal associates illocutionary and perlocutionary values, to the extent that it happens when it is enunciated and by the fact that it is enunciated, awakening effects of disapproval or widespread indignation. In a way, it is about speech turned into action and an action turned into speech that highlights a certain *performative character*. Through the movement of speech acts, the "occasion of stumbling" becomes public, that is, it offers itself to the meanings and raises a specific reaction. Besides, as Molière stresses: "it is the public scandal that offends; to sin in secret is not to sin at all".

2. In the *General Chronicle of Spain* there are records of the use of the Portuguese words "escandalho" and "escandêlo", in the 13th and 15th Century, respectively. Cf. *Dicionário Etimológico da Língua Portuguesa*, Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1995, p. 439.

In this sense and as the playwright himself recognizes, without the transgression publicizing, there simply cannot be a scandal. That is why that authors as Apostolides and Williams suggest that "the scandal must be understood as the transgression publicizing of a social norm" (2004, p. 3), emphasizing the visibility and publicity value to understand the phenomenon. So, we know that the public sphere today is guided by the visibility and transparency principles claimed by the Enlightenment philosophy that has incorporated the publicity principle in the democratic political theory, in opposition to the secret /havens and *arcane rei publicae* characteristic of the traditional doctrine of the State reason. "Everything must be shown, exposed and enlightened", declare Diderot and D'Alembert in *Encyclopédie* (Starobinsky, 1979, p. 304). And, as it is known, it was the illustration spirit that allowed the establishment of a kind of tribune, the press, according to which "it is difficult to hide anything and it is impossible to diminish", as stressed by the Marquis of Condorcet, considered as the last of the illuminated (Condorcet, 1970, p. 117).

Therefore, the principles of transparency and visibility in the political field erected as a mainstay of the liberal democracies, as something "good and fair", opposed to the closed and secret policy of cabinet specific of the monarchical absolutism (Cf. Schmitt, 2008, p. 80). Therefore, if the scandal has become a prominent feature of the social and political life today, such cannot be dissociated from the demand for the transparency principle of the government acts. That is why that authors as Markovits and Silverstein consider that scandals can only emerge in liberal democracies (1988, p. 5), precisely because these grants extreme importance to the visibility of the political power given, in large part, by institutional or parliamentary mechanisms of control, and by politics environment monitoring done by free and independent media. "Fundamentally, we believe that political scandals can only occur in liberal democracies. In no other political arrangement is the separation of the public and private realms so essential to the vitality of the political system" (Markovits & Silverstein, 1988, p. 5). As Theodore Lowi assures "since the public exposure is a crucial element of the political scandal,

we can say, as if it was a theorem, that the society will have little or no scandals if there is no of institutionalised means of exposure" (Lowi, 1988, p. 10).

On the other hand, we know that the media are always ready to "disqualify" or discredit the political sphere, pointing out their possible dysfunctions and denouncing their abuses or deviations before the public opinion. Actually, the *watchdog* role still remains as one of the *ethos* characteristic values of the journalistic profession, but if the supervising and vigilant approach of the press before the political sphere helps to explain, in part, the profusion of political scandals, we must not forget that the scandal "adds drama" to journalistic stories and therefore it attracts the public attention. "The scandal attracts the attention, it offers readers and audiences to the *media* and therefore it helps them to achieve economic gains" (Dagnes, 2011, pp. 4-5).

Thus, and once that political scandal does not happen spontaneously, it is essential that the transgression of the prescriptive procedures that governing the exercise of political power gets the attention of media organizations that, in order to convert the phenomenon into something that can be understood by the public, configure the event in a media narrative that gains plots and subplots as the scandal develops and unfolds. By converting itself in a *media event*, the political scandal acquires a configuration marked by the particularities of the media forms of communication. As Thompson suggests: "The scandal develops, literally, in the media; and the professional activities and the media organisations play a crucial role with its practices and specific working rhythms," (Thompson, 2000, p. 75). Many times, the political scandal is a complex event that unfolds on primary and secondary plots. The research and publication of the initial transgressions that are at the origin of the outbreak of a scandal can lead to revelation and consequent media exploitation of "second order transgressions" which, in some cases, keep a tangential or superficial relationship with initial transgressions, giving origin to sub-scandals or larger scandals that can even eclipse, especially from the media point of view, the "first order" transgressions (Thompson, 2000, p. 25).

In spite of this, it is reductive to consider that the scandal depends exclusively on the existence of an infringement committed by a political leader and the necessary public response of indignation. The scandal conformation in the public sphere is decisively marked by the news about the event and the political elites' role in the establishment of the media agenda. Indeed, we must consider the existence of strategic actors and networks members and political elites that contribute to promote or, on the other hand, to silence scandals. That's why, according to Robert Entman (2012), political scandal denotes, therefore, individual transgressions committed by presidents or candidates to public offices that are publicised by the *media* as a serious problem to the political sphere, a problem that must be investigated and, somehow, remedied (Entman, 2012).

Thereby, to label an event as a political scandal, we should take into account three aspects in particular: the media coverage duration; the coverage prominence and its resonance. The coverage duration is a good indicator about the scandal penetration in public awareness and in the production of feedback and responses from political actors and journalists. Otherwise, the event should be visible and prominent in the headlines, in editorial texts, on television programmes of information and political comment. The scandal will not be able to hatch without the necessary "media amplification" and without the information that works as a "game of mirrors". Finally, the scandal should be framed as such, that is, through a language with a strong symbolic and liturgical meaning, using cultural and moral expressions, images that connote involved individuals as guilty or responsible for behaviours ethically reprehensible that cause a certain poverty and depletion of politics. At the bottom, the event should be framed with a moralising speech on the part of the media, a speech that will strengthen the norms and the values violated meanwhile, contributing to societal homeostasis broken in the meantime. Controlling the media coverage duration, prominence and resonance, the organic agents of the media system, the so-called *gatekeepers*, as well as political elites and pressure groups that influence these agents, contribute to emphasise, mediatise and increase the scandal impact

or, on the other hand, to silence, block or minimise the consequences of a political scandal through certain editorial and strategic interests inherent to the *media* groups.

This way, we can argue that the media scandal potential is not only related to the transgression severity or to the reprehensible behaviour of the political leader, but depends essentially on the context created by the news flow published on the subject and by the political elites and political parties role before this behaviour. About this, Brendan Nyhan identifies two independent variables of the transgression which are particularly important in the creation of an environment favourable to the media scandal development: the image that opposition parties have about the involved political leader and the news publication about other issues that end up diverting attention from the event (Nyhan, 2014, p. 439-440).

In fact, media coverage is the barometer that indicates the existence (or absence) of a given political scandal (Waisbord, 2004, p. 1079) and our perspective is that the scandal is the result of a co-construction process which involves the press, political leaders, pressure groups, police and judicial authorities, media elites and opposition parties, that have always something to gain by using scandal as a political weapon. When these entities promote an allegation about a deviant behaviour, political scandal tends to hatch. Indeed, the political scandal can be interpreted as a socially constructed process that emerges when political leaders' public or private behaviour is interpreted, by the press, by the political sphere, by the judicial authorities and by the public opinion as a behaviour that offends moral, social or institutional norms and hence should be sanctioned or condemned. Our view is that, in order to organize the inherent complexity of the phenomenon, the communicational devices of symbolic mediation insert the scandal in the order of discursive facts, *selecting*, *cutting out*, *framing*, *shaping* and *disseminating* the events that are the basis of a phenomenon that bursts in the public sphere. It is at this point that the linguistic devices specific of the *media* field operate an event reconfiguration or re-figuration, appropriating

the event to convert it into a media object that can be, independently of its complexity, easily interpreted by the reader at the moment of its reception.

The pragmatic nature of media scandals

Analysing the political scandal configuration operated by the journalism field, we realise that, in most cases, scandals are narratives that are developing and unfolding in episodes in the media as hypothetical transgressions are known, as the *dramatis personae* are identified and positioned and, in the case of particularly complex scandals, as new revelations or new reports are discovered, the so-called "second-order transgressions" (Thompson , 2001), that cause the original scandal become other scandals or sub-scandals. As it is known, the narrative machine of the *media device of information* gives enunciative marks to the events and the scandal configuration in the media does not escape the logic of framework, configuration and reconfiguration inherent to symbolic mediation devices.

Indeed, the scandal develops itself, literally, in the media by a *mise en récit* process, "tessitura of intrigue", that is, through the succession and framing of the events and actions performed by journalistic characters, transforming the phenomenon into an intelligible "story", into a story seized and experienced by the receiver. This means that the narrator organizes facts and events, or pseudo-facts or pseudo-events, with the aim of building a meaningful totality, and therefore, creating sense. It is the narrativity that orders the scattered events of the world of life that determines their connections, linking heterogeneous events and elements. As Paul Ricoeur notes on *Temps et Récit*, "the issues "who", "what", "how", "why" and others are already contained in the narrative intelligence" (1985, p. 35) and, in this way, the events understanding and explanation is done through narrativity. Therefore, it is the narrator-journalist's competence to organize the story background, to contextualise the transgression, to position individuals who find themselves at reports epicentre, recompose the seriality, the episodes, the sequences of the scandal, bringing closer, naturally, the media reconstruction of the phenomenon to reality, to the *absent referent*.

The journalistic text is a linguistic recreation of the events and the media scandal, for being a disruptive and complex event with a temporal structure which can be quite long, follows a structural organisation plan characterised by the events succession in a chained mode and naturally according to enunciative strategies that organise, contextualise and establish the events that are or have been at the base of its outbreak. In the "technical civilisation" society occurs what Gianni Vattimo calls "fabrication of the world" where the *mass media* configure the events as a *"fable*," an intrigue woven and figured by language games that are inherent to journalism and that more than merely representing the reality, arousing fact effects, frame it under certain angles, shape it, configure it, establish it, by attributing them in a selective way peculiar singularities and characteristics. For Vattimo, *the reality principle* suffers, indeed, certain erosion, deterioration, a certain rarefaction, because the communication field no longer tends toward *auto-transparency*, directing instead to *fabrication*, to a hermeneutic logic. Thus, we live a second-order experience, an experience where the reality of the world of life mingles with fiction. The *media* statements do not summarise, thus, to a pure *state of affairs* or *mimetic* state, but assume a certain plurality, a certain *artificiality*. The journalistic narratives such as the historical narratives or other are simply the result of what the narrator-journalist configures as a perception object, as *discursive event*.

Therefore, when a particular scandal becomes a media event, a complex communication process is constituted that consists of a list of subsequent revelations, accusations, defence reactions, which have an essential feature: the events are shaped by journalists and the stories are created and reported having into account certain "narrative codes" (Canel & Sanders, 2007, p. 50). Now, one of the "narrative codes" or "expressive resources" (Prior, 2016) of the media scandal anatomy that we intend to highlight is the personalisation or *figuration mode* of the characters involved. As Tzvetan Todorov referred, the characters cannot exist outside the action and, on the other hand, there cannot be action without characters (Todorov, 1970, p. 120), as the characters are the ones who perform certain actions in the rec-

reated storyline, making the narrative progress. Let's take the example of the journalistic coverage of the former Brazil President's testimony, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, to the judge Sérgio Moro responsible for *Operação Lava Jato* (*Operation Car Wash*) made by the two Brazilian magazines, *Veja* and *Isto É*.

Fig. 1. Revista *Veja*, 10/05/2017. Revista *IstoÉ* 05/05/2017

The event is imagery and discursively established by the conflict category between two characters somewhat antagonistic: on one side the judge Sérgio Moro, figuring as a symbol of a Brazil that fights against corruption; on the other side, the defendant, Lula da Silva, central figure of the *Operação Lava Jato* (*Operation Car Wash*) Through linguistic resources ("payback", "face--to-face meeting") and iconic settled on the metaphor of the fight, boxing in the *IstoÉ* magazine headline, Mexican wrestling in the case of *Veja* magazine, the narrator-journalist configures the event as a fight between the public life moralisation and the endemic corruption that affects Brazil social and political life. A certain politics judicialisation is also glimpsed, because the judge, who was supposed to be referee in the process, is presented as an adversary of the defendant, as a direct antagonist, the hero responsible for

the purification of the Brazilian policy. Thus, in the case of political scandals media coverage, this simplified figuration creates heroes and villains, good and bad, transgressors and "purifiers", guilty or innocent people, most of the time before the sentence and due to the fact that the *media*, almost always, anticipate to the judicial inquiry, providing true public opinion trials. Yet, the former President is the target of a highly negative coverage, building an imaginary situation through imagery representations, caricatures, which affect the reader's attention, showing Lula da Silva as guilty even before the sentence.

Fig. 2. Revista *Veja*, 04/11/2015. Revista *IstoÉ*, 09/09/2016.

But it is important to refer that the characters that comprise fact narratives about scandals are always a semantic construction, a product of enunciative ruses and linguistic stratagems that allow the reader, consciously or unconsciously, to build a particular personality about these characters. They are *dramatis personae*, linguistic constructions, social representations restricted to mere adjectives, incomplete and reductive descriptions, in some kind of rudimentary *mimesis* (Mesquita, 2002, p. 126) guided by credibility

criteria that most of the time creates stereotyped characters. The characters that embed media narratives about political scandals are thus semantic construction, figures produced by the speech that they only keep a tangential relationship with the real person.

Another aspect that matters to show, although it seems obvious, is the fact that the journalistic language does not recreate exactly the world of life, the real. It can only recompose this reality, producing a credible speech, an effect of reality. This real effect is made possible by a series of linguistic resources and language indexical devices such as adverbs of time and place that fix the journalistic discourse *here* and *now* (Motta, 2013, p. 199), propositions, testimonies and quotes which give veracity to the speech and other reference strategies aimed at anchoring the journalistic reporting in the *real*.

However, we also intend to stress here is the production of aesthetic sense effects that the media scandal demonstrates. The scandal is a highly dramatic phenomenon and the intrigue composition turns out to be strongly pervaded by subjectivity, either at the enunciation moment, or in the reception act by the reader/viewer, even if the journalistic enunciation is, naturally, characterized by the speaker's expressive authenticity. Thereby, it should be added that the narrative configuration of media scandals is strongly marked or characterized by pragmatic contexts and the narrator's claims when sewing the event. Thus, the narratives about political scandals are not, in fact, naïve or built randomly, but they are characterized instead by the speaker's argumentative attitude, by the connections that the narrator establishes between the events, by their purposes, interests and communicative intentions and, of course, by the effects of sense that the language ultimately evokes in the receivers.

To capture the reader's attention, journalism uses a multitude of language resources and figures of speech that produce symbolic effects, leading the reader to subjective interpretations and allowing, at the same time, a certain aesthetic fruition.

Fig. 3 and 4. On 16/03/2016 edition, the magazine Veja illustrated the headline with a metaphor between the mythological figure of Medusa, who had snakes instead of hair on her head, and the former President Lula. Caravaggio painted Medusa in 1597. It should be noted that the expression Bothrops was uttered by Lula himself when he was arrested for questioning: "If they wanted to kill the bothrops, they didn't do it right, because they didn't hit the head, they hit the butt, because the bothrops is alive," said the former President. On the headline, the former President is portrayed with an anger or fury expression, in an iconic cover that illustrates the alleged Lula's attempts to escape from prison.

In fact, it is interesting to determine how the media narratives about scandals are heavily impregnated with language games, meaning effects that arouse a certain aesthetic experience at the time of its reception and seizure, regardless the necessary approach of the discourse produced to the objective reality, a benchmark. This means that any version about the real, about the event, is an interpretation of it, and any version can betray because it is a version among other possible versions: it is not the fact in itself "(Motta, 2013, p. 40), it is just its crystallisation through *artefactual,* artificial schemas. Using reference strategies, the *medium* seeks to awaken in the receivers the real effect in order to convince the reader that what is narrated is related to reality. However, and since the political scandal is, by itself, an event that activates the dramatisation devices, adapting easily to the narrative machine that produces aesthetic effects aimed at capturing and retaining the public attention, the journalistic language often uses pro-

duction strategies of poetic sense effects that invite the reader to subjective interpretations and that, on the other hand, awaken the reader's interest and curiosity in following a disruptive plot that alters the flow of normality, that breaches the balance of the political system and, why not to mention, of the journalistic field, its routines and, often, its ethical assumptions. Consequently, the journalistic speech turns out to be based on a strong subjective aesthetic and pleasant charge, that; nevertheless, lets the reader apprehend the message using conceptual frameworks, or *frames*, which he is properly familiar with.

Fig. 5. Examples of the use of intertextuality, a technical or artistic mean that journalism uses to arouse the so-called effects of aesthetic sense and the necessary emotional involvement of the audience. Intertextuality in journalism is characterized by the appropriation of texts or elements from other genres, for example, literary or cinematic. It is about the

establishment of a conceptual framework that can be intuitively apprehended by the viewer, since it uses certain stereotypes and mental schemes previously instituted. In the examples mentioned, Lula da Silva is, for example, compared to the protagonist of the film The Godfather, as if he was the "powerful big boss" or the godfather of the corruption scheme investigated by the Car Wash (Lava Jato). In Visão magazine headline, political leaders are compared to criminals from the film Reservoir Dogs, by Quentin Tarantino, in a report on the financing scheme of municipal campaigns in Portugal.

Final considerations

The media culture is a manufactured reality, it is a reality in "second hand" and the scandal does not escape to the makeup and *artefactuality* logic, in Jacques Derrida's words, specific of the *media* field. The world of life reality is mediated by communication schemes that select, frame, shape and, in some cases, deform reality itself, replacing it. Through a range of hierarchical selective and artificial procedures, the texture of the journalistic speech about scandals is, not only formed, but also deformed by news narratives that often convert the fictional in news and consequently, in reality.

Nevertheless, with this excursus, I did not mean to treat all the issues raised by the media scandal configuration operated by the *media device of information*. My intention was more unpretentious and aimed only at drawing attention to some aspects and analytical clues that are interesting to observe in the configuration, refiguration and framing of the media scandals. I highlighted aspects mainly related to *personalisation* and with the *dramaticity* of scandal, as well as some production strategies of reality effects and effects of aesthetic or poetic sense.

Any narrative needs characters and the media scandal has, necessarily, its *dramatis personae*. The characters carry out certain functions in the plot, functions that are important in the action progression. In the case of media scandal, it is predictable to view a division between offenders and informers, between major and minor characters, protagonists or antagonists, purifier heroes and transgressor villains, individual or collective characters. Perhaps it is appropriate to point out that the scandal becomes a representation, with plots and subplots, with major and minor characters,

where a recreational and aesthetic dimension is also visible, allowing to enjoy the visual event, which allows *spectatio.*

However, it will be interesting, in other works, to analyse the seriality of media scandals, its unfolding in episodes, the temporality or time experience, as well as other issues raised by the intersubjective experience of poetic journalism and that, in our view, is also part of the anatomy of the media scandal.

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In the last decade, from a communicative point of view, a lot of novelties and changes shaped the traditional public sphere, Donald Trump's election in the United States of America, the Brexits, the rising of the several xenophobic and ultra-nationalist threats emerging in different geographical and political contexts, the populism phenomena, as well as the te debate on Cyber surveillance, counter-information, and the so-called "fake news" has drawn attention to some dystopian portrays conceived in the 20th Century which is now being considered an appropriate depiction of democracy and political communication's new pathologies. The book joins together researchers from Communication Sciences and related areas (Political Science, Political Theory, Political Philosophy, Political Sociology, Arts, and others), with particular emphasis on those interested in political communication around a unifying common axis: the pathologies and dysfunctions of democracy, in media contexts, in different aspects of their involvement with the media such as the media representation of these pathologies and dysfunctions; the impact of the media in the functioning of democratic institutions; the interference of political agents in journalistic information; the relationship between media and political institutions in the processes of public opinion building. Particularly, on this volume one addresses to the topic of surveillance. Within digital social networks and infotainment, invisibility, the right to be forgotten, and the reserve of a private life acquire an almost subversive nature in an age defined by hiper-communication. Simultaneously, the media staging of power mobilizes protagonists to a reality in which rationality and public responsibility are confronted with multiple risks of scandal arising from a permanent state of collective scrutiny. "Scandalogy" is a concept already used to project the study of image crisis' phenomena, increasingly emerging due to the opportunities of political exposure.

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