The Identity Constitution in the Current Conjuncture of Digital: Technologies of the Self, Expanded Identity and Gutenberg Galaxy

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The new devices and connection networks of the digital context allow new forms of interactions and perception of the world. In view of this situation, an idea of sociability as well as notions that permeate can be revisited. In this paper, we intend to talk about the constitution of identity in view of the complexities of the new forms of social interactions mediated by digital devices. Among the results, we have that communication technologies can be thought from three conceptual tools: an idea of “technologies of the self” by Michel Foucault, a notion of “expanded identity” by Rachel Sánchez and a notion of “galaxy” by Marshall McLuhan. The new communication technologies are also called by Foucault of “technologies of the self”, since they participate in conflicts and complementarities in the construction of the self; these technologies allow a constitution of an “expanded identity”, which concerns the expansion of technological devices and digital environments of social connectivity on the Internet; finally, these technologies can be thought of as an “era” or “galaxy” of McLuhan, marked by the appearance of electronic media and a global village characterized by the suppression of borders and the instantaneous transmission of knowledge. The use of electronic and digital means, in addition to revolutionizing communication, implies a new constitution of identity that occurs in a wide spectrum of borders, diversity and plurality.

Keywords: digital, identity, technologies of the self, Foucault, Gutenberg Galaxy

Introduction

Statement of the Problems

The notion of the individual is eminently historical and is constituted from the advent of the modernity paradigm around the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Until the end of the Middle Ages we found only one man subsumed by the collectivity in which he is inserted, chained to the relations that tradition established and to a role previously determined by his birth. Such an identity of the traditional man would thus be clearly defined, fixed and stable, with his life being organized by instances outside himself that do not allow for individual intervention (Mateus, 2011).

In the course of modernity, the development of a subjectivity based on personality gives the individual the prevalence over the collective, thus constituting the genesis of fundamental mutations in the understanding of
man and his world. The notion of individual goes back to the rebirth and liberation of human reason, being directly related to the notion of identity. The term identity etymologically means the “same entity” which, in a way, refers to the idea of “identical” (Faria & Souza, 2011).

In this work, we intend to talk about the constitution of identity in view of the complexities of the new forms of social interactions mediated by digital devices. Among the results, we have that communication technologies can be thought from three conceptual tools: the idea of “technologies of the self” by Foucault, the notion of “expanded identity” by Sánchez and the notion of “galaxy” by McLuhan.

The new communication technologies are also, as Foucault would call them, “technologies of the self”, since they participate in conflicts and complementarities in the construction of the self; these technologies allow the constitution of an “expanded identity”, as Sánchez points out, which concerns that which is amplified by technological devices and digital environments of social connectivity on the Internet; finally, the “era or galaxy of Guttenberg”, as punctuated by McLuhan, is marked by a global village characterized by the suppression of borders and the instantaneous transmission of knowledge. The use of electronic media in addition to revolutionizing the means of communication implies a new constitution of identity that occurs during a wide spectrum of borders, diversity and plurality.

Research Methodology

This study consisted of a bibliographic review in which texts were initially selected from databases (Scielo and google academic) that dealt with the issue of identity associated with the digital context. In particular, texts were chosen that addressed Michel Foucault’s self-technology concepts, Rachel Sanchez's expanded identity and Marshall McLuhan's galaxy (of Gutenberg).

In the databases, searches for texts were carried out with the combinations of the terms “technologies of the self”, “expanded identity”, “galaxy”, and “digital”.

Results and Discussion

Identity in the Digital

Among the results, it was found that, for example, Faria and Souza (2011), when returning to the question of identity in several authors of Social Psychology and Sociology, would emphasize that such notion would be constantly related to the idea of transformation. This idea of transformation was related, in a way, to a dialectical perspective, in which there would be a permanent process of tension between the individual and the social. This process of tension is often covered by social and identity theories.

Identity theory and social identity theory are two perspectives that base self-concept and the nature of normative behavior. Both address the social nature of self as constituted by society and avoid perspectives that reside in circumscribed practices (norms, roles) and they use similar words but often with different meanings (identity, identity salience, commitment) (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

Identity theory is a micro sociological theory that sets out to explain individual’s role related behaviors, while social identity theory is a social psychological theory that sets out to explain group and intergroup processes. These theories place their main theoretical emphasis on a multifaceted and dynamic self-mediator of the relationships between social structure and individual behavior. Their differences can be attributed to the different disciplinary roots of the two theories, with sociology for one and psychology for the other (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).
Social identity theory is intending to be a social psychological theory of group processes relations and the social self. The basic idea is that a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation) into which one fits provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

In the digital world, the identity relationship is not only between humans mediated by machines (computers, smartphones), but also by machine-machine relationships. In fact, a context of hybridity between machine and organism is assumed at this juncture. For example, the smartphone is not just a digital device, but is an extension of the subject (memory, vision, hearing) (Lasén, 2014). There is a kind of symbiosis whose identity relationship is similar to that of a cyborg (cyborg organism endowed with organic and cybernetic parts, capable of improving its capabilities using artificial technology) (Rosa, 2012).

The Types of Web and Their Identities

In contrast to the early days of the web (90s), from the 2000s onwards, we would have the configuration of a new platform for the evolution of Social Media. Such a platform would have as main characteristics the collaboration, participation and co-development of software whose operating potential would not be limited to use in a single device (Gómez-Cruz, 2007).

According to Gómez-Cruz, the web, since its beginnings until the great expansion in the 90s, already had an open architecture, with characteristics of collaboration and interactivity between users, such as, for example, some types of games (such as RPG) and also chat chats. In this first stage of the web, digital identity would be treated as a fiction, with virtually no real body identifications, a tendency to anonymity and experimentation with multiple, fluid, fragmented and imaginative identities, different from the real ones (Gómez-Cruz, 2007).

The main context of digital world configurations tended to be anonymous, as would be evidenced in certain types of online games and chat chats. For example, in online games the “avatar” or player’s character would be an imaginary figure that would allow for light and fluid presences. In the same sense, in chat rooms, the individual could create an identification (a nickname) that would allow him to remain anonymous, without appealing or being incited to reveal true or personal information (Gómez-Cruz, 2007).

However, as of 1995, the internet has opened up to companies and professionals, which would allow the creation of thousands of web pages and sites with static content, in order to leave role games (characters) and chat rooms chat as a minority portion in relation to existing content. Access to the information, products and services of the websites and portals, in this context, would occur unilaterally, in the sense that both companies and their administrators would have practically no information about the Internet user (potential customer) (Sánchez, 2014).

From mid-2003, this mode of operation of the web would be radically changed in favor of the articulation of a social internet based on the creation of platforms and interconnection of users, which would come to be called web 2.0.

The context of web 2.0 presents an inversion: before the provider was constituted by servers connected in network, in which the user could have access to the information; now the individual himself is converted into a portal, into a provider/producer of information and a co-developer of services (Sánchez, 2014).

In this model, the tendency to anonymity and the use of anonymous avatars or imaginary characters, would give space to avatars whose characteristics refer to personal and elements of the individual. In the first phase of the internet (web 1.0), interaction, communication and socialization would not, therefore, refer to “real”
physical referents.

In the context of **web 2.0**, the appropriation of collective intelligence, personal information, comments and shares occurs simultaneously with the exposure of characteristics of personal and private life in the construction of a digital identity. In short, unlike **web 1.0**, whose presence would be represented by nicknames, names and fictitious characters, on **web 2.0** we would have avatars that reflect the image of the body itself, and that expresses concrete characteristics of the personal and private reality of individuals.

**The Digital Revolution**

The onset of digital networks has set itself as an opportunity for an analysis not only on the role communication plays in our society, but also on the transformation knowledge has gone through, and on the innovation dynamics of our contemporary world (Di Felice, 2012).

The characteristic that marked this new **reticular** information architecture is the possibility for all members to have access to all information, regardless of their locations and positions. In addition, it was manifested as an interactive architecture that offered the dissemination of information to all the members that composed it, giving each technologically the same communicative power of dissemination (Di Felice, 2012).

The passage from a communicative model based on the **identity** separation between sender and receiver to a model for the circulation of information in a network, alters the practice and the meaning of the act of communicating. For McLuhan (1993), the media plays an active role in the transformation processes of the entire social structure. In this sense, societies would be more influenced by the nature of the media, through which people communicate, than by the content of the communication.

The structural importance of the introduction of a new communication technology that, since the advent of writing and printing in the 15th century by Gutenberg, as well as electricity and mass media in the 20th century, ended up not only changing the way of perceiving, storing and communicate, but also the organization of the entire society, which has undergone qualitative transformations (Di Felice, 2012).

The digital revolution consists of the last communicative revolution that changed the very architecture of the information process, in order to replace the frontal form of information transfer (press, theater, book, TV), by the reticular, technologically interactive and collaborative. Thus, a new form of interaction arises as a result of technological innovation, with assumptions and characteristics of a new social architecture that stimulates unprecedented interactive practices between us and information technologies (Di Felice, 2012).

The media should no longer be thought of as “**tools**”, instruments to be used, because, when using new media, we start to develop new types of interaction and try out new forms of social interaction. With the new media, an unprecedented, connected and invisible social is created, which is created and deconstructed and reconstructed continuously through information flows (Di Felice, 2012).

Digital networks cannot be described only as a media structure for passing on information, as they have in themselves the complexity of a social and interactive ecosystem but consist properly of a new architecture of collective intelligence expanded everywhere (Lévy, 1997).

**Digital Identity**

In agreement with this historical perspective of the conception of identity, Foucault (1991) points out that the processes of constitution of the modern individual would occur according to mechanisms of objectification and subjectification, at a given historical moment. The former (objectification), in general, would be related to the disciplinary processes and mechanisms of power that tend to constitute man as an object. The second
(subjectivation), on the other hand, refers to procedures through which man is constituted as a subject, that is, it would be through processes of subjection that the individual would be attached to an identity attributed to him, and that, in a certain way, would be recognized as yours.

However, it is worth asking how this dynamic of constitution of identity would occur in the current conjuncture of the digital? What does the new context of social relations in digital consist in general terms?

The conjuncture of digital less than a mere substitution of technological means and models for others, constitutes a new *ecosystem* in which we live, in a trans-organic dimension of interaction (Di Felice, 2017). According to Lasén (2014), new communication technologies are also, as Foucault would call them, “technologies of the self”, since they participate in conflicts and complementarities in the construction of themselves. In this sense, if subjectivity can be considered an active self-training process, never completely individual or collective, through actions and operations on our bodies, thoughts and behaviors, such information technologies would be directly involved in the mediation of these movements, during their exchanges and practices.

Still according to Lasén (2014), in the specific case of mobile technologies (cell phones, smartphones, among others), this movement would act in two axes: one related to identification, knowledge sharing and self-awareness, and the other to control and dependence. Regarding the first axis, the emergence and performance of these elements in the midst of mobile technologies depend, to a large extent, on the power of subscription (the storage capacity and enrollment performance in software and hardware). The elements of the second axis, on the other hand, would be related to the demand for recognition, triggered and driven by these services and technological mechanisms, which would be understood, in such perspective, as modalities of subjection and dependence.

These technological devices allow the constitution of an “expanded identity”, which concerns that which is amplified by technological devices and digital environments of social connectivity on the Internet. This extension allows individuals to have an increased perspective of themselves and their daily lives in the image, although it is not a mere visual representation. The network image becomes the vehicle that allows to extend the limits of individual presentation and definition. It is part of the individual and his/her being seen in the world. As a result, social networks allow you to deepen your exploration of yourself through image and produce yourself visually for others (Sánchez, 2014).

According to Sánchez (2014), the production of the image of oneself would involve different conceptions, according to the historical moment and technologies available. In this sense, the modalities of self-presentation would show different aspects not only from the aesthetic point of view, but also from the social, cultural and political context of each era.

Finally, the *Gutenberg galaxy* is an idea that helps us to think about the current digital context within the scope of a Global Village. In that text, McLuhan (1993) discusses the impact that the invention of the Gutenberg mobile press had on Western civilization. The author describes how the man of the West has a type of intellectual training that was completely different from any other part of the world at that time (1960). All of humanity still lived in a world of purely oral education. Only English-speaking countries had reached a level of civilization and education where teaching and communication from the printed word were the rule and not the exception. With the invention of the Gutenberg press, the notion of the individual is strengthened, in the sense that it would be possible for him to freely propagate his ideas even if they were insignificant. The culture of Catholic countries remained oral, while Protestant civilization tended to the printed word (Catholic civilization...
is emotional like all oral culture; Protestant nations tend to be sober and more precise).

A book-based society tends to be uniform, while the “electricity” society tends to divide into smaller groups.

According to McLuhan (1993) the Gutenberg galaxy is marked by the appearance of electronic media. The appearance of electronic media conditions this galaxy, where there is the conjuncture of a new tribalism (Post-human) marked by hybridism (human-machine) in which conditions of possibilities of partial identities are presented.

Conclusions

This constellation of concepts converges with Bharat Anand’s (2016) idea that “Everyone is a media company today”. In this sense, digital social networks would function as echo chambers, which further consolidate our prejudices and convictions because they work through algorithms that constitute bubbles that ratify our pre-established view of the world. There is the idea that in today's technological culture the nervous system is an extension of these technologies.

If with the typographic technology born with Gutenberg we have the foundation of modernity and industrial civilization, now there is a transition from tribal culture, closed and stable to the appearance of literate, individualized man, living in the instability of modern societies (for McLuhan, nationalism, industrialization and mass markets are the result of the typographic extension of man). We would therefore be in a moment of transition that tends to occur during a crisis and the search for identity, since revolutions in the media imply invisible changes in knowledge systems and culture.

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