

Communication and Socialization 2.0

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0. Abstract

In today's society communication has become easier as technologies like wireless internet are omnipresent and have started to dominate the way people communicate with each other. It is not important anymore to talk face to face, a few words typed on the cell phone, a video conference or an audio message sent on an instant messenger substituted the way where people were entering in dialogues when exchanging communicative messages. Dialogues and discourses in the style of Vilem Flusser's ideas of a telematic society have taken over and telematics is more powerful than ever. Public and private spheres exchange places and the narcissistic characters of the YouTubers can be found everywhere. Technical images replaced traditional ones, the process of abstraction following Flusser's thoughts has come to perfection.

1. Dialogues and Discourses

Human communication starts as a way of a dialogue, but that does not mean that this has to be a verbal method that is being used for that. The human being can communicate in various forms, such as body language, gestures, signs, signals or, as this is understood as the main method of the communicative process, oral and verbal. A dialogue is considered as a two way communication between equal partners, who have chosen to communicate about a certain aspect or topic and it goes like a ping pong game, a question and answer - and a counter-question waiting for an answer - match. As this is considered part of the Socratic method of progress and recognition, Vilem Flusser considers a dialogue a traditional form of communication, which is made impossible through today's architecture and urban planning (cf. Flusser, 2003). The destruction of the traditional marketplace as a space of

communication by today's urbanity, has made it necessary to find new ways of communication. Still, there are two forms of dialogues existing: the circle and the net (ibid.). An example for a circular form of dialogue would be parliament, as the participants are gathered around an empty middle and this empty middle is considered as consensus, about which everybody is talking. The topic is the centre and not the participant. At the netlike dialogue each participant is a centre and "the synthesis of information is happening through diffusion in the region of the entire net" (Flusser, p. 288, 2003). A network like that would be the postal service, the telephone, video and computer systems. Coming to think about today's technology, the telephone adheres the technology of audio, video and computer systems in one single apparatus. The big difference between those two systems is that the circular one is a closed, while the netlike one is an open system. In the open system anyone can participate, while the circular one is reduced just to a handful of participants, who probably know each other well already and know the other's position. Fast thinking or predictable reactions are the result of that (cf. Bourdieu, 1998) and discursive media succumb the circle structured dialogues (cf. Flusser, 2003).

Vilem Flusser sees the discourse that way that there is one sender and many receivers (cf. Flusser, 2003), unlike Socrates, who considers the discourse as an exchange of information between peers (cf. Nelson, 1929). It is the domination of the sender and the message that he is sending out is received and probably perceived by an anonymous mass, who have no chance to respond once the message has arrived. The only way they can react to this would be the way to enter in a dialogue with the discursive sender and it is not always granted that this sender is willing to respond. Very often the broadcaster has no interest in listening to what the receivers have to tell him, as long as the message has arrived and money can be made from that (cf. Adorno, 1988). Examples for discourses and the media taking advantage of this discursive situation would be radio, television, the movie and music industry. Especially the later two ones have quite a powerful position, as they provide and produce content for radio and television, which could not survive without the culture industry products anyway. Exchangeable protagonists and only slightly alternated programme formats steamroll the (paying) public, very often supported by product placement, which again is needed to provide additional income to pay the exceptional high salaries of these protagonists as long as they are still in the spotlight. Fame sells and the public is buying.

Nowadays there are some hybrid forms of dialogic and discursive media to be found. With the rise of social media like Facebook and YouTube on the internet, a new form has emerged.

YouTube's slogan "Broadcast Yourself" was used from 2005 until 2012 and it implies that everyone has the potential to be a broadcaster, as long as he or she would use their video hosting service for that purpose. While the site as such is a dialogic form, as it also offers the possibility of leaving messages for eventual discussion (in the sense of the ping pong game of the dialogue), the videos featured on it are strictly discursive. The possibility of leaving a response to a video through another video or a text message results in a dialogue, but the video as such is discursive. It sends a message to the public without giving the public the chance to react in an interactive way. "Broadcast yourself" is more than just a slogan, it is the invitation for narcissistic characters to show to the world what they can do – or not.

2. Public and Private Spheres

When the terms "private" and "public" are mentioned, very often the antonyms of state (as a form of collective property) and individual (as a form of customized, personal property) comes to mind. The idea of property in this case has to be left behind, as the new technologies and media have started to permeate various walks of life and virtual and real veritableness have started to become exchanging, dialectic entities. Video services like YouTube and the money machine, a cash cow called cultural industry, provide a platform for narcissistic individuals, who feel summoned to voice their private opinions to the world in order to comment on each and every small incident that happened somewhere in the world, even if it is just of a very local importance. That way local and regional events become worldwide known (on various levels) and could generate effects in corners of the world, where they would have never been noted before. The area of the internet phenomena had its first peak in the late 1990ies. A Turkish man, Mahir Cagri, turned into an internet celebrity, when he set up a homepage in very bad English and started with the headline "I kiss you". The message and design of his page became viral and all over the world people responded in one way or the other, going that far that they would even call him, as he had his phone number on this site. The man had turned his private life public and the public reacted¹².

¹ The original homepage can be found under <https://web.archive.org/web/20041229194455/http://www.ikissyou.org/index2.html>

² The whole story can be found here <https://web.archive.org/web/20041213000836/http://www.ikissyou.org/history.html>

So when Flusser writes “the virtual space and the deep space start to enter the *lebensraum*, overlapping it sometimes, in order to overlap and cover themselves. That way we are torn apart from the ground (from the here and now) and are forced to become outlawed” (Flusser, p. 283, 1991), then he refers to the concept of space in a fourdimensional way with the factor of time included. Space is the threedimensional phenomenon that is spread by the x, y and z axis and time as the fourth dimension, which also interferes with space as it overlaps all spatial changes. Time changes space. So with the creation of the virtual space, the public sphere gained another dimension within time. The commuting between public and private domains has gotten easier and the sharp differences between those two started to crumble, not to say smudge. Mr Cagri knows this best from his own experience.

As the commercialisation of the internet hit off in the mid 1990ies, together with the necessary apparatus – the computer – getting more affordable for the common public and private households; the networks (as there is no “the internet” as a solely network) started to grow and telematic society got its first communicative marketplaces within its borders, which already were a mixture of public and private spheres. Information exchange started to get easier and the commuting between a public and a private virtual sphere started to lose its meaning. Private information, which had to be carried to a publisher first, who decided if it was worthwhile to be published or not, could be aired/published without a third party filter function now and it remained online and accessible as long as the responsible person wanted it to be public. On the other side, the state had the chance to hide information from the public by making it private, so that only a chosen few could access it – and those chosen few needed to have password, which would be given out by the state, as the respective owner of that information, only³. New closed communities started to emerge and the virtual network gave many the chance to distinguish themselves in real life, when they felt that they were part of such a closed community. The Facebook Generation was on the rise.

3. The Facebook and YouTube Generation

³ Several Free Information Acts and equivalents in several countries (Australia 1982, Brazil 2012, USA 1967, Canada 1985, United Kingdom 2000, Germany 2006 just to name a few) were necessary in order to force the various state administrations to grant the citizen the right to access information saved about them. It seemed that the state administration had something to hide from its citizens. Still, in some countries the right of information access does not exist yet or it is not executed, even though granted by the constitution, as no specific legislation exists.

On February 4th, 2004, a new type of network went online: Facebook. Developed out of an idea to rate if someone's face is 'hot or not' it gave its users the chance to set up an online profile, upload one's private photos and many more features. Facebook's features grow year by year and its hunger for its users' data too. What gold used to be for its diggers in the 19th century, user data is for its administrators and collectors in the 21st saeculum. With private data made public, companies can model a perfect profile of its user/customer and use that for their own good in order to generate more income for them, pulling the money out of the user's pocket. Facebook's stock and income value depends on the number of users and profiles it has.

So when Facebook started, it was not an open network or website for anyone to access, the new users had to register themselves in order to become part of it. So it gave the users the impression that it was a closed community, where you could connect with people of the same background, interests or even the same family, the Facebook Generation was born. If someone was not on Facebook, this person would be looked at strange by the others, as this person would exclude itself from a big community. This person would be an outcast, it was just unbelievable someone would not (want to) be part of such a wonderful thing. Flusser's idea of the marketplace as a place for the exchange of information (cf. Flusser, 2003) has turned into a website (with a huge industry behind it) as a place for that. The communication structure of the site remained hybrid discursive though, but with the feature of a chat function, it received an instant dialogical function too. This dichotomy is one of Facebook's factors of success: the user can be public and remain private with his communication at the same time. The publicity of the user can be reduced completely to the fact that only "friends" (users, who he or she has added as his or her friend to their personal network of virtual social relationships) can access the content the user shares.

When on February 14th, 2005, the video hosting service YouTube went online, it was the kick off of something new. It was also inspired by the idea of rating and finding other users (cf. Web Archive, 2017), just like Facebook, but it used the possibility of the moving image to broadcast the users' messages. The possibility of uploading someone's own videos made it most attractive – the YouTuber was born. The catchy slogan "Broadcast yourself" made the video hosting service attractive for the narcissistic parts of society, who believed that they would have to demonstrate their existing (non)talents to the rest of the world. It did not take

long and YouTube was a stepping stone for a couple of individuals, who became successful as singers or just as one hit wonders. Additionally, numerous videos like “how to play...” turned up, (professional) music videos as well as documentaries were uploaded and several people started to use YouTube as a stage for giving comments on events around them, or far, far away. YouTube is an enhanced version of a vlog, with millions of accesses every day. The video blogging community let the bug-eyed public in their private homes and give comments on even the most banal things, as long as they receive a little bit of attention by the anonymous mass in front of the monitors. And as their success is quite evident and some even get quite rich, thousands of teenagers dream of becoming a YouTuber as their daytime job in the future and make a living from it. Adorno’s vision of the culture industry is potentiated by the factor 10, minimum.

4. Socialization 2.0

Was in former times the socialization of the human being dominated by the social environment, such as parents, friends, school, personal contacts with neighbours etc., the advancing technology brought a new component with it: the technical apparatus. Vilém Flusser’s model of abstraction knows five stages of cultural history:

- A) The stage of the tangible experience, which the human being has in common with animals.
- B) The stage of capturing and treating, where the human being is producing and using items for a certain purpose.
- C) The stage of the traditional images, where the human being is picturing and reproducing an item in a bi-dimensional (eventually tri-dimensional) environment
- D) The historical important interstage of writing and storytelling, where the human being has invented a system of signs and codes, with which he can transfer knowledge to future generations, but it is a counterpart to the image, as the image is concrete and the alphabet is abstract.
- E) The stage of calculating and computing, which leads to the highest form of abstraction: the technical image. The technical image is not based on an act of imagination, but is a result of an activity of an apparatus and furthermore a result of scientific texts.

(cf. Flusser, 1983, 1985)

With the formation of the telematic society, mankind has definitely reached the last stage of this abstraction process. Technical images are everywhere and someone needs a special kind of apparatus to produce and read them. Even when writing a text on a computer or sending a text, audio message or photo by a cell phone, the user is producing a technical image, as he needs a certain kind of machine and programme to be able to generate information. The sending of an audio message can also be considered as a technical image in a wider sense, as the criteria of calculating and computing are fulfilled, even though it is not a concrete image that is created or received.

Now that the human being is surrounded by technical images everywhere, they are also part of his socialization. They have an impact on his behaviour and social interaction. Flusser is seeing it that way that “society is fragmented in piles of bodies, in a ‘lonely mass’, and the interpersonal relations, the social texture, are dissolving. These Californians⁴, who are sitting detached with their backs to each other, have no social conscience. They belong to no family and they don’t identify themselves with any kind of people or class. If you take a look at their dispersion nonideologically, but in a phenomenological way, then you can recognize the emergence of a new social gauze. You can realize the laces, which connect these ‘new humans’ with the senders of the technical images. You can realize that these are not asocial, but very strongly, but in a new sense, socialized, people. They are that strongly socialized that we have to fear, despite of their apparent isolation, about their individuality” (Flusser, p. 71, 1985). So when we think on today, the wandering nomads, which type away their messages on their cell phones, are nothing but a result of the socialization of the telematic society. They simply communicate differently from former generations; emojis have replaced the facial expressions, abbreviations like “lol”⁵ or “asap”⁶ have substituted the writing of full phrases and have even invaded oral communication, friendships are made by social networks like Facebook, information acquirement is reduced to the use of Wikipedia etc. The transformation process to a telematic society is not completed yet, but it is on its way. Currently society seems to be in a change of socialisation and communication from version 1.0 to version 2.0.

⁴ Flusser describes a group of Californian vanguard computer specialists here.

⁵ Lots of laughter

⁶ As soon as possible

5. Literature

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