

FORMAS DE VIDA FORMS OF LIFE FORMES DE VIE

COLECCÃO TA PRAGMATA

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The *Eudaimonia* of the book in question: archaeology of contemporary forms of reading

Daniel Melo [1]

This article proposes a reflection on the place of books and reading in our contemporaneity, understood in a broad sense. It seeks to critically analyse the time we are currently in, which is broadly speaking the time post-*Ancien Régime*, the time of citizens and the masses, without forgetting the importance of certain longer-lasting cultural legacies.

It is therefore not restricted only to the present but intends to help understand it by widening its focus. It also addresses inextricable phenomena, such as the digital and the Internet, since four decades of collective dissemination and appropriation have solidified them in time enough so they can be addressed by the history of the present time[2].

To match the theme of the colloquium, this proposal appeared to be the most meaningful for a researcher concentrating on the contemporary history of reading, books, and publishing. Although still a work in progress, the aim is for this to shed light on some meeting points between politics, society, and culture, boosting interrelationships that could not be unveiled in an analysis restricted to a single subfield. Another aim was to analyse connections with technology. It is not about assessing technology itself, however, but rather looking at certain underlying intentions and technology's use in collective trends that have already been relatively widely established and analysed. Against this backdrop, this text is not designed to be systematic or panoramic but instead to provide paths for interpreting some of the questions that have been deemed most pressing today based on a review of the academic literature available, including qualitative, quantitative and mixed studies and accounts from several fields and intellectual backgrounds.

This paper is divided into 4 interconnected parts: 1) topographies of books and publishing – from scarcity to an abundance of books that hides all the rest; 2) archaeology of forms of reading – from «long reading» to «discontinuous, segmented and fragmented reading»; 3) archaeology of forms of communication – control, manipulation and immersion, erosion of reflection, introspection and critical thinking; 4) other causes that inhibit self-knowledge and empowerment, regarding memory, reasoning and pedagogical-ideological twisting.

1 — Topographies of books and publishing – from scarcity to an abundance of books that hides all the rest

Until around half a century ago (generally speaking), one of the key problems related to culture and books was their relative scarcity. Scarcity in terms of the total number of volumes per capita, taken globally (despite all the revolutions since Gutenberg and the impressive growth in libraries), but also, above all, scarcity of access, the difficulty faced by many in accessing books and having time to read them.

Today, certain agents or influential experts suggest that we have shifted to the extreme opposite. They talk of a world of «superabundance» in response to «hyper-individualism» and «extreme individuality», in the words of Mexican publisher Tomás Granados, inspired by an influential Mexican essayist, Gabriel Zaid[3]. Whether or not there is superabundance for all, the supply has been directed towards responding to hyperindividualism[4]. The publishing market (and the digital market in general) was formed to feed that atomised perspective, where there does not seem to be a place or environment favourable to other collective, community-based perspectives on life, with shared texts and reading in the workplace, in the street, at home, in areas for socialisation in general[5]. Even in schools themselves, reading is still extensively viewed in an instrumental (and individualised) way, whether or not it takes place in the classroom. As a result, it has barely extended into other modes, contexts, spaces and sharing (see Lopes, 1997, p. 181[6]).

Furthermore, the superabundance mentioned has hidden the rest, which includes a wide range of inequalities of differing types:

- in terms of the geographical distribution of books among different geopolitical regions (e.g. the predominance of the USA and part of Europe, see Iglesias, 2011) and within several territories of each country;

- within social classes and groups (since those with higher income and/or free time often have more books and/or reading time and/or greater capacity for making more plural, critical choices);

- regarding different perspectives on books and reading according to age group, for example the decline in reading and the status of books among young people aged 15 to 19 in France at the end of the 20th century (Baudelot et al., 1999, in Chartier, 2002, p. 103);

- regarding the existence of groups with different cultural capital, for example among university students who study literature and others, or among those whose parents have academic qualifications and those who do not, etc. (see Chartier, 2002, p. 102; also Lahire, 1997);

- in the profile of publishing itself, which is more dependent and focused on titles linked to «guaranteed sales» (school books) or quick sales (bestsellers), due to the quick turnover observed for decades and the need for large conglomerates in the sector to renew their supply to capitalise on the costs of industrial distribution and maintain profits (Legendre, 2013, p. 30);

- in access to critical, plural mediation without conflicts of interests (Costa, 2006, p. 2);

· and even its influence in creating imbalances between different modes of reading.

All these things may be redoubled in the case of inequality of access to the Internet and e-books (Chartier, 2002, p. 112).

As individuals felt (and feel) swamped by texts, the solution was to accentuate a proliferation of other texts that could present them more briefly, from reading guides to literature reviews, top sellers, lists, collections, interviews, reports but above all reviews and concise and specific opinion texts (see Muniz Sodré in Soares, 2005, p. 8).

But what many scholars believe to be more serious and at the heart of a cultural crisis for books and reading is the decline in bibliodiversity in the world[7]. In other words, perception and cross-linking of data or indicators (since there is no specific indicator for assessing an issue as complex as this one) suggest a sustained decline (since the 1970s-1990s) in the area of social and human sciences in number of titles and sales by volume; in a sustained decline in «great readers»: readers who read a lot of books per year (around fifty titles). Both phenomena have been studied in several Western countries, including France, the USA and Portugal (for France, see Chartier, 2002, pp. 102-4 and Donnat, 2010). But we could also mention other areas in sharp decline: theatre, poetry, non-academic paid periodicals, etc. (for France see Donnat, 2010) or academic monographs in favour of journals (for the USA, see Chartier, 2002, p. 103). For sociologists such as Muniz Sodré, the Internet era really is the «zero time» of literature (see Soares, 2005, p. 6).

That evolution and decline in bibliodiversity has been associated (although not exclusively[8]) with increasing concentration of businesses in the publishing and media sectors, which has imposed oligopolies or monopolies in each country or supranational space (such as the EU). Operating in disloyal competition, they have contributed (and continue to contribute) to the increasing disappearance of bookshops, publishers, distributors and others[9]. This has therefore led to impoverishment of these crafts as professional activities, as many new independent publishers do not live exclusively from that activity, or publish significantly fewer new titles. In Portugal, for example, and according to a variety of information on the closure of spaces linked to the publishing world in the last 20 years (studies by the OAC and CIES-IUL in Neves, 2012 and Neves et al., 2014 respectively), this has led to a considerable reduction in the group of qualified people working in the sector, from publishers and booksellers to reviewers, sales and distribution assistants and perhaps translators. This is even more relevant because the diversity of agents working in the book publishing sector is at the heart of the definition of the concept of bibliodiversity, which is an elementary minimum of variety of supply produced, put into circulation and kept by the highest number of agents possible (see IAIP, 2014; Sapiro, 2011; Hawthorne, 2014a and 2014b).

Together, these factors have caused a retreat in investment in new authors, new themes, new approaches, new trends, etc., and have influenced a certain standardisation of authors, themes, approaches, trends, with a loss of innovation, risk, heterodoxy, pluralism[10]. Legendre (2013, p. 30) discusses a standardisation of book production. And Alberto Manguel (2005)

talks of the transformation of bookshops into supermarkets and publishing houses into factories for producing objects with a sell-by date, as if they were yoghurts.

As publishing and books do not exist in a bubble, these trends towards a concentration of institutions and choices have also occurred in related fields as demonstrated in certain studies about the media and the Internet (e.g. Klinenberg, 2006 and 2007 and Furtado, 2009, pp. XXIII-XXVII). The zenith of this process was the creation of digital platforms, i.e. «digital infrastructures that enable interaction between two or more groups that position themselves as intermediaries and bring with them new users; consumers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers and even physical objects» (Furtado, 2019, p. XXVII). This category currently includes «GAFA (Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple and other «technological conglomerates»)[11].

2 — Archaeology of forms of reading – from «long reading» to «discontinuous reading»

With the expansion of the digital around the planet or, more narrowly, what Chartier (2002, p. 21) has called the «revolution of digital text», three major changes have been observed.

The first deals with the «order of discourse», in other words, the former «relationship between types of objects (books, daily newspapers, magazines), categories of texts and forms of reading» was broken, since with the digital «a single device, the computer, [...] lays before the reader several types of texts traditionally distributed into different objects» (Chartier, 2002,

p. 23). Chartier (*ibid.*) concludes: «this creates a continuity that no longer distinguishes between different discourses based on their materiality».

This phenomenon has made it more difficult to «distinguish between, classify and rank discourses» (*ibid.*), which erodes the legitimacy of some of them (see the crises of journalistic discourse, swamped first by infotainment and tabloidisation, and later by fake news/misinformation and «echo chambers»). It has also become harder to «perceive a work as a work», since the fragmented reading that prevails has made it harder to understand the «identity» and «consistency of the text as a whole» (Chartier, 2002, p. 23).

The second crucial shift deals with the «order of reasons», since «electronic textuality makes it possible to develop argumentations and demonstrations according to a rationale that is no longer necessarily linear or deductive». And because, as a result, «readers can check the validity of any demonstration by personally consulting texts (but also images, recorded words or musical compositions) which are the object of analysis if, of course, they are accessible in digital form» (Chartier, 2002, pp. 24-5, also 108)[12].

The third change deals with «the order of ownerships», which encompasses a «legal sense – which underpins literary ownership and copyright» and a «textual sense – which defines the characteristics or properties of texts» (Chartier, 2002, p. 25, also 110). Since electronic texts can be displaced, cut out, extended and recomposed, this erases the attribution of authorship (and publishing) from original texts (and media), calling into question a work as an «identified unit since the 18th century at least, due to its stability, uniqueness and originality» (*ibid.*).

As a result, these changes have had and continue to have implications for the erosion of critical thinking, public scrutiny, authorial identity and the viability of a significant portion of publishing (independent, to a large extent). From here we can arrive at other derivations connected to reading.

Based on observations by Antonio Rodriguez de las Heras, Chartier (2002, p. 31) mentions that reading a digital text is like surfing the net: «a discontinuous, segmented, fragmented reading». This way of reading «seems disorientated or inadequate with regard to texts whose appropriation requires continuous, attentive reading, familiarity with the work and an understanding of the text as an original, coherent creation» (*ibid.*).

Put differently, although the Internet is a transmitter of written culture, it does this transmission with damaging effects on reading written texts (especially the type of text called a book, i.e. longer texts): firstly, its formation around speed (or instantaneity) has encouraged dominance of the visual and audiovisual, since these forms have been more easily and/or quickly absorbed. But, above all, by introducing the field of discontinuous, segmented and fragmented reading, it has made it more difficult to perform other types of reading that came before (such as continuous reading of a coherent, relatively long text that invites a slower, more attentive, calmer reading and, therefore, greater potential for stimulating concentration, reasoning and/or abilities for narration, creativity and imagination)[13]. The erosion of this other mode of reading has had and continues to have harmful effects on concentration in general, on development of a capacity for reflection and, as a result, self-knowledge and empowerment, not just of citizens but of communities.

One of the pioneers of reflection on how reading on the Internet began to change ways of thinking and reading was Nicholas Carr, in 2008, opening a debate that continues today. For Carr, reading on the Internet has demobilised deep reading, where deeper and more critical reflection (deep thinking) can emerge,[14] and often diverts us from our own focuses of interest to commercial, political or other focuses of interest that are of interest to advertisers. These lessons were then confirmed in a study by University College London on users of 2 popular search websites: «it is clear that users are not reading online in the traditional sense; indeed there are signs that new forms of «reading» are emerging as users «power browse» horizontally through titles, contents pages and abstracts going for quick wins. It almost seems that they go online to avoid reading in the traditional sense» (cited in Carr, 2008). Specialists in developmental psychology such as Maryanne Wolf (of Tufts University and author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*) have highlighted the Internet's tendency to encourage a «reading style» focused on «efficiency» and «immediacy» and have repeated the same concern with the reduction in deep reading. A later study suggested the emergence of cognitive changes associated with the «Google effect», i.e. «the tendency to forget easily accessible information if we look for it on the Internet from search engines [...] rather than retaining it in our memories» (Sparrow, Liu & Wegner, 2011).

I therefore propose connecting discontinuous, segmented and fragmented reading with the idea of acceleration, greater speed in accessing, processing and using information. Using information with hands-free on-screen reading makes it easier to write while reading the text[15]. In other words, it encourages

people to carry out several tasks at the same time. This question of acceleration in communication is in turn connected to a growing trend in multitasking in the day-to-day lives of many citizens, in leisure, in their intimate lives and at work. A question that goes back to «accelerated time», «time without entropy», which has dominated «the closest everyday reality» for some decades to the present, as analysed by André Barata (2018, pp. 17-22, citations 18, 17 and 21 respectively)[16].

In fact, an understanding that there is no time for slow, linear time in personal everyday lives has been around for decades (or the idea that there is less and less time for slow, linear time). Bhaskar (2013, p. 3) warns of the «decline in long reading» as an «alarming macrotrend» (citations from Furtado, 2019, p. XXIX), despite being an author who does not view publishing as being in a dramatic crisis but rather in a new crisis of renewal to join the others that came after invention of the press. Muniz Sodré guarantees that «long reading shall be abolished» (although only «in the long term», see Soares, 2005). We can therefore talk about a crisis in reading, a certain reading, in times of induced acceleration, largely arising from contagion of constant connectivity and the appeals and stimulation that this can cause. As Mário Dionísio said in a class in the 1950s, through the gaze of his student Eduardo Prado Coelho: «my first praise to slowness came from a teacher, Mário Dionísio who, faced with the proliferation of what were called «rapid reading methods» or «scanning» appropriate for the dizzying rush of businessmen (today there must already be «non-reading methods», he would say in classes «what we need is more and more slow reading methods»» (Coelho, 2004, p. 90).

Put differently, strictly speaking, (digital) screen civilisation has not exactly imposed the «death of the reader and the disappearance of reading», but nor has it brought us a brave «new era of communication» (expressions from Chartier, 2002, pp. 105 and 107 respectively).

Chartier (2002, p. 115) also tells us of several threats contained in this era of digital text (communitarianism vs. cultural monolithism, empire of conglomerates): «it can lead to a loss of any common reference, to the separation of identities, the exacerbation of particularisms. Or it can, inversely, impose the hegemony of a single cultural model and the always mutilating destruction of diversities» (*ibid.*). It can also lead to the «embargo and control of the most powerful multimedia companies over the formation of digital databases» (*ibid.*).

3 — Archaeology of forms of communication – control, manipulation and immersion, erosion of reflection, introspection, and critical thinking

Another relevant issue is related to the superabundance of content in the digital context in general, with Internet users incessantly producing messages of all kinds (written, audio, visual, audiovisual), addresses, pages, accounts, profiles, etc. (Coleman, 2010, in Portela, 2019, p. 53).

A scholar on these matters, Manuel Portela, highlights that «virtualised multiplication [...] today appears to be less the open workshop for experimentation with identities that Sherry Turkle foresaw in the 1980s and 1990s (Turkle, 2005 and 1995), and more a global control of online behaviours that algorithmic analysis – including data generated by clicks that we make from

link to link and through written correspondence itself – makes possible as a strategy for observing and monitoring individual thoughts and desires» (Zuboff, 2019 apud Portela, 2019, p. 53).

On this question of using the Internet for observing, controlling and manipulating likes, attitudes and behaviours, in addition to a growing number of studies, it is important to note that some significant cases have emerged in the public sphere, such as the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case. Legal investigation of this in Europe found that the mega social network had sold gigantic databases containing the private records of customers to political consultants (without proper authorisation) for political misinformation purposes as part of campaigns it worked on: Trump's 2017 presidential campaign and the Brexit campaign for the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union (Alcântara, 2019, p. 8; Hoyle, 2019, p. 12; Pereira, 2019b, p. 59).

In 2017, the UN revealed that the «lack of control and proliferation of hate speech against Myanmar on Facebook has triggered «an ethnic cleansing» in the country, targeting the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority» (Hoyle, 2019, p. 12).

In fact, Facebook mentor and CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, demonstrated his willingness to deliver private correspondence and personal data to friends immediately after the company was set up, and later made himself available to provide other people's personal data to company directors (in 2012-2015), therefore long before the Cambridge Analytica case (Pereira, 2019a, p. 58).

Another investigation (started by a former software engineer at the company and explored by journalists of the reference newspaper *The Guardian*) found that for several years (or

decades?) rival mega-company Google used and continues to use an algorithm on its YouTube service for pushing content according to discriminatory criteria promoting (politically and socially motivated) violence, promoting political bias (for example, selecting content that is more favourable to Trump and unfavourable to Clinton during the 2017 presidential election campaign), focusing on controversies and stupefying sensationalism or oddities (Lewis & McCormick, 2018; see also Sutter, 2018).

Google was even fined by the French government in 2019 for improper use of user data, violating users' privacy (Hoyle, 2019, p. 12), which brings us to the conclusion that digital platforms share this trend towards committing the same types of abuses[17].

The issue of the use of sophisticated algorithms for the purposes of commercial and political manipulation was extended to rival company Facebook and was even a source of conflict within the company, something that has since been publicly recognised[18]. McNamee, former Facebook backer, asserts that the company's algorithms «favour misinformation over accuracy and messages containing extreme language over neutral messages, because the latter get more attention and connection with users and, therefore, more revenue from advertising» (Hoyle, 2019, p. 13).

Furthermore, several governments and their state apparatuses have set up spying, surveillance, censorship and information manipulation mechanisms on the Internet that are so broad-reaching that in some cases they will have covered a massive quantity of data, metadata and information transmitted by citizen-Internet users from all over the world, including government authorities and heads of state (see the 2013 Snowden

case in Snowden, 2019; also Pereira, 2019b and Estanque, 2019; see the case of official Russian interference in the 2017 US presidential elections via Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in Hoyle, 2019, p. 12).

The responsibility of certain governments was double, because the intrusive capacity of large digital platforms itself was made possible by growing deregulation of the digital landscape, including the European Union through the inaction of the European Commission (see the track record since 2010 in Cádima, 2018).

Also regarding the impoverishment of critical research practices and the ability to produce knowledge, several authors have signalled Internet search engines, particularly Google, as projects that have that harmful effects. This is an academic reflection that is currently ongoing and has produced lively debates in the public realm for more than a decade (see Carr, 2008; Sutter, 2018). Carr argues that Google is the zenith of the Internet with regard to the aim of «efficient and automated collection, transmission and manipulation of information», presented as a synonym of intelligence[19] and following a rationale rooted in industrial Taylorism. This is recognised by its highest manager: «Google, says its chief executive, Eric Schmidt, is «a company that's founded around the science of measurement», and it is striving to «systematize everything» it does» (Carr, 2008). Carr concludes: «what Taylor did for the work of the hand, Google is doing for the work of the mind» (*ibidem*).

Connected to this, many researchers, teachers and educators have raised questions about the exclusive and acritical use of the best known online electronic encyclopaedia, to which

Google directs certain types of searches – Wikipedia – for having incorrect or incomplete information. However, others highlight how useful, comprehensive and easy to access it is.

But what is in question is deeper and more general: most of these devices (Facebook, Google, etc.) were deliberately created to lock us into their never-ending whirlwind of constantly accessible and unstoppable content, with hyperlinks that can be endless, animated, intrusive visual appeals, newsfeeds and immediate satisfaction, quick contact and feedback, likes, emoticons, recommendations and other rewards. This has even been publicly recognised by several of their mentors and has been analysed in more or less recent studies[20].

Scholars of communication and language, such as Muniz Sodré (Soares, 2005) and Luís Carmelo (2003[21]), mention that Western societies are currently undergoing a process of diminishing values (which has been going on for decades), with implications for reading and consumption of culture in general. This is influenced by the expansion of an aestheticisation of social life, driven by a «discourse of aesthesia, a kind of experience of public space that is more passionate and affective»[22]. And returning to this latter issue, sociologist Illouz (2019) dedicated her latest book to «emotional goods», as emotions and goods are increasingly co-produced by an enormous variety of industries (tourism, music, cinema, sex or psychotherapy) with the aim of transforming or improving individuals' egos.

Abundance in the digital world has accentuated what several communication theorists call information overload, a concept proposed in 1964 that involves citizens' difficulty in sorting out which information is relevant and trustworthy for

understanding subjects that relate to them and the surrounding context in general[23]. Together with targeting and the constant attraction of Internet users' decisions implemented by the great digital platforms (or digital business chains), this causes critical and citizenship capacities to be weakened. As Estanque mentions (2019): «faced with this immense voracity of communication and information, human beings burn out in the never-ending search for information, in an exhaustive effort without a defined target, but unable to enrich knowledge. In short, «*Homo digitalis*» corresponds to immersion of the individual in a sea of flows and digital equipment that penetrate and dominate our personal identities. On the face of it, the world and knowledge are in everyone's pockets. In reality, this intoxicating digital iconography appears to annul citizens, while at the same time promoting mass cloning of alienated consumers»[24].

Jalali (2019), in turn, calls attention to the erosion of democratic debate caused by political polarisation, which started before the digital but has been strengthened by the configuration of the Internet around algorithms (which serve things in which the user has shown interest, thereby stimulating «echo chambers» where increasingly we hear ideas we already believe in») and the tendency of social networks towards agonistic, simplified and polarised confrontation[25].

In short, it is not only abundance that citizens must face at the moment: it is actually a growing[26] and unstoppable immersion in the digital continuum, which several scholars mention as a «digital culture of permanent connectivity». This culture is transforming subjects' relationships with themselves and others: according to Portela (2019, p. 55), the «observation of

digital native children and young people has shown that individuals' very sense of self is shifting to depend on the responses of others, mediated by communication systems. Moreover, research suggests that communication mediated by computers alters the ability to develop empathy. In other words, the need for a constant connection interferes with the capacity for introspection – limiting the conversations that individuals have with themselves and the resulting reflexivity – and, at the same time, it diminishes the ability to imagine the places of others». A «ubiquitousness and permanence of communication» is threatening «face-to-face conversation», «a fundamental process of building humans», «in the realms of family, work, politics or intimacy» (Turkle, 2015, in Portela, 2019, p. 55). One of the ways which is indicated as generating perverse effects is email, due to its «effects of interrupting prolonged intellectual work» and its involvement in the «rationale of bureaucratising and standardising work and organisation management processes» (Cal Newport in Portela, 2019, p. 61n1).

4 — Other causes that inhibit self-knowledge and empowerment, regarding memory, reasoning, and pedagogical-ideological twisting

Comprehension of textual content is greater on paper than on screens, especially among children, according to existing studies[27]. These conclusions go against certain fashionable discourses that the digital should occupy everyday routines at school (and beyond) as if it were a second skin. The obsession with technology has costs, which in this case are counterproductive: although school is presented as a space for careful study (and, therefore, mental concentration), in practice these types of trends

regarding the mode of reading reward immediateness and dispersion, and are «highly incompatible» with concentration, due to the «association of these devices with short interactions and immediate rewards» (citation by researcher Ladislao Salmerón in Silva, 2019, p. 34). It should be noted that this is not inevitable; however, it will be the case if continuing the «current use we make of technology» (*ibid.*). Roger Chartier has explained that this is due to today's predominance of a hypertextual rationale in the digital and on the Internet and the overlapping of information or texts on the same screen. This is despite the fact that the digital and the Internet are also able to provide in-depth, continuous reading from an e-book, although access to them remains today unequal and restricted to a minority, due to the costs involved and limited public investment or sponsorship for this feature. These reflections are based on information collected by Chartier since the end of the 20th century[28].

For Natália Caseiro, based on her pedagogical experience, reading on screen is «dispersive reading» which may be cumulative with other forms of reading and has introduced significant alterations, especially among young people: «it can be observed, particularly among younger people, that on-screen behaviour is transferred to books, which can be seen in the difficulties they display with concentration, fully reading a medium-length or long text and consuming reading time. The entity of «time» takes on new perceptions that have nothing to do with a «lack of time for reading or writing», but rather with the subject's inherent difficulty in having/facing up to time alone with the page, without the mediation of an interactive medium» (Caseiro, 2007, p. 111).

According to some authors, hypertext itself has relegated parataxis (formation/development of an argument), instead favouring hypotaxis (omitting subordinating conjunctions, in other words, steps in reasoning). This enables an undermining of ancient abilities for rhetoric in exploring relevant issues of civil society by creating and interpreting thorough arguments (see Kolb, 1994 and Brent, n.d.[29]).

Over this almost half a century, expansion of the digital has produced a variety of debates, particularly on the connection between communication, education and culture from an inclusive, future-focused perspective. From an initial emphasis on the need to guarantee digital literacy for the entire population, there has been a gradual shift towards the need to ensure full capacity of reading on several media, communication technologies and modes and intensities of reading in order to avoid compromising the future of societies, with scholars, organisations, recommendations (e.g. UNESCO and the OECD) and official programmes (e.g. Portugal's National Reading Plan and equivalents abroad) in the field of education and conceiving of reading as a decisive, key factor for all (Alçada, 2016; on these debates, see Melo, 2020).

In short, take up of the digital, which began to be seen (decades ago) as a primarily positive trend, has begun to be understood and/or analysed also (or increasingly) for its negative effects, including by the same leading scholars (e.g. Turkle in Portela, 2019, p. 55; and Brent, n.d.[30]).

There are several causes, but I would highlight two: 1) the effects of sedimentation and analysis of evolution have brought about a new questioning and interpretative positioning (particularly on the issues of forms of reading and literacy levels);

2) the political and ideological evolution in Western economies and societies themselves has stimulated certain trends in the instrumentalised, manipulative and alienating use of the Internet.

But there are older factors that contribute to the lack of self-knowledge. For centuries until the present day, much formal education has moved in the same individualist direction, in what Jorge Ramos do Ó suggests is the «government of oneself» (where students should become the subject of their own education), adopting some of Michel Foucault's approaches on the theme (Foucault, 2010; see also Ó, 2003, pp. 6-10). This teaching has often led down undesirable paths, single paths with a performative, productivist sense, where space and time for maturing and contemplation, for self-knowledge and personal creation have been rare (Ó, 2019). One of the great names of conceptual art who has been reflecting on the place of art in education and society since the 1960s, the Uruguayan Luis Camnitzer, has diagnosed the following pedagogical-ideological twisting: «we have an incorrect ideology at work, which has associated art with creator, with individuality and signature. All this pushes prices up but does not bring power [to art]»[31].

5 — Conclusions

In this exploratory survey, several themes have been related with the superabundance of information, the standardisation of content supply (even if it is segmented into market niches), the manipulation of consumers' tastes by large conglomerates (whether in publishing or digital platforms) and the spread of a kind of discontinuous, segmented and fragmented reading with negative effects on the ability for reasoning, critical, creative,

imaginative thinking and individual and collective emancipation. The aim was not to seek out close cause and effect relationships, but rather to try to understand how the changes in technology and communication that have accompanied entry into the digital world are having implications on our ways of reading, communicating and living, individually and in communities.

Receiving this excursion may lead to a conclusion about an apocalyptic or simply catastrophic scenario, in the style of many exercises in opinion expressed every day on social media, with a longstanding tradition in Western culture (and beyond, see Carmelo, 2003 or 2013). This may perhaps be an over-the-top conclusion, although it is not up to me to give an opinion in this context. I would simply point out that, regarding these questions already addressed by several specialists (as mentioned in this chapter), many solutions have been suggested: safeguarding and democratising digital books as closed texts, with authorship, and published for the market (Chartier, 2002, p. 27); political and economic regulation (e.g. Bebiano, 2019; Covas, 2019); raising citizens' critical awareness of the dangers of poor Internet use[32]; changes in behaviour; changes in political perspectives, not just in public policy linked to ICT but also government policies in general (Klinenberg, 2006 and 2007).

The issue is not in using other paths to return to a debate that has already been held and was relatively fruitless (because it was presented in a Manichean way[33]), among critics and apologists of mass culture, among apocalyptic and integrated intellectuals, to use Umberto Eco's terms, but rather to focus and seek to critically answer the problem that Eco himself highlighted: «from the moment when the situation of an industrial society

makes that type of communication relationship known as a set of mass media unavoidable, what cultural action is possible to allow that mass media to bind cultural values?» (Eco, 1979, pp. 49-50). And going from here to fine-tuning the formulation and demand, broadening to a questioning that includes the need to safeguard, as far as possible, a capacity for reflection, criticism, imagination and creativity for everyone, for freedom of expression and access to transparent and accurate information and knowledge, which encourages an open and healthy democratic debate while stimulating truth, clashes and consensus.

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[2] For more on this field of studies, see Dosse, 2012; Ferreira, 2012; and Bebiano, n.d..

[3] See Granados, 2019. On Zaid, see Melo, 2020.

[4] For a critical perspective on the society of hyperchoice and the risks of hyperindividualism, see Santos, 2006a and 2006b. On «textual superabundance», a theme already discussed in other periods, see Chartier, 2002, pp. 20, 75-6 and 118-9. On supply on the digital technology side, see Estanque, 2019. On the «epidemic of loneliness» and «absence of community in real life» among younger people, see Jalali, 2019.

[5] As Elísio Estanque mentions with regard to critical collective sub-

jects (2019): «on the one hand, individual initiative is promoted and stimulated through the growing dependence on digital technologies; on the other hand, there is cancellation or extensive restriction on the emergence of new collective subjects that oppose the system or who seek to open gaps therein for new utopias».

[6] Having said that, I do not believe either that the place of schools should be reduced to students' performance, whatever that may be, or to their function of «social reproduction», nor should the strength of «youth typicality» or culture be ignored, as Caseiro advises (2007, pp. 104-6).

[7] For a definition of the concept, see IAIP, 2014; on the theme see Sapiro, 2011; Hawthorne, 2014a and 2014b.

[8] For a broader description of the sector's historical framework – including «limited sensitivity to economic and market factors» by book publishers (in Portugal and beyond), the «trend towards drawing up product-driven strategies» (i.e. based on marketing and the company's technical expertise for developing products that deliberately fill gaps or will create/reach new customer bases) and the arrival of «large commercial conglomerates» – see Furtado, 2019, pp. XXI/XXII.

[9] See Beja, 2012, pp. 87-93 and 106-10; Schiffrin (2013[2006]); Sapiro, 2011; Bhaskar, 2013, p. 3; Hawthorne, 2014a and 2014b; and Furtado, 2019, p. XXIII.

[10] According to Costa (2006, p. 2), based on culture economists such as Richard Caves (2000), a «new «product» by a creator is always something uncertain [...] and this characteristic actually justifies the dissemination of mechanisms that tend to seek to minimise risk by investing in a more «conventional» offer, particularly by large companies».

[11] Furtado, 2019: XXVIII. For a more detailed description of the essence and effects of the «net giants», see *idem*: XXVII/ XXVIII.

[12] Regarding the latter consequence, I believe that this assumption has many exceptions, if we look at the fact that readers often cannot

access content from primary sources (the most common), nor content from many secondary sources (or if they have been able to access them, they had to pay for it in the form of broadband for downloading files or access to download the text in question).

[13] It is important to note that the effects of the gradual overlaying of the «intensive reading» mode over the «extensive reading» mode have been noted to have taken place since around 1750 (according to historian Rolf Engelsing), however, I believe this issue is not directly related to the more precise question addressed here, that of extreme intensification of quick reading and, in particular, discontinuous reading (see Chartier & Cavallo, 1998-1999).

[14] This is what Carr (2008) tells us based on his experience and the experience of fellow intellectuals: «I'm not thinking the way I used to think. I can feel it most strongly when I'm reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I'd spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That's rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel as if I'm always dragging my wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle. [...] And what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski. I'm not the only one. When I mention my troubles with reading to friends and acquaintances – literary types, most of them – many say they're having similar experiences. The more they use the Web, the more they have to fight to stay focused on long pieces of writing. Some of the bloggers I follow have also begun mentioning the phenomenon».

[15] On the implications of this reality (and immersion in the digital in general) on everyday writing, see Carmelo, 2013, p. 380-1. It should be noted that non-digital book reading can also be done alongside writing, if a procedure is used that makes it possible to keep the book open without using one's hands.

[16] Note that, for this philosopher, the «collective acceleration of time» – which begins «in the socio-economic process itself» and involves «interaction on social networks» – «is a form of domination between us and domination of the world beyond us», which «drags with it the entire world, which is more and more vulnerable to our power» (*idem*, p. 21). This accelerated time is imposed by «planned obsolescence», which prompts the rapid replacement of one instant with another, and so on, arranging «social time in such a way that we remain in that condition» of continuous and insatiable «consumerist voracity», trapped in the «present instant» and novelty, and this finds an excellent ally in social media (*idem*, pp. 21 and 101). The acceleration of social processes has significant effects on thought, as the same author argues based on the work of Harmurt Rosa (*Social acceleration: a new theory of modernity*, 2013): «and thought itself descends into this, constantly fleeing itself, and thought becomes just another item of planned obsolescence, to the point that a presumption of truth and validity of arguments that does not obsolesce becomes unsustainable. It is this novelty that must be highlighted when we talk about post-truth and gives credence to the idea that thinking slowly is needed» (*idem*, p. 21).

[17] On the issue of abuses of power, see the opinion of the leader of the main forum for debate on ideas in the digital world, Paddy Cosgrave, Web Summit mentor: «there are large autocratic companies [also in the digital world] whose internal rationale often harms the world. This requires scrutiny, monitoring, regulation. It is a pattern that comes from the past. We have seen it in energy, in cars... [...] Let's look at social media [...] Jack Dorsey, of Twitter, showed us this week that we don't even

know what social networks' seatbelt is, and he therefore announced that he's going to ban all and any political advertising on the network because there is no other response at the moment. It's an interesting position, but it has only been taken after massive media scrutiny» (Ferreira, 2019, p. 4).

[18] After the 2017 presidential elections in the US, a former Facebook VP, Chamath Palihapityia, gave a direct warning at Stanford University: «I think we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works» (cited in Hoyle, 2019, p. 14). One of the main Facebook backers, Roger McNamee, then wrote a book warning about prolonged abuse of trust by the company (and by rival companies such as Google), and the harm they cause democracy and free competition, in a symptomatically named book called *Zucked: waking up to the Facebook catastrophe* (see analysis and excerpts in Hoyle, 2019). Regarding the company Facebook, McNamee even talks about a «clear and present danger to democracy» (cited in Hoyle, 2019, p. 13). On this matter, he says that both Facebook and Google have a «business model that compels them to manipulate attention» and since they «need data» in order to do this, they have to resort to «spying». Doing this and making that information available regarding a significant portion of the world's population indirectly allows those citizens to be manipulated by third parties, whether these are companies or governments: «when we manipulate people's attention in the advertising field, which is what Facebook and Google have done, essentially we are giving advertisers access to the deepest feelings and emotions of two billion people». These secrets were not only put on sale (and continue to be sold) but in 2016 Russians were among the purchasers. And he adds: «the line between manipulation of attention and manipulation of behaviour is very tenuous. [... Facebook and Google] have created platforms that allow advertisers to do that» (cited in *ibidem*).

[19] Still, their easy assumption [of Sergey Brin & Larry Page, founders

of Google] that we'd all «be better off if our brains were supplemented, or even replaced, by an artificial intelligence is unsettling. It suggests a belief that intelligence is the output of a mechanical process, a series of discrete steps that can be isolated, measured, and optimized. In Google's world, the world we enter when we go online, there's little place for the fuzziness of contemplation. Ambiguity is not an opening for insight but a bug to be fixed. The human brain is just an outdated computer that needs a faster processor and a bigger hard drive. The idea that our minds should operate as high-speed data-processing machines is not only built into the workings of the Internet, it is the network's reigning business model as well. The faster we surf across the Web – the more links we click and pages we view – the more opportunities Google and other companies gain to collect information about us and to feed us advertisements» (*ibidem*).

[20] E.g. Carr, 2008; Lewis & McCormick, 2018; Sutter, 2018. Estanque (2019) mentions the following, on the subject of young people's particular vulnerability: «supported by the multidimensional marketing of digital networks, exploration of potential customers gives way to mass production. With the decisive help of sophisticated software designed to monitor our daily movements, step by step, client segments are designed with specific patterns of likes and duly moulded to receive each new product that big brands launch on the market. And in this process it is individuals themselves – the focus on younger groups is no accident – that become the main lubricators in the system. Our sensory faculties and behavioural models are being altered without our realising. Frenzied by this collective dizziness, seduced by the sparkle and agreeableness of the gadgets we carry around in our pockets, guided by stimuli and routines that lead us to escape from the real world, we lose our sense of the communication chain or the search for knowledge. Several studies have revealed dependence on devices, growing addiction to swiping, the infinite panoply of icons, animated applications and platforms, are

introducing impressive alterations in teenagers' and young people's cognitive schema».

[21] He alludes to the levelling caused by the empire of television based on *Contre-feux* by Pierre Bourdieu.

[22] Muniz Sodré cited in Soares, 2005, p. 6. According to Carmelo (2013, p. 397), aesthesia is «a state of intensity that connects us to persuasive images with which we establish a continuous interest in our lives». Currently, «aesthetisia comes from the way the mobility of digital images is internalised by those who scroll through and decode them. The virtual creates a little world in each moment that is also the world of those who read them. This hypnotic identification is at the heart of new types of intensity – as in the example of aesthesia – which form an osmosis between perception and flows that reach it» (*ibidem*). The same author also adds an effect of this reality: «virtual images, like all hyper-reality, do not entail a context and, therefore, an «outside» and an «inside» that characterise them» (*ibidem*).

[23] This is the original definition of information overload: «information overload occurs when the amount of input to a system exceeds its processing capacity. Decision makers have fairly limited cognitive processing capacity. Consequently, when information overload occurs, it is likely that a reduction in decision quality will occur» (cited in Gross, 1964).

[24] Moniz Sodré warns of damage to reasoning: «today there is an interruption in long-term reasoning. Excess information is like metastasis of cancer. People cannot achieve concentration, time for reflection» (cited in Soares, 2005, p. 8).

[25] The issue is emphasised by the fact that today's capitalism has focused on an economy of massive data, since «data has become the raw material to be extracted and users » activities are its natural source (Furtado, 2019, p. XXVIII).

[26] In terms of individuals «caught in the net». According to Carmelo

(2003, p. 15), in this new historical framework «suddenly dominated by the emergence of an end to mediation and a desire for instantaneity, subjects tend to expand and become confused with the object-globe-simulation, also becoming slaves to true flows (consuming, travelling, seeing, etc.) and a new *logos* (understood as a new encounter between immaterial algorithms in which mankind sees itself, when thinking and thinking about itself, and the algorithms of technological artefactual atomistics in which mankind believes when seeing and imagining itself)».

[27] See the results of the meta-analysis «don't throw away your printed books», which combined 54 studies in English carried out between 2000 and 2017 on more than 171,000 participated in Delgado, Vargas, Ackerman & Salmerón, 2018. Summary of the article and the experiences of a co-author in Silva, 2019.

[28] Chartier, 2002, pp. 101-123.

[29] According to Kolb (1994): «the principal argument against nonlinear web writing in philosophy is straightforward: philosophy necessarily involves argument, and argument necessarily involves a beginning, a middle, and an end. Thus a truly philosophical text needs a line. This claims more than that works of philosophy should include arguments. It says that any philosophical work should be essentially one large argument. It is through the argumentative line that any piece of philosophical writing does its work. On this view, a philosophical argument (just as a mathematical proof) cannot be a cloud of disjointed statements. Hence the philosophical line cannot be dissolved in the way some have dreamed of dissolving the narrative line. And thus philosophical hypertext will have to respect the line by making arguments the units of presentation, and by maintaining an overall argumentative-hence linear-structure». Brent (n.d.), a Canadian researcher in communication studies, also raises this possibility: «there are very good arguments to be made that hypertext, which privileges infinite hypotaxis rather than parataxis, can paralyse the ability of rhetoric to explore important ques-

tions of civil society through the creation and interpretation of rigorous arguments. Hypertext may simply not be the right medium to foster the mental discipline and social inquiry spawned and nurtured by three thousand years of rhetorical interaction in speech and writing» (*ibidem*). Other authors, however, emphasise the positive aspects, above all connected to hypermedia, such as Vallverdú (2007, n.p.), who, nonetheless, does not forget that «electronic media show several cognitive problems and of quality/control of the information». For this author, «hypertext is an expository device that offers new rhetoric strategies, hypermedia ones: with higher argumentative speed and a reduction in the depth of analysis». The emphasis here is on the potential for social use of this new mode of rhetoric: «this time, civil society has not been waiting for a philosophical response to hypertextual uses; they have just done it. Hypertext has increased the number of discourses and arguments, provoking social actions and attitude changes with very fluent and interactive media. Perhaps we don't aspire to logical perfection but to active hypertextual thoughts».

[30] Brent (n.d.) recently noted the following: «many, including myself, have argued that this form [webtext] will revolutionise reading and writing in positive ways congruent with the postmodern view of discourse. But I am not convinced that these sunny predictions about hypertext, including my own, have asked all of the really tough questions that need to be asked if we are going to understand our role as teachers in this transformed textual world». It is important to remember the position of the influential founder of MIT's MediaLab, Nicholas Negroponte, on this issue of early optimism about the Internet. He believed that the Internet would make young people immune to nationalism in 20 years (in Jalali, 2019). The concentration of businesses with power in the digital world and advancement of closed, watched over, manipulated and commercialised Internet have also contributed to this disbelief (Alcántara, 2019, pp. 3 and 7-8).

[31] Cited in Salema, 2019, p. 34; see also his work *Didactica de la liberacion: arte conceptualista latinoamericana*, accessible at <http://descargasar-tevisuales.blogspot.com/2014/07/didactica-de-la-liberacion-luis.html>.

[32] Sutter, 2018; Hoyle, 2019; Pereira, 2019a, p. 59. Hoyle mentions an NGO dedicated to informing parents about the effects of technology and media, Common Sense Media, which has been joined by McNamee.

[33] As Jalali (2019) mentions about the debate on the implications of the digital, particularly digital social networks: «taking the middle path between cyberoptimistic and cyberpessimistic visions fails to hit the target in terms of the role of digital [social] networks on politics. They are not inherently positive or negative for democracy. Firstly, because they only contain the potential to be a positive factor by increasing access to information; by broadening the debate of ideas; by facilitating communication. But they similarly contain the potential to be a negative factor, for example as vehicles for misinformation. A dual truth exists within them».