

Postmodernity, technology and human communication*

Postmodernidad, tecnología y comunicación humana

Mario Souza y Machorro**

<https://doi.org/10.36105/mye.2020v31n3.02>

Abstract

The link postmodern technology/human communication has in *mass media*, TV, cinema, the internet and its derivatives, uncensored publications and advertising tools of educational distortion and community health. *Postmodernity* influences social organization and culture with its dichotomy *rationalism* vs. *irrationalism*. The Kantian vision of science, morality and art for a fairer, freer and happier society crumble in the attempt to «overcome modernity». Cybernetic society bureaucratizes and impedes man's freedom. *Mass media* and the communication society have not generated a more *transparent* or self-aware society, but more complex and chaotic. *Subject-object* and *public-private* dichotomies make the individual oblivious to his life, an element of science fiction, immersed in a virtual process that displaces him to

* Modified from the original titled *The magnificent tool of technology and human communication*. Discussion table *Postmodern technology, its bioethical scope and impact on mental health*. First International Congress of Bioethics: *Knowledge, law and new technologies in health. Past, present and future*. January 13-17, 2020. Guillermo Soberón Auditorium, Palace of the Faculty of Medicine, UNAM, CDMX.

** Psychiatrist, psychotherapist and psychoanalyst. Member of the Mexican National Academy of Bioethics. Mexico. Email: souzaym@yahoo.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9599-6845>

Reception: March 20, 2020. Acceptance: May 15, 2020.

electronic worlds. In the *ecstasy of communication*, the medium predominates with its dispersion over the message, scientific knowledge is oriented to technological development and power, highlighting its linguistic aspect that does not prevent more and more from being talked about and written worse. The impact of *mass media* drives antisocial behaviours and «the search for intense sensations» to placate emotional states stemming from the existential vacuum, frustration and vital dissatisfaction of certain populations. The persistence of alienating, self-aware and reality-distorting disclosure does not encourage the development of a healthy personal, linking and social function.

Keywords: postmodernity, technology, communication, *mass media*, irrationality, alienation

This article focuses on the realization of a succinct description of the conjunction formed by three interacting elements, whose simultaneity, although it has been extended to all contemporary groups and conglomerates, impacts them in different ways and scope, but always with some degree of distortion and impact on health, as expressed throughout the text. The intention of its preparation is to propose, from the perspective of Mental Health Education, a critical vision of the subject.

At present, it is well known by the different human groups, that *postmodernity* has important and decisive technological support, which directly influences communication between people. Moreover, although, to date, a consensus has not been created among scholars on the subject, it is stated that *postmodernity* begins reliably with the use of the artifacts responsible for the insurmountable scope of mass communication.¹

This preferred social way of communicating, not always in a correctly or adequately form made by commentators, given the linguistic distortions that it entails, is appreciated in all media, times, conditions and circumstances. On the cell phone, for example, that

is useful for everything...! Even to make calls. On the internet, which in turn houses so many contradictory things, that it is difficult to distinguish the chaff from the grain. In its multivariate messages, images and everyday sounds, which facilitate a large bland exchange of bland messages, because the others have as it has been found to be harmful in a variable way, from mild to serious, as in child pornography.²

In the laser beam, of wide scientific usefulness, the *gamma-knife* and imaging, as a tool for neuroimaging, etcetera, with its varied technical and medical usefulness, which continue to surprise with its versatile usefulness for health and, in particular, against certain diseases that are difficult to access for diagnosis and treatment.

In the CD, with its incomparable quality, difficult to beat, which brings together wonderful music collections and which, being an echo of history and progress, includes at the same time, all kinds of art characters, which include, for example, from the frivolous and trivial, those who have little to contribute, to the most serious and exemplary.

In the «Tele» and its «dis-educational, anti-educational» and violent programs, which reverberate and multiply in the most varied hostile artifacts and video games, which negatively shape the minds of the people who use them, as in the case of childhood populations and even in general public opinion, which cannot prevent its use or its harmful impact.

In the cinema, with their mafias and abstract proposals, so difficult to grasp, that they interpret reality fantastically and that, as in the theater, given the difficulty of its realization, they do not always stick to facts or history and disregard the truth, in many cases, changing it capriciously according to their needs, both for production and for economic gain. Finally, in the tabloid press, always at the service of private and in many cases dishonest commercial interests, which inform, deforming social reality and manipulating it for their interests.

Yes, all of them undoubtedly also have colossal advantages, *but only when used in this way*, because more often, according to the opinion of the researchers on this topic, who have informed us with their documentation for several decades, cause direct and indirect detriment to society. And what to say, for example, of the daily news distortion, in all the media, the *fake-news*, certain books of dubious origin, written by upstart people on the matter and infinity of uncensored programs and publications, whose unfortunate scope is simply *incomparable! So much so, that today*, they affect our environment with their imposing and repetitive aggressiveness, effective and penetrating at the same time. Such a condition purposely manipulated and full of health risks has various modalities, appreciated daily in our sociocultural habitat, which end up overwhelming and directing recipients, although they are intended to be shown only as persuasive «suggestions». For example, for the purchase of all kinds of objects and with the attractive clothing of seduction, as they are symbols of *postmodernity*.

This particular condition of *postmodernity* is, for some authors,³ a preconceive notion, apparently originated in the architecture of the seventies. Other authors question whether it is a concept, a style, a new period, a practice or an economic phase.⁴ Still others consider it a proportional reaction to the *unfinished project of modernity*. That is to say, an indication of the historical meaning of an era and, at the same time, its end, which influences social organization and culture, manifested itself in the *Rationalism vs. Irrationalism*.⁵

In this regard, keep in mind that during the Enlightenment of the 18th century, whose development founded the values of modern society, the idea of «the individuality or emancipation of the human being» was promoted. Emmanuel Kant tenaciously promoted a formal and differentiated reason, independent of metaphysics and religion, thus generating new spheres of validity: science, morals and art in favor of a more just, free and happy society, threatened by the impoverishment of the vital world of people. Considered in this way, this progress achieved from the perspective

of an attempt to *overcome modernity*, *postmodernism* represents a *regression threat that blurs the values achieved*.⁶ See, for example, in the irrationalism of a managed and cybernetics society –as it is indicated–, which causes the death of man,⁷ facilitates bureaucratization and the administrative annexation of the world. However at the same time, *postmodernism* as Foster points out, promotes «a different possibility of an existence» which emphasizes the role of *mass media* in the uprising of the *communication society*.⁸ However, the large set of informants called the *mass media* does not help characterize society for being more *transparent* or more self-aware, but rather as a more complex, entropic and chaotic society. In short, the path of plurality and the erosion of the *reality principle*, which so effectively disseminates the aforementioned incessant multi-information activity, is a polluting mix of competing images, interpretations and reconstructions, without guarantee of greater recognition or authenticity. They are only an effect of dissonance, which, according to Vattimo, who defends *postmodernity* fully, «paradoxically encourages emancipation».⁹

For J. Baudrillard,¹⁰ *postmodernity* deprives the meaning of the dichotomies: *Subject-object* and *public-private*. People –this renowned author points out– no longer project themselves on their objects, affects, representations and fantasies. «The psychological dimension continues to pale and the subject feels: *that it is no longer where things happen*». It is in the *ecstasy of communication* that the existence of linking an individual with his own objects lies. In fact, both concepts by J. Baudrillard: *primitive telematics* and *simulation hyperrealism*, point out how: *an individual is now alien to his life; it is a simple element of science fiction, homogenized in a virtual process, where body movements and efforts are displaced to electronic worlds*. Such space-time miniaturization, are the elements immersed in a process of devices and artifacts foreign to his mind, which ends up reducing the public space, which is now occupied by multifaceted advertising.¹¹ Today everything has advertising; today everything is saleable; today you have to buy everything.

Apparently, at present we have emerged from the drama of the *path of alienation* pointed out insistently by E. Fromm, to live the pornographic *ecstasy of communication*, where everything is exposed; the frantic production of information is reported uncensored. Thus, *the message no longer exists; it is the medium that predominates with its dispersion*. For this reason, for J. Baudrillard, *postmodernism* represents the end of intimacy and interiority; a new manifestation of the form of *excessive exposure and transparency, of a world that prevails and ignores the person*.¹² On the other hand, for J. F. Lyotard, both *modernism* and *postmodernism* are opposed to each other, due to the disappearance of the social idea of progress in rationality and freedom.

Western society for the past two centuries believed in the certainty of the development of art, technology, knowledge and freedoms as beneficial to humanity. Likewise, initiatives, discoveries and institutions enjoyed social legitimacy, insofar as they contributed to individual freedom, development and emancipation. For this reason, scientific knowledge for J. F. Lyotard,¹³ becomes a kind of discourse linked to the development of technological transformations, especially when it comes to communication. The multiplication of information machines also affects the circulation of knowledge, as well as the development of the means of circulation, transportation, sound and images. From this, all the knowledge that cannot be translated into *quantum of information* will be obviated and subjecting the results and their advances to a language foreign to the unfamiliar, that is, cybernetics.

The projection in this regard will be the relationship that occurs between generators and users of knowledge, which, increasingly, will take the form of *producers and consumers of goods*. Knowledge already is and will be produced to be sold; ceasing to be in itself *its own end*, which will directly affect its use value, since it is not thought in terms of exchange value. In this way, in the *postmodern* era, science reinforces its importance as an indispensable commodity for countries and productive powers; *knowledge is and will be a matter*

of world power struggle. See how Nation-States have struggled to dominate territories, the exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor. Today, their focus is directed towards mastering information. Therefore, *knowledge and power are of interest to them and at the same time represent the sides of the same coin.*¹⁴

It happens that in the heart of the computer age, knowledge is a matter of government. See for example, that a few weeks ago, president Trump of the United States ordered the use of a *drone* to kill a prominent iranian general in Irak. The next day, «stated a television news program in that country», his military were so upset that, in retaliation, they launched missiles over two U.S. military bases in that country. It is worthwhile to point out –that the U.S. has military bases in most parts of the world, stationed since the end of the Second World War–, killing at least 80 soldiers. Immediately afterwards the so-called «Big Mouth» Trump denied the facts and affirmed that no soldier had died, and in return, that he will punish them with severe commercial repression as he has done with other countries. The issue then is, what should we believe and to whom? What really happened? Days later –once people were confused–, it was learned from different news reports that the first news had been true and the White House spokesperson in Washington no longer made any comment, thus keeping a suspicious silence...

In a society where the communicational component is more evident every day, both for its quality of reality, and for the problematic condition that it tends to have, although it would like to be ignored, regarding the linguistic aspect, it acquires special relevance. It is not only from the natural philological point of view, but also for its valuable educational-formative sense of transmission of content, ideas and emotions. However, behold, that increasingly each time, paradoxically, we speak and write worse; we continue in our country as in many others, without achieving a minimum daily individual reading.

Now, in this direction, we must consider that the rise and *spread of computing, the depersonalization of knowledge and the ecstasy of communi-*

cation, when mixed with telecommunications, facilitates war and, likewise, threatens national borders and dissolves regional identities. Paradoxically, in the century where thousands of messages emerge every day, *information* as such, far surpasses audiences and prevails over *communication*. To this end, it should be noted that communication should be understood, preferably by its definition: «Only that in which the receiver using the communication channel, states the sender who has received the message, which creates an effective communication action, although, not all receivers receive or decode the message». At this point, it should be noted that *inform* and *communicate* are different verbs, of action and meaning. Take as an example, that one can buy more than 500 channels to see their screen... but only see 3, without knowing the others. In other words, much of the information will be lost in the ether, without anyone noticing or worrying; it is so much that it is impossible to find out all the programming. However, the important thing to highlight as one of many arguments is that the so-called *mass media society* is not, unfortunately, that desirable society: more enlightened, more educated, more joyous and better organized to provide satisfaction to audiences. The varied visions of the world shown by their managers pulverize the ideal of a transparent society and fulfill Nietzsche's prophecy: *The true world, in the end... becomes a fable*.

Hence, then, the *postmodern* society, being a society characterized by the emergence and dominance of the media, their *messages and technologies*, accentuates the danger and horror of a *social homogenization*, also marked by the ideological background of its messages. In this sense, the opinions of nihilist philosophers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, as well as pragmatists such as Dewey and Wittgenstein, stand out, pointing out that: «Being does not necessarily coincide with what is stable, fixed and permanent, but is linked more to the event, the consensus, the dialogue and the interpretation». In other words, it becomes a challenge that impels each of the members of society *to be able to receive the experience of*

changes and contradictions in the postmodern world, as an opportunity for «the new way of being human being».

On the one hand, the informative-promotional activities usually derived from lucrative interests, influence the cultural universe with a diverse and harmful impact, which today –already assumed thoughtlessly and inertial– prevents communities from distinguishing it, also thanks to inadequate conceptualization, spread of the mental and physical health of the communities. On the other hand, in addition to the usual contradiction and its consequent confusion, manipulation and its inherent psychopathology are added to distort the vectors of healthy socialization, that is to say, with the recognized universal ethical values.

Faced with such a phenomenon, the members of society, unequally prepared to notice such a deleterious influence, are also not –nor do they feel apt– to erect a reasonable defense.¹⁴ Yes, scientists of social representation promote health education and its psychosocial aspects: sexual education, against violence and drug use, activities in favor of the family, etc. But the scientific illiteracy of the community and the trivialization of the culture that they spread, pointed out at the time by C. Fuentes, contributes, for example, to insufficient health management, which is why it is necessary *to adapt scientific information and its appropriate social communication of the truth*.¹⁵ In addition, the systematic impact of the *mass media* on vulnerable populations drives antisocial, self-aggressive and hetero-aggressive behaviors and others «in search of intense sensations». Among the best known of these, extreme sports, abuse and dependence on psychotropic –legal and illegal–, driving high-speed vehicles, promiscuity and sexual violence, suicidal tendencies, carrying weapons, robberies, vandalism, etc. All the previous ones with a view to placating their emotional states –not only those derived from the interest to explore the world, which would be legitimate–, but those derived from ignorance, existential emptiness, frustration and life dissatisfaction, despair, alienation, chaos and suicidal tendencies, in whose manifest psychopathology

many members of the child-youth populations participate even without knowing it.

Consequently, the high cost of ignoring the impact of *mass media* on communitarian psychophysical health, brings with it an incalculable dose of suffering and preventable pain. Such social condition, suffered by those who do not know that they do not know, who are subject to submission and inequity, legitimately demands with its unjust pitiful condition, an energetic and determined humanitarian participation, from those of us who form society, with actions responsible and effective in training, educational and health character. Therefore, it should be noted that as long as an alienating social disclosure scheme persists, alienating self-consciousness and falsifying reality, combined with people's ignorance and thoughtlessness and zero weight of messages, it is *delusional to expect the development of an individual, connectable and communitarian healthy function*.¹⁶

Bibliographic notes

¹ BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. The Ecstasy of Communication. In: FOSTER HAL, ET AL. Postmodernity. Barcelona: Kairós; 1988.

² MATTIAS, B., GRETCHEN, R., BLYKER, M., POTENZA, N. When pornography becomes a problem. Clinical insights. Psychiatric Times. 2019, Dec. 13, vol. 36, issue 12.

³ GÓMEZ SÁNCHEZ, LUIS EDUARDO. Deconstruction or new syntheses. Critical approaches to the notion of postmodernity. In: Unknown images. Modernity at the postmodern crossroads. CLACSO; 1988

⁴ FOSTER, HAL ET AL. Postmodernity. Barcelona: Kairós; 1988.

⁵ HABERMAS, J. The philosophical discourse of modernity. Madrid: Taurus; 1989.

⁶ LECHNER, NORBERT. A disappointment called postmodern. In: Unknown images. Modernity at the postmodern crossroads. CLACSO; 1988.

⁷ HOPENHAYN, MARTIN. Postmodern debate and the cultural dimension of development (a descriptive scheme). In: Unknown images. Modernity at the postmodern crossroads. CLACSO; 1990.

⁸ JAMESON, FREDERIC. Postmodernism and consumer society. In: FOSTER, HAL ET AL., Postmodernity. Barcelona: Kairós; 1988.

⁹ VATTIMO, GIANNI. The end of modernity; Nihilism and hermeneutics in postmodern culture. Spain: Gedisa; 1986. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvf3w4sh>.19

¹⁰ LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANÇOIS. The postmodern condition. Report on knowledge. Cátedra, Col. Teorema: Madrid; 1984.

¹¹ LYOTARD, JEAN-FRANÇOIS. Postmodernity (explained to children). Mexico: Gedisa Mexicana; 1990.

¹² VATTIMO, GIANNI. The transparent society. Paidós/ICE-UAB: Contemporary Philosophy Collection; 1990, 10.

¹³ BARROSO GÓMEZ, J. Media and postmodernity. Towards an ethical, community and planetary press. Reason and word. Sport, culture and communication. Number 69: 2-10.

¹⁴ SOUZA AND MACHORRO, M. *Mass media* and psychopathology. Sex, violence and drugs. Electronic Journal of Neuropsychological Medicine 1. 2012, January 13: 519-526.

¹⁵ WATZLAWICK, PAUL. Theory of human communication: interactions, pathology and paradoxes. Palo Alto, California: Herder; 1967. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvt9k0tj>

¹⁶ SOUZA AND MACHORRO, M. Social and Family Violence in current Peru. Hermilo Valdizán Hospital. Office of Support for Teaching and Research. Farindustria Auditorium: Lima, Peru; 2012, May; 29-30.