

Proceedings

Mediatized Capitalism: Searching for the Individual's Algorithmical Identities through Reflexivity [†]

Paulo Martins

CIES—ISCTE/IUL, Lisboa 1000, Portugal; aquiaolado@gmail.com

[†] Presented at the IS4SI 2017 Summit DIGITALISATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY, Gothenburg, Sweden, 12–16 June 2017.

Published: 9 June 2017

1. Description of the Research Problem

Are the profiles of attention/interpretation/intention of individuals algorithmically auto-induced under Mediatized Capitalism?

2. Theoretical Framework

From the hype of web 2.0 paradises, the world seems to be running on data. People have bowed in cascades to the magnificent “disguised as free” exchange. Instead of inter-defined social situations individuals are mostly “running after the” never-ending fluxes of today’s social configuration. Experience is being restructured through material and immaterial processes, in an overwhelming part—in social production and partly also in social reproduction—autonomous of fleshy creators. In neoliberalism, capitalism becomes not simply another media (Fuchs, 2007), capitalism is the media, and mediatization becomes the pivot of social ordering, strongly decreasing the demos’ transformative action possibilities.

Acknowledging the mediated construction of reality that the becoming of a datafied/interconnected materiality and ecosystem imports to the social ordering of the quotidian (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). And, drawing upon a view of the present endless cross-contamination and endless refeedings of society’s communicative processes (Hall, 1982), the emergence of a new code is perceived in the social configuration we live by/in/on. A roaring code that rarifies and reifies our social realities, from sender, through channel, to receiver; from production, through distribution, to consumption. Communication became too noisy: “my message” is everyone else’s noise, as the messages for all the others are my noise and my deafness. Listening is almost impossible. Communication returns to its historic unidirectionality, not allowing for any hysteric feedback loops: it is a specialty of some who can gather literacies, access and resources, the medium ends up with the messages and the exclusive participation of a few. Voice for the vast majority is rarified. Lastly, communication tries to modulate the social practices and representations of recipients, reifying conventions of legitimacy, colonizing attentions and guiding intentions, and closing us in refeeding each flux and facilitating the unending iterations of the process. This “Information and Communication Overload” “blinds” individuals to alternative ways of being and doing. Our senses become thus colonized, leaving us only with the ability to “think it trough” in our “inner conversations” in refeeding the system.

With communication being the settler of realities’ ordering, but also the deranger of the social, more than ever before, the individual becomes both as pivotal as negligible. Though numbed by the speed and complexity of this new order—where listening, seeing and talking becomes very difficult—people, nevertheless, “smell things”. Looking beyond individuals representations and actions becomes unavoidable—into their cognitive working and processing (Archer, 2012) (Jenkins, 2004); into which figurations (Hepp, 2014) impend upon them and the importance/questioning

individuals give/make to such figurations, in the process of reframing the world. Rather than which Media Effects are determining what, we must analyze what “digestion” with which absorptions/eliminations/reframings result from the intense Media Reflections on individuals “habitus”: what rearrangement occurs in individuals’ cognitive system and with which consequences to society (Scott, 2011) (DiMaggio, 2003)?

3. Methodological Framework

An interdisciplinary methodology with a deeper contribution from the observed individuals is here proposed. Simply put, we want to know what “hits” people daily, what grabs their attention, what public issues and private troubles (Mills, 1959) they work daily with, through which mitigations and operabilities.

For this purpose we will align with a mixed methods approach: first, individuals’ quotidian will be auto-characterized (Socratic Questioning) in three non-intrusive phases: 1 diary of the daily “hits”; 1 exo-classification sheet of the “hits”; 1 endo-classification sheet of personal reflexivity on the “hits”. This methodology will promote reflexivity in successively contemplation, analysis, and comprehension. Thus, we will mobilize tools from Pedagogy and Psychology, while operationalizing Sociological and Communicational frameworks and concepts. During the same period of time under which subjects are observed, we will proceed with a systematic construction of a database of media trends (all media, new and old). The last source of triangulation will be the fixation of the life histories of the individuals under analysis. This approach will allow for the dismembering of the “inner conversations” and reflexivity, thus for a clearer view of the alterations in individuals’ cosmovisions and reworkings of the “individually operable”.

An understanding of how/why the intensity of the mediatization of the social is catalyzed/contradicted by individuals and with which inner/outer readjustments in validating operable figurations and ways of acting is thus achieved. This is of extreme relevance for it is individuals’ pivotness, as an inexorable gate of Mediatized Capitalism, which primarily keeps feeding the new order.

4. Expected Contributions and Results Achieved So Far

No findings yet. The project is near the end of research design.

This project theoretical contribution rests in a rereading of present times as those of a Mediatized Capitalism. We bridge to major processes of social ordering that came to its maximum strength with the becoming of today’s fully and deeply interconnected social configuration—the process of mediatization, deepened into “deep mediatization”, and the process of capitalism, deepened with neoliberalism. Both symbiotically growing and spreading one on the other through society.

Also, theoretically, we propose a reanalysis of media embedding with society at large, and, consequently, propose a revaluation of the Media Effects paradigm and all its instances in favour of a conception of the dominance of a Media Reflections paradigm, with a prominence of more micro-relational processes rather than macro-structural ones.

Methodologically we will mobilize a novel interdisciplinary approach with technical contributions from Pedagogy and Psychology and conceptual contributions from Sociology and Communication Studies. In addition, we bring individuals fully to the fore.

Only through this integration of theoretical and methodological can we characterize and understand the centrality of individuals in the reconfiguration of today’s societies.

