

ART AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AS TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION WITH AUDIENCE IN THE PANDEMIC AND POST-PANDEMIC ERA

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There is nothing new about the declared cultural crisis chronicle. But is it a crisis, or a challenge, or a new opportunity where digital technology and social media acquire the function of sole social therapy provider? Social media virtual platforms have replaced art scenes, cultural products created in the digital environment have made traditional output useless and futile, consumers have moved onto virtual spaces, and this condition of self-isolation has merged and united reader, listener, spectator and author in one.

“First we build the tools, then they build us!”¹ Never has Marshall McLuhan’s prophecy about the electronic revolution been as relevant as today, when human interaction is characterized by physical distancing and self-isolation while, at the same time, we see a shift to digital and virtual spaces where the social consolidation of society is forming as an unusual pattern.

Digital infrastructures, intelligent technologies, what will the Post-pandemic culture look like? Is it possible to model to fit these new conditions? Is it possible to identify a place of traditional art in the industry of online services that, on one hand, is inherently in contradiction with it, while, on the other, is the only way for its transformation and survival?

Human beings have proved to be the most “dangerous” creatures for us humans. The pandemic has changed the forms of relationships and has prompted us to develop new social skills and to revise not only our ability to talk, but to listen. Social media today is not an element of the existing environment; it is itself the environment where we constantly and automatically communicate. If the main secret of success of the 20th century television was: “Choose what is accessible“, if television was only a medium of channeling cultural products that later

started creating its own content, could this new platform be the new means of cultural self-expression, an impulse for inciting cultural transformation and the formation of a new culture in the future?

Everything started much earlier than the Covid-19 pandemic and the self-isolation on a world-wide scale of circa 7 billion spectators. Every technological advance in the field of communications was initially perceived by society either skeptically or as a threat that would have a negative effect on the future of humanity. Nevertheless, times change and the awareness about the new discovery has transformed the danger into an indispensable necessity that was inevitable for the logical progress of humanity. This was the case with fax machines prophesied to destroy cities, as they reduced the demand on ordinary mail. The same criticism applied to the internet that has changed the world and made it more mobile, accelerating the time needed to spread information, making contact instantaneous via online text messages. In these times of the world pandemic, when all these different platforms and applications are being used for video calls and chats the aforementioned traditional attitudes are back on the agenda. However, given our reality, it would be better to discuss the quality of this kind of communications that in this situation appear to be the only alternative for maintaining social connections.

Following the experiences of the past century, the world has surmounted many a crisis, be it the Great Depression, the Second World War or the Cold War, and the solution always lay in expanding the scales of creativity, flexibility, and social connections. Humanity was looking for new strategies and resources for self-preservation.

Nowadays we are in some kind of turbulence zone

¹ http://yanko.lib.ru/books/media/mcluhan-understanding_media.pdf

where it is difficult to determine what does the nearest future hold, whether the traditional formula that any kind of crisis creates a new stimulus will work or not? What kind of stimulus? As we know, every crisis has several dimensions: economic, social, political, and cultural.

Statistical models and interfaces of the spread of coronavirus portray a distinct picture of event development. In the conditions of a worldwide lockdown minutely statistics prove that we are a unified and deeply connected whole, where pre-existing rules are replaced by new ones, and their adoption and establishment takes place effortlessly, unanimously, without critical consideration. Among them, the telephone app, which has become a permissible form of persecution and surveillance, has become one of the main, publicly agreed-upon tools, despite conflicting with basic principles of anonymity and human rights in general. But from an epidemiological point of view, it is not so much a means of surveillance as it is a necessary control, the ultimate goal of which is not a model of governance known to us so far, but control, as a mechanism of protecting the life of every human being in society.

In the context of severe isolation of cities on a planetary scale, first and foremost, supply systems would have to be revised... as basic requirements were threatened. This is the urbanism that first came to meet the need: signal, transmission and metabolism. Online platforms offering delivery services have gained the function of supporting the unified social fabric. Shops were closed down, streets became desolate, but life went on. Millions of people continue to shop online and receive food delivery by couriers that leave packages on their doorstep, in full compliance with physical distancing rules. Automated online ordering systems, system administrators and couriers were the people who set the world in motion, while everything else remained silent—the automated chain of communication has become a domain of public life. It no longer represents that fragile virtual digital layer over the mighty city, but rather the city itself has become fragile.

As for the rest, analogy, copy, simulations are sufficient in the form of telemedicine, sports activities, online education, online conferences or online culture. The balcony is the part of the outside world that can be turned into a stage, the wall of the opposite building into a projection screen for movies. Applications and home

spaces replaced all forms of social activity that existed in spaces outside our households. Public space is evacuated and the functional load of our homes becomes infinite—it represents a school and a university, museum, job, and all other domains of social connection. Rooms look like spaceship compartments where everything has to be stocked, since we do not have immediate access to products. However, there still remains the contactless delivery as a form of communication with the outside world. Art is temporarily in quarantine, albeit with an uncertain status, in a kind of transient condition, a figure that has become a reality and necessity. Days turn into weeks and months and our existence is defined by 2 categories: “home” meaning online and “out” referring to being offline and not to physical relocation.

Quarantine is over, though not for art, and some of its limitations are gradually shifting to a permanent category, where you are constantly online “at home.” According to Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, the situation created by Covid-19 is not much different from the flu epidemic and the whole situation is a consequence of information warfare and the media as an instrument used to wage it. Those who have been captured by this wave are in a state of “bare life” or mere physical existence. According to him, saying no to social contacts thus provokes an authentic state of exception. People have lost not only social and political qualities but also human and emotional ones. A Society that lives in a state of emergency for a long time can never be free.

Slavoj Žižek belongs to the opponents of this view. Žižek thinks it is impossible to return to the old reality. By the end of the pandemic the new world will be fragile and vague. However, only the virtual world will be legitimate and free movement will be available only to a very wealthy minority. The most tragic and disturbing thing we can learn from this epidemic is that nature is infecting us with viruses; it is giving us back its message. Which is as follows: What you have done to me, from now on, I will return back to you.

The great demand for information of man, as a social being, takes on an even wider scale. The information field becomes part of social domain where each and every person is “at home,” as its natural, harmonious part, as both a producer and a consumer of information. Social networks have become a part of public life that have demonstrated complete solidarity with humanity

and unified them around McLuhan's "bonfire," where the main interest is the growing demand for information. And the more the demand grows, the more evident becomes the fragility caused by the uncontrollability of the virtual system and the reliability of information.

On the other hand, social networks have become a zone of comfort where every boundary is conditional, where the requirements of distancing are not on the agenda, where you are "safe" while you are with others and your right to be free is protected.

If the essence of culture and art is to break social distancing, then it will still have to remain in isolation, since instead of infecting each other with emotions, being infected with the virus remains on the agenda. Fear of other, of alien, fear of the unity of people, this is the result of being in isolation, which affects both culture and art, as well as all spheres of public life.

Pandemic is the starting point for entering a global crisis (and not only), where the crisis itself is still ahead. Specialists talk about its wide scale and long-term duration. Society is still in shock, but every day in the post-pandemic world proves that the new standards of social distancing pose no less a threat than the economic crisis. These new standards have completely changed us

and our surroundings that we were constantly longing to get in touch with by breaking down barriers. On the other hand, we are moving towards discovering new opportunities for art and culture, we feel the need to search and seize new spaces—this space is the media space that has its own rules and laws where the unity of people is not dangerous.

The virus has not gone anywhere; returning to previous order and maintaining it will be the main challenge for the domains of human and public life, the essence of which is to reduce distancing. The mask becomes not only a means of protection, but also a means of self-expression which, along with air filtration, will manifest the individuality of each and every one of us and, at the same time, will spread solidarity and unite us under a universal epidemiological umbrella.

When anyone who goes out is officially suspected of being a threat to others—and this status quo remains valid even after quarantine restrictions end—the social network still remains the only space where the requirements of isolation and distancing do not apply. The social network will continue to spoil us with innovations and applications and of course with new culture and art, with its simulated, figurative, though silent, applause.

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