

NARRATING BEINGS BETWEEN THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE: METAVERSE AND WORD

ESSERI NARRANTI TRA IL VISIBILE E L'INVISIBILE: METAVERSO E PAROLA

Maria Annarumma and Vincenza Barra¹

Department of Humanities, Philosophy and Education, University of Salerno, Salerno, Italy

mannarumma@unisa.it

vbarra@unisa.it

Abstract

The dimension of the Metaverse will determine a new form of “invisibility” sign of an existence that goes beyond the body to become a stream of consciousness, of thought, of ideas. The destiny of *Homo technologicus* will be defined, in his ability to face a different experientiality given by the digital ecosystem with an “ethics of conscience”.

All the discoveries have led to revolutions and paradigm shifts. Now we are faced with another question, if virtuality will prevail in the world, what will be the role of corporeality? In this futuristic vision that smacks of science fiction, the fate of the world and of each of its inhabitants lies in the exclusively human ability to narrate oneself.

Narrative, in all its forms from the more structured to the freer ones, softens the impact of the feeling of shock one feels in the face of the unknown, it is like a “buffer” that is placed between oneself and the extraordinary situation. The word is the only powerful tool that man has. The word will save us. The body, the brain, the mind will experience new knowledge because the technological process is unstoppable. Through technologies, the same narration, which represents our essence, the flow of our thought, takes on a new guise. Although it is an individual expression, it strips itself of time and space to redefine the uniqueness of the human dimension: we are our words.

La dimensione del Metaverso determinerà una nuova forma di “invisibilità”, segno di una esistenza che va oltre la corporeità per diventare flusso di coscienza, di pensiero, di idee. Il destino dell'*Homo technologicus* si definirà, nella sua capacità di affrontare una diversa esperienzialità data dall'ecosistema digitale con una “etica della coscienza”.

Tutte le scoperte hanno determinato delle rivoluzioni e dei cambi di paradigma. Ora siamo di fronte a un altro interrogativo: se nel mondo prevarrà la virtualità, quale sarà il ruolo della corporeità? In questa visione futuristica che sa a tratti di fantascienza, il destino del mondo e di ogni suo abitante risiede nella capacità, esclusivamente umana, di narrarsi.

La narrativa, in tutte le sue forme da quelle più strutturate a quelle più libere, ammorbidisce l'impatto dalla sensazione di shock che si prova di fronte all'ignoto, è come un “cuscinetto” che si interpone tra sé e la situazione straordinaria. La parola è l'unico potente strumento di cui l'uomo dispone. La parola è salvifica. Il corpo, il cervello, la mente esperiranno nuove conoscenze perché il processo tecnologico è inarrestabile. Attraverso le tecnologie, la stessa narrazione, che rappresenta la nostra essenza, il flusso del nostro pensiero, assume, una nuova veste. Sebbene sia espressione individuale, essa si spoglia del tempo e dello spazio per ridefinire l'unicità della dimensione umana: noi siamo le nostre parole.

Keywords

Corporeality; Metaverse; narration; paradigms; technologies.

Corporeità; Metaverso; narrazione; paradigmi; tecnologie.

¹ Maria Annarumma is the author of the paragraphs: 1. The virtuality and invisibility of the body; 2. From complexity to post-contemporary: an epochal transition in progress; 3. From Aristotelian knowledge to the knowledge of possible worlds. Vincenza Barra is the author of the paragraphs: 4. Intelligence connected to technologies; 5. The enigmatic future: perspectives to be discovered.

1. The virtuality and invisibility of the body

Technologies intertwine human dimensions, create multiple interconnected parallel realities, determine an interpenetration of physical reality with the impalpable one, defining a flow that dematerializes and at the same time regenerates times, places, men, ideas and new sensoriality; from the visibility of the body in the modern age we have moved on to the gradual "invisibility" of the post-contemporary body.

Invisibility is apparently an absence, it debunks the visible, concrete and in some ways controllable reality and places it in an ethereal, almost "insubstantial" dimension, as if everything that is present in the mind, in the imaginary, in the unconscious didn't exist. The invisible is like infra-red, you can't see it but you can perceive it. Virtuality has brought about a new form of invisibility, which passes from the classic assumption of marginalization and loneliness to a digital invisibility, a sign of a new form of existence that goes beyond the body to become a stream of consciousness, of thought, of ideas. First technique and then technologies have transformed and continue to modify the existence of man more than man himself can be aware of it; the awareness of these processes is felt only afterwards, first one has to deal with technologies and their substitutes and then an awareness of the change to which it inevitably leads arises, and it is in this passage that perspective-taking of one's own role becomes fundamental in the technological habitat.

Technology with all its tools is not only like Alice's mirror² (Carroll, 2019) which leads us through a monitor into another dimension, but it enters inside us and acts directly with our system and at the same time destiny of Homo technologicus³ (Longo, 2001) is determined by his ability to deal with prospective experientiality with an "ethics of consciousness" (Metzinger, 2010) and to consider extracorporeal experiences important for the elaboration of self-awareness⁴. The experience of being "out of the body and in the mind" helps to understand how the fundamental feeling of feeling like someone arises. For the philosopher of the mind "the thinking self-arises from the bodily self with the simulation of bodily movements in an abstract and mental space" (Metzinger, 2010, p. 116).

With virtual reality, the body dematerializes making itself momentarily invisible but at the same time experiences another bodily perception that "materializes" in the mind.

Everything that happens in our body is determined by a dynamic intertwining of endogenous and exogenous factors; technology interacts with our body, enters our mind and manifests itself in different forms; "the product that is born" is the result of a "game" of cognitive, extracognitive, psychophysical, biological and social dynamics made up of continuous connections and remodulations. Some studies show⁵ how our brain dynamically organizes itself to develop a bodily model of the self that is coherent with the surrounding environment (Botvinick & Cohen, 1998). Proprioception and interoceptive perception are fundamental components to the conscious self; the experience of being an embodied self is a holistic construction characterized by very different relationships and sources⁶. Merleau-Ponty⁷ asserts that all consciousness is perceptual consciousness. The body represents a perceptive opening to the world that is determined through experience and the "word" itself becomes "corporeity" to the extent that it defines being in its uniqueness represented by "individual narration". Language, as the maximum representation of intellectual activity, goes beyond the organic level and it is in this inlet that man can play a leading role.

² Carroll L. (2019). *Through the looking glass*, trad. S. Spaventa Filippi, Viterbo: Edizioni Alter Ego.

³ Longo G.O. (2001). *Homo technologicus*, Roma: Meltemi.

⁴ Metzinger T. (2010). *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, p. 251.

⁵ Botvinick M., Cohen J. (1998). *Rubber hands feel touch that eyes see*, in «Nature», 391, p. 756.

⁶ Sibilio M. (2002). *The intelligent body e*, Roma: Ellissi; Longo M.R. (2008), *What is embodiment?* in *Cognition*, 107, pp. 978-998.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty M. (1969). *The visible and the invisible*, tr.it. di A. Bonomi, Milano: Bompiani.

2.From complexity to post-contemporary: an epochal transition in progress

Globalization, multiculturalism, inclusion and integration, the World Wide Web, digitization, the Metaverse, confront us with an increasingly dynamic complexity, because what is true and valid now will not be so tomorrow: the obsolescence of knowledge and the fragmentary nature of knowledge will be our certainties.

Edgar Morin, best known for his transdisciplinary approach, explains this aspect to us in an exemplary way. Referring to education, he states that it does not take up the multiplicity, dynamism, heterogeneity of society, but re-proposes cognitive models closed in cognitive domains which are in turn enclosed and atomized in watertight compartments. There is no communication between disciplines: this is the real dilemma.

Reality does not resemble formal institutions dedicated to education, training, that is, things that are separate in the university environment are mixed in reality. In the world of globalization, everything is constantly interconnected. For centuries we have lived separately, but now everything is linked, there is an interdependence in all parts of the world.

The immutability of knowledge and the classification of the world (Aristotle 384 bC), although important, was based on the immutability of existence. This approach has been adopted for centuries and in some ways is still present in the formal institutions. At some point man was faced with the fallacy of the perfectibility of knowledge, that is, knowledge given once and for all. All the discoveries have led to revolutions and paradigm shifts. The logic of the world has been and is determined by constant fluctuations, ramifications and unpredictability. Kuhn⁸ (1969) defines these transformational processes as "paradigm shifts" whereby the integrity of human thought has been subjected to a series of events that have questioned its balance. This happened with the Copernican Revolution and the dissolution of the Ptolemaic vision, subsequently with scientific discoveries; from Gutenberg's movable type to electricity that transformed technique into technology, and still DNA sequencing, the discovery of nuclear energy. Every scientific and technological progress is revolutionary and from every revolution there is no turning back. Each technology does not add and subtract nothing: it changes everything⁹ (Postman, 1993).

Now we are faced with a question, on the one hand the world will be increasingly digital, on the other the bodily experience will be increasingly linked to the parallel universe: the Metaverse and its declinations. In this futuristic vision, which smacks of science fiction at times, bodily experience will be determined by a form of virtual experientiality: in what terms will all this develop in man? If today we speak of computational thinking¹⁰ (Whing, 2006) and of an anthropologically different generation¹¹ (Ferri, 2014), in the near future we will be faced with a new thought of man, a new generation, a new evolutionary species; will we pass from *homo sapiens digitalis* to a *homo metaversus*? Brain imaging studies of mobile born show that mobile devices develop new *formae mentis*, also favoring the speed of learning. We are talking about a real new generation, an anthropological mutation of Darwinian memory and still impregnable.

Within this scenario, a new educational frontier will also open up for the school which, as most often happens, will find itself unprepared.

3.From Aristotelian knowledge to the knowledge of possible worlds

We have passed from Aristotelian knowledge to Bruner's knowledge of possible worlds, in which the importance of narration is underlined as a co-construction of reality, as a sharing of ordinariness but even more of the extraordinary.

In *Actual mind, Possible world* Bruner¹² (1993) talks about narrative thought and the role that words play in interpreting the world. The narrative, in all its forms, from the more structured to the freer ones, softens the impact of the sensation of shock one feels in the face of deviance, diversity, the unknown, it is like a "cushion" that intervenes between himself and the extraordinary

⁸ Kuhn T.S. (1969). *The structure of scientific revolutions*, trad. it., Torino: Einaudi.

⁹ Postman N. (1993). *Technopoly. The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

¹⁰ Wing. J. M. (2006). Computational Thinking, Communications of the ACM, Vol. 49, No. 3. 33, pp. 33-35.

¹¹ Ferri, P. (2014). *The new children*. Milano: BUR Rizzoli.

¹² Bruner J. S. (1993). *Actual mind, Possible Worlds*, trad. it., Bari: Laterza.

situation. Thinking, reflecting, speaking, communicating are the only tools to elaborate this deviation from the known as normality, obviously, the socially acquired one.

The other side of the coin has a dark face: the power of the word that directs thought and destinies, modifies reality. Let's think of dictatorial regimes and the role of the word. In 1984, George Orwell, through the slogan *The big brother is watching you*, as well as through the *thought police*, which vaporized those whose thoughts diverged from political dictates, emphasized the power that the word possesses and which for this reason must be controlled and censored (Orwell, 1948).

Today we can record that events are surpassing even the utopian predictions of science fiction narrative. *The Invisible Man* by Wells (1966) tries in vain to reappropriate his body which tragically he will only find again during his last moments of life¹³. Invisibility, by a strange law of retaliation, will allow us to reappropriate our body through the narration of ourselves to the world, and will allow us to reconceptualize our body image through a virtual self.

The word is the only tool that man has to understand, elaborate, communicate. The word is salvific because it allows knowledge to be elaborated and transformed into shared knowledge.

Through technologies, the same narration, which represents our essence, the flow of our thought takes on a new guise. Although it is an individual expression, it divests itself of time and space to redefine the uniqueness of the human dimension: we are our words.

4. Intelligence connected to technologies

The METAverse is an impalpable dimension, it goes beyond physics, beyond the universe. The Metaverse doesn't physically exist, it's a parallel universe. The alternative and immersive reality proposed by the exponent of cyberpunk Stephenson¹⁴ (1995) represents the next technological frontier. Three-dimensional spaces focused on social connection, immersion, virtual reality and augmented-reality are envisaged where users will move freely using their own avatars. A moment is foreseen in which everyone will have a real digital alter ego and will dialogue more and more with the new interfaces, such as domotics or Web 4.0 intelligent machines. The body, the brain, the mind will find themselves in a new reality and consequently our way of communicating will radically change. Our brain will be able to develop other potentialities and bring out new intelligences; it is an extraordinary organ and it is impossible to fix the limit of its possibilities.

Through technologies we rediscover ourselves, we explore ourselves, we narrate ourselves. The narrative that represents our essence, the flow of our thought, takes on a new guise, although it is an individual expression, it strips itself of time and space and begins a new path together with the others. The "connective" intelligence¹⁵ (De Kerckhove, 1999) produced by technologies is one of the most powerful expressions of mankind for the growth of cognitive and intellectual production. De Kerckhove goes beyond the concept of "collective" intelligence of Lèvy¹⁶ (2002), it becomes the practical implication it is "materialized" through the connection that has unified worlds and people who were previously separate. Therefore, if collective intelligence is the action of "thinking" of the multitude, connective intelligence is its active and dynamic part.

With the science of complexity, linearity and Cartesian dualism have been replaced by a dense network of interconnections that have made it difficult to distinguish the individual parts from the whole. With Berthoz¹⁷ (2011) a new way opens up in the knowledge of man, who over time has developed increasingly refined strategies for processing and managing information and for controlling the complexity of natural and cognitive phenomena. If, in modernity knowledge is based on linearity and postmodernity¹⁸, on the other hand, is based on fragmentation (Lyotard, 1981) and complexity¹⁹ (Morin, 1993) we

¹³ Wells H.G. (1966). *The invisible man*, Roma: Mursia.

¹⁴ Stephenson N. (1995). *Snow Crash*. Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli.

¹⁵ De Kerckhove D. (1999). *Connective intelligence: the advent of the Web Society*, FilmAuro.

¹⁶ Lèvy P. (2002). *Collective intelligence. For an anthropology of the cyberspace.*, trad. it., Milano: Feltrinelli.

¹⁷ Berthoz A. (2011). *Simplicity* trad. it., Torino: Codice Edizioni.

¹⁸ Lyotard J.F. (1981). *The post-modern condition*, trad. it., Milano: Feltrinelli.

¹⁹ Morin E. (1993). *Introduction to complex thinking*, trad. it., Milano: Sperling & Kupfer.

now live in a technological habit which continuously and unstoppably modifies our way of being in this world: we are in Digimodernism (Kirby, 2009) a new cultural paradigm of the twenty-first century. Starting from the Internet, the most important place of digimodernism, a new type of text has emerged where users, author and reader, physically intervene in the creation of narratives and in the construction of destinies²⁰.

5. The enigmatic future: perspectives to be discovered

The aim is to analyze the possible trajectories of the emerging and controversial world of the Metaverse and predict what influences it may determine in educational scenarios. At present it is premature to be able to hypothesize realistic scenarios if not barricading ourselves behind pseudo interpretations that will have answers visible to the eyes of the world with time, and for a perverse dynamic, a time marked by the pressing and ferocious rhythms that technology itself determines.

The great challenge that the educational system has to face is that of "giving the interpretative keys" through the "possible worlds" (Bruner, 1993) and only in this way will it be possible to face the dynamics of the *next new brave world* (Huxley, 1933), but hopefully with a truly "excellent" implication by canceling the dystopian vision of 20th century science fiction novel²¹.

The mass media, first with radio, television, newspapers and self media then, with the great global web, with social media and now with the Metaverse, have determined an informal information flow, full of suggestions, induced inspirations, even if apparently neutral, at the same time capable of influencing and directing tastes, choices, customs, habits and, consequently, of influencing human behavior and conduct.

The monologue of mass media turns into interaction and dialogue in social media, and in a parallel world in the Metaverse giving life to a perverse form of democratization of being in the flow of knowledge.

The institutional paideia, therefore, cannot neglect the innumerable information and solicitations that come from the informal channel, but must make the subjects exposed to the attractive allure of the messages and their effective meanings aware, to promote critical capacity and rational selection, that is, the refined tools of education.

It can be said that we are just at the beginning, there are many problems to be solved, the times for their solution are long. Therefore, sensationalism that causes false expectations is to be condemned. Instead, it is good to let the sense of moderation and rationality prevail. We can conclude this reflection by saying that it is not technology and its variations that will solve our problems but a deep knowledge of it and its wise use.

An incessant challenge continues for teaching in outlining unexplored scenarios and in enhancing the essential tools for interpreting the new "worlds of the possible" whose parameters are: thought, narration, sharing.

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²¹ Huxley A. (1933). *The new world*. Milano: Mondadori Editore.

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