

Contemporaneity as Identity Development

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Abstract

In a recent conversation among teachers, a weird statement came up: our young minds are not part of this contemporary world. They are reactionary to new concepts, short-minded to references. Completing the idea, some other statements also mentioned that the identity of today's minds is not up to the present moment, they do not reflect what we, researchers, point as contemporaneity.

Following this idea, this panel gathers in a transdisciplinary encounter, five thinkers of specific areas, like communication, arts, culture, neuroscience and literature for discussing their minds from this specific five key-words: contemporary, identity, digital, advertising and culture.

The discussion takes Brazil as study subject. A culture like the Brazilian, plural and hybrid, miscegenation and syncretism build a unique way of thinking, colliding with global trends of everyday life, transforming communication and adding peculiarities over Brazilian identity.

Brazilian contemporary artists, for example, had built an interesting way of self-referencing, questioning one-self as a way of reinventing a clearer identity or at least making it more contemporary. This surely is not a prerogative of Brazilian artists.

Conversely, it is quite interesting to see that creativity in advertisement is still guided by a "politically correct" discourse, which puts Brazil in more up to date synchronism to the rest of the world. In some cases it brings creativity down in communication, vanishing any trace of uniqueness.

Over this encounter, we should clear all the points shown here, giving a better view of how this identity is being developed by contemporaneity.

Keywords: Contemporary; Identity; Digital; Advertising; Culture

Introduction

In a very informal discussion in a professor's lounge, a subject came up: today's minds. It would not be more unlike if the professors involved were not from different fields of knowledge. At that time it was simply a comparison between our students and art movements. It probably makes more sense, in Portuguese than in English. But the idea grew up with different professors. For a fast conclusion everyone agreed that they, the young ones, live in a parallel universe, where every struggle and accomplishments were never succeeded. They exist in the fifties where the main idea is to grant a perfect and healthy life, with a perfect job, in a perfect family. Perhaps the teachers had forgotten what it is to be young and dreamy again. Or not. What really amazed us all was the fact that some of our students consider 200 years ago as Jurassic, not only figuratively but literally. No wonder then they could enjoy the fact that censorship should be up and running again.

The idea of understanding our students thinking to what is taught is not really a lone search, neither a particular one. One may say that this is the shock of generation or even the raise of Generation XYZ. However there are specific points, if not bigger ones, yet to be observed. Our young minds are really fruit of the very definition of GLOCAL, global influences, with local particularities. They are a reflex of what a previous generation left. It is important though, to remember that the gaps between generations are no longer than 9 or 10 years, with a tendency to downsize even more. All of these aspects only increased the curiosity.

With this in mind one should look around for peculiarities in the area. In order to better understand, the first step should understand ourselves. Thus I invited some professors to talk a bit about this. Not mentioning the first comparison but asking them, why our identity, Brazilian one, was so singular for our students. We should see next their brief response, and I also encourage every one to ask them further about this topic. Their area of expertise is as follow as well as their responses:

- Isabel Silveira – Brazilian Culture and art
- Silvia Copia and Sonia Gerais – Language
- Ismael Lima – Neuroscience
- Marcos Rizolli – Arts and Semiotics
- Paulo Mello – Art, Communication and Technology – and the mediator

The result of this conversation generated the following texts. A first my intention was to write everything in a single text a make this research a plain one. After our encounter in Brighton, I decided to keep as it is, for it reflects a bit of the puzzle that is their learning process. Perhaps they are not so alienated as we have first discussed. I dare to believe they are the reflexes of what we teach. We give them thousands of information pieces, not often organized, and we ask... or better, demand them to put in order, assimilate and deal with it. It is not fair! I am considering then starting a new research; one that questions how much is too much to teach for a student? If we have been studying for about ten years¹, to be able to teach anything, why should they be ready in less than 4 semesters? But as said this is another paper. Let us read the professor's response².

¹ In Brazil we have 13 years of school and go straight to university, which is in general 4 or 5 years, exception made for medical school.

² Every author was responsible for transcribing and translating their own text.

The expression of the Baroque as a metaphor of the Brazilian mestizo culture

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Some historians indicate the beginning of the Baroque art from the end of the 16th century, coming after the Counter-Reformation religious art. Other scholars date its advance until the beginning of the 18th century. However, the agreement among historians is related to the definition of its aesthetics, expressed in the movement with tendencies to the bizarre, the asymmetric, the extravagant, the emotional appeal, whose expression grew stronger after the Renaissance. It was considered as a deviation of classical thought, because it offered risk to all the harmony, clearness, balance and linearity of the traces, proposed by the Renaissance. The Baroque art enhances the Counter-Reformation mentality, preaching the spiritual values of the Middle Ages.

In a general sense, the Baroque was related to the senses, not to reason, once it mobilized all the resources that could act over all the mentalities. Ávila (1994: 60) considers: “It is true that the Baroque will no longer represent only an artistic style, but a systematization of the taste reflected in a lifestyle, a global style, from the culture of a period [...]”.

The Baroque in Latin America is responsible for a worldview, a plural lifestyle, which joins paradoxical elements created by the multiplication of meanings that cover the different, the strange absence of a unique essence. The Baroque style can, consequently, represent a metaphor of the ethics of Brazilian life.

The Brazilian Baroque expression

In Brazil, the constant acquaintanceship among different peoples created a multiple, plural and syncretic phenomenon, in the broadest sense of the meaning. In a general sense, this all began with the invasion of the European peoples, in the 16th century, which mixed with the local indigenous population, and with the Africans, brought as slaves in the 17th century, and later, in the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century, with the strong coming of immigrants to the country, intensifying the plural character of Brazilian society.

The country becomes, then, mestizo, from the complexity and multiplicity of characteristics, which result from the acquaintanceship, in the same place, of such different cultures and ethnicities. “There is no white or black in Brazil, but a texture, a mobile text in continuous transformation, waiting for other mixes.” (Pinheiro, 1991, p.28). Brazil does not show a unit, which characterizes it. This aspect can cause repudiation for the ones who search to legitimate a Brazilian identity. Pinheiro continues “The word identity is not related to what we are, because we are not a being in a pure state, we do not fit inside the western ontology, once we are already a mobile territory, which accumulates elements coming from several parts”.

It becomes evident, then, that the theme of a Brazilian national identity has always been a topic enriched by debates and controversies among Brazilian and foreign researchers interested in the country. The visions of the scholars contemplate ways that get branched. At times, the thoughts are rigid and fixed in an attempt of a precise answer related to who we are

or who we should be as a nation, at other times, this question is seen as a process that is built along time.

For many years, the explanations and debates on identity were centered in the concept of race, as if the biophysical criterion could answer, involve or even answer all such questions.

In face of the mentality of governors, intellectuals and scholars, there was a position of avoiding to assume the cultural and racial diversity of the country, once such great diversity threatened the idea of national integration, and the focus of discussions found answers to the questions concerning identity in literature, visual arts, cinema and music, point out identity icons which became famous and, in their works, showed some national representation.

People like Machado de Assis, Euclides da Cunha, Gilberto Freyre, Carlos Gomes, Villa-Lobos, among so many others, manifested a worry with the country reality and are seen, by many scholars, as characters who managed to popularize a singularity of national culture, by means of the consciousness they manifested concerning the national identity.

Subsequently, the media, such as radio, television, cinema, magazines, gave visibility to icons like Carmem Miranda In the 1930's and 1940's, to a level in which made her a symbol of Brazil in other countries. Another name, which comes to the media in the 50's, is Pelé, seen as a "soccer star", who became a symbol of success and transformed the image of the country. Along time, happiness and also nakedness, not in a restrained way.

Nowadays, it is possible to perceive that this subject still assumes several paradoxes in what refers to the discourse of those who are interested in Brazilian identity. Texts are found showing certain resentment of deluded rationalists with the country and so many others who wish, at any cost, to emphasize the importance of having a national identity.

Such themes, in which there is usually more heat than light, become visible stimuli for specialists' discussions. Because of that, what can be discussed in a short space and in a clear way, comes to be related to the need of overcoming all old ideas: identity and opposition, once in the context of Brazilian culture one can easily see the dynamics concerning nature and creative activities, as: parties, music, dance, sports, literature, shows, culinary richness, religions, scientific researches and so many other ones that get mixed, connected.

Using the Baroque as a metaphor of the Brazilian mestizo identity is recognizing that we are a country with its excesses, strangeness and exuberances. We are made of naïveness and eroticism, simplicity and luxury, classic and poor, utopias, laughter and all the effervescence and implicit contradiction in the context of Brazilian culture.

All the indetermination, all the unpredictability, all this multiple creativity whose atmosphere overflows energy, was or is still, not comprehended and seen by European rationalists as an effect of the late processes of Brazilian industrial transformations.

Contemporaneity and political correctness in beer advertisements and the rivalry between Argentina and Brazil.

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When analyzing the issue of Political Correctness (PC) we actually analyze the ideological functioning of a language and its contemporaneity, which is the object of study of Verbal Language subject taught a few semesters by teachers Silvia and Sonia at Mackenzie Presbyterian University.

Everything obviously applied to the advertising pieces, besides all of the interferences that can appear in them, such as irony, the humor and the study of the formation of the student's identity, student that lives the contemporaneity and all the successes and mistakes of it, but a lot of times, it is favorable to the censorship, including the one that belongs to the advertising universe. Seemingly our students are liberal, but, in practice, they are the opposite.

This way, when they have to write an advertising announcement, that writing ends being altered, sometimes getting limit the creativity of a text, in the case, the advertising.

Initially, the subject of the stereotype can be victim of it, generating a prejudice idea.

According the author Marcos Pereira, the prejudice “refers to to one unjust and negative attitude in relation to a group or to a person that it is supposed to be member of the group” (2002, p.77) . Like this, it is fundamental that the publicity professionals and propaganda become aware of their responsibility and be attentive in relation to their writing. The publicity should call their strategic and creative lines to the efforts of speeches that they guide to the respect to the diversity and multicultural.

In case the publicity insists on maintaining stereotypes and prejudices, the society should act to discourage that type of behaviors, then it could be “politically correct” that can be understood as a movement or “phenomenon that, gradually, it comes promoting a reinterpretation for situations of political order, economical and social” (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001, p. 58).

In the Brazilian propaganda it is possible to observe the reflex of the philosophy of this movement or phenomenon, because it becomes every time more constant for being indicated now as criterion and parameter of creation and of production of advertising pieces.

We can give some examples of the Brazilian culture and politically correct speech that can include a symbolical inclusion and it is able for giving a possibility of expression of the minorities. This is one of the targets of the politically correct speech. Sometimes we can provoke messages politically incorrect (and can be funny).

The first example can be seen in advertising about BRAHMA BEER versus SCHINCARIOL BEER, but before we can give some explanations about this theme. In 2004, a very famous advertiser Nizan Quanaes begged for a lovely Brazilian singer called Zeca Pagodinho (he only used to drink Brahma beer) to change to Schincariol beer.

The singer made a beautiful performance in the advertising of Schincariol beer drinking it in the television.

But in a few days, a paparazzi made a photo of Pagodinho drinking brahma in a bar in Rio de Janeiro. He was very happy and was drinking with a lot of friends. He had been questioned about this, then, Pagodinho broke the contract with Schincariol beer, had to pay a big fine and suffered penalties. (one of them: he was prohibited to appearing in the TV for months.)

At that time, it was made a national campaign for the the ethics and the use of the politically correct.

In another example: the new beetle, it is a good example of PC because there are all kind of people driving.

The last examples, we will open the link Top 7 (Hostility between Brazilian and Argentines, including the havaianas flip-flop)

Here we can notice there is a big hostility between argentine and Brazilian, or between Maradona and Pelé. Who is the best football player of the world?

When we have been studied with the students of the Verbal Language we can notice that some pieces aren't politically correct, but they can be funny.

Brazilians love to have fun.

Neuroscience and its transdisciplinary application on the 21st century

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Within the transdisciplinary discussion, it is interesting to observe how new technologies influence us and how those behaviors are controlled or not by media. The question of the construction of knowledge is quite complex for the 21st century, especially when one thinks of Brazil. We live in a moment where technology is used quite often to limit other than aggregate and generate new knowledge. What to think of a generation that express themselves in 140 characters? There are tools to make us reflect and respond to these new paradigms. The necessity and the curiosity to unravel the human brain, its assimilations, their internal processes, to define how, why and where we buy, it is not a new investigation. From the beginning of human kind one tries to trace that.

Hippocrates says On The Sacred Disease: “Men ought to know that from nothing else but the brain come joys, delights, laughter and sports, and sorrows, griefs, despondency, and lamentations. And by this, in an especial manner, we acquire wisdom and knowledge, and see and hear, and know what are foul and what are fair, what are bad and what are good, what are sweet, and what unsavory (...) And by the same organ we become mad and delirious, and fears and terrors assail us, (...) All these things we endure from the brain, when it is not healthy,(...) In these ways I am of the opinion that the brain exercises the greatest power in the man.” (Hippocrates, 400bC).

According to this, an amazing machine processes all this mix of culture, influences and stimulus: The brain

With the technological evolution, tools were developed to help us understand the form of assimilation, the behavior, and the desires of the human being. With equipment such as fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) or SST (Steady State Topography), it is possible to determine specific areas that work with certain stimuli. Tests performed with these tools and some others begin to assist us define what to respond to, where to go and often even manipulate the human mind. Advertisement then, using these artifices comes up with its emotional involvement and leads us towards Sensorial Marketing. Small pranks may cause our naïve minds to be manipulated.

When we receive an order, our brain tends to focus on the specific information received. This is how, for example, when we watch a commercial. The main product is the front of the screen, however, colors, soundtrack, characters, can and are sending other information that our brain receives and assimilates.

This means to say that Neuroscience will contribute and develop the consumer, its culture and society.

When we talk about neuroscience, so we understand that any area, from culture to politics, from science to economy are influenced and even modified by stimuli.

Why does the question that initiated this article is so provocative? Our young minds are not part of this contemporary world.

It happens because the changes are so fast, that even young, we still have problems to evolve at the speed at which technology advances.

It's a fantastic opportunity to observe brain areas in activity. In this way, we can infer that, specific colors, musical timbre, actors, types of product may exercise more or less impactful reactions.

Another tool that helps us to monitor the consumer is the eye tracking with what we can track the gaze of the person and identify which areas of the media stimulates more or less that observed person.

In short this is as new as Hippocrates. What we still try today is to unveil and envision another part of the exciting world of knowledge, going further, exchanging information and interacting with what we have already accomplished.

The 21st century world turns quickly full of new possibilities; the job of the researcher is then to find ways to apply this new reality at our daily needs.

Neuroscience comes then as a tool to add knowledge instead of extinguishing old methods. Qualitative and quantitative researches for example should always exist. Neuroscience is more of a branch to reduce the margin of error in sales.

As mentioned then, think about this word SALE, but in a wider sense not only economical. Sale is exchange. When we talk about a political party we sell the idea that that party is good for the community. When we talk about a pizza place we defend the idea that it is a pleasant place, and in that case, we very often recommend it to a friend... it is selling. For that matter

the social relation of contemporaneity goes further for feelings, experimentations, new ways of communication and new life experiments.

We realize that this experience is more necessary every day, to understand and to relate to the world around us, and therefore stand a position for or against it.

Neuroscience helps then understand and interpreting the individual behavior, which is rich in references and experiments.

When we discuss an article like this, the contemporary, the languages, the cultural and artistic forms of expression, we can realize that in the Brazilian context, the cultural, musical, artistic and cinematographic miscegenation, influence the formation of the individual in the most varied ways. Therefore, this individual shows as a result of mixed and eclectic environment that he or she was exposed to, i.e. the Brazilian culture.

Self-reference as identity and methodology.

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One of the most striking features of contemporary art is the self-reference. Build up collectively metaphoric forms for one question: why, at last, artists speak for themselves?

From Albrecht Dürer to Van Gogh, by recurrence, the self-portrait has become a genre of art in Western culture.

In the twentieth century, in front of the vanguards who privileged forms of interpretation rather than the statute of the representation, the tradition of self-image gave way to a sense of expanded self-portraits.

The visual connection - frequently facial - will be, then a simple expressive platform - where the figure of the artist to let go to be a record for spending to be organic, generically, the presentation of existential dimensions.

In other words: the transgression of the visible world will be the power of creative of self-portraits produced by many and important artists.

Two examples and precious to British artistic culture: The paintings of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud both amazing as synchronous.

Several and diversified signs, for beyond the simple image of the artist, will be presented in semiotic bundles increasingly recurrent in culture, making the self-portrait only one possibility among many proliferating and self-referential narratives in contemporary art.

An artistic personality that could not stay away from this presentation is the Mexican Frida Kahlo.

His impressive self-portraits reveal much more than their physical appearance. Represent their existential pain, his life story, his imaginary disorders.

In crease contemporary, between the second half of the twentieth century and the first moments of the twenty first century, artists adulterate their faces and bodies - to change the very fate of art.

The Italian Piero Manzoni makes their waste his representamen. Therefore, breaks definitively with the design of self-reference as a result of the appearance of the heroic artist.

Other three fundamental names of the art scene also tested - and widened - the peculiar limits of self-portrait: the North American artist-celebrity Andy Warhol, the German social-artist Joseph Beuys; the French disturbing artist Louise Bourgeois.

After them, the self-portrait should be understood not as genre of art, but as a creative method - own contemporary art.

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So determined Marina Abramovic in her solo exhibition at MoMA in New York: with discipline and method, faced in directly confrontations of the public curiosity. The artist, in its presentness, it was art.

Another reference for understanding how self-referencing method is the artist and photographer Cindy Sherman. In Film Stills the artist presents himself as the suppose characters thrillers. Consider:

And further, its fabulous Portraits series makes the artist multiply among the different types of women's American society. Contradictory: always she and never herself!

Another artist, who among many expressive works, opened parenthesis in their trials to take public and artistically his warm relationship with a porn star. Himself: Jeff Koons. She: the iconic Cicciolina.

Beyond to the behavioral spheres, a variant of radical self-reference is the one adopted by Spanish artist David Nebreda.

Diagnosed schizophrenic, lives in the basement of Madrid, adopted celibacy and adept with a diet frightening. His photographs themselves, shape their radical artistic experiences.

Many other names could be here cited in order to expand the weight of exemplifying of the idea of self-reference as a creative method in contemporary art.

But to finish this presentation, I want to present the unusual experiences of a young Brazilian artist. Rodrigo Braga.

This artist acts within the limits of nature, body and identity. Here are some pictures.

And so, the artistic contemporaneity expands the thematic fields for the methodological sphere.

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