

José Manuel Muñoz-Rodríguez *Editor*

Identity in a Hyperconnected Society

Risks and Educative Proposals

 Springer

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Preface

To paraphrase a Spanish poem, ‘the truth is never sad, what it has is no remedy’. And that is true. For some time now we have insisted on saying how sad it is to see children glued to a screen, forgetting about free and spontaneous play; young people together but not looking at each other, each staring at their screen; and entire families online while sharing a meal. I don’t know whether it’s sad or not, but it’s real; it has happened and is happening. Today’s society and humanity, almost as a whole, are a digitalised society and humanity, which in many cases leads to permanent disconnect. And the idea is not to be on the sad side of the plot, but the real side, and take it seriously from scientific fields than can and should have something to say. Then we have pedagogy, which must think and implement education in this reality that has been with us for a considerable time, but about which we do not think properly, nor propose convincing approaches according to reality and what research is constantly telling us.

All types of innovation in human capacity to relate and communicate, by vital necessity, affects culture and, therefore, our relationship with people and things. Nowadays, human communication and action are largely justified by the so-called hyperconnected society, in other words, they are protected by a society that allows us to move around different places at great speed and in a grid, associated by complex, interconnected social networks and which helps the human species to be permanently connected. The capacities of social relationships are enhanced, but access to knowledge is reduced. Everything is at our fingertips, on the other side of the window, but we don’t always know what to take, what to see, who to get together with and how to move. We can, and know how to, get all kinds of information, which has probably led us to regress in the creation of knowledge.

Human nature, small and large, from here or there, from this or that culture, is almost constantly connected to a screen, to the digital world. The main cultural reference of humanity is gradually becoming technology, perhaps relegating historical reference to the background and bringing to the forefront what is instantaneous, ephemeral or liquid, discontinuous, fragmented, accelerated and disjointed, no matter how connected we are. What counts is the here and now, what we have within reach, which translates into a new ontological condition of humankind.

The emergence of mobile devices, social networks, virtual platforms or interactive games has meant a significant change not only in human behavioural habits but, above all, in changes in conduct, and how we communicate and relate. Everyday human life revolves around the screen, being connected to the Internet, the centre of our interests is what happens, is done and you can be online.

The world therefore manifests itself on screens. Society is technologised and human beings are hyperconnected, and as we move forward in this new ontological situation, human reality becomes more novel and changing. The digital world, what we see, what we feel, mediated by technology, is real. What's more, for many it is the only reality to the point that we can see our idol walking past and our biggest concern is to get a photo to be able to show it off online.

It is hyperconnected society; it is the era of digital humanism, in some cases dependent but seeking to be independent, where technology affects human nature, forcing it to make decisions so as not to be overwhelmed by technology, but on the contrary, to control it and leverage it for comprehensive and sustainable human development. Neither dominant nor dependent on technology, rather belonging to this new world of life, interconnected and interrelated.

From an educational perspective, this phenomenon is difficult to manage. The emergence of technology as a mediator in our actions has meant that education and educators experience the positive and negative consequences of this phenomenon from a place of perplexity. Educators, families, live between astonishment and fear, between the opportunities and risk, between the benefits this technology is bringing to society and fears for the dangers it can entail, especially for children.

Furthermore, the education system specifically – in general terms managers, teachers, actions, schools, etc. – cannot find the right way and mechanisms to not only use technology in positive and edifying terms, but also find a correct interpretation of this technology as a space for coexistence and relationship. In the everyday reality of education, of family environments, in school corridors, technology is more a disruptive element than an optimum and significant contribution in the process of building identities.

And this is because we have not accepted that the basic concepts of education have changed: communication, relationship, affectivity, autonomy, creativity, etc. We cannot continue to think about them from the classic pre-digital concept, but rather from enclaves of an education which understands technology as a primary stage of training– insofar as technology is culture – and not just a didactic tool. Our life scenario is dominated by technology, society is a digital society, and education processes must include conceiving technology as something that is already inherent to the human condition, which affects and crosses human development and the building of identity. In other words, it affects and marks our practices and ways of living, how we understand ourselves and those around us, and how we understand that which it does not welcome, reality.

This book sheds light on many of the questions still being asked. It aims to answer the question of what education should do – and how – in relation to the demands, opportunities and challenges of technology. It responds to the ways and means in which human identity is affected by technology, and the grooves in which

the chain of thought and educational action should travel so as not to get muddy and stuck. Technology, connectivity and digital society have changed how we see and interpret reality, how we do things and think about ourselves, about others and about the reality around us, ultimately, in the processes of personal and social construction of human identity.

Among other arguments, because technology is culture, it creates ways of being, of doing and getting along in hyperconnected society. It has deployed new ways of living, of relating, of friendship. In short, in Habermasian terminology, it has generated new worlds of life and new ways of communicating as a basis for thought and human actions, which often clash with the traditional system of coexistence and with the modern conception of society. This has resulted, in turn, in unprecedented ways of perceiving and creating realities, including human reality and its identity.

The book focuses on the core principle of education: identity. It studies how identity is affected by the permanent connectivity humans are subject to. It develops the processes of construction and reconstruction of identity, mainly of young people, analysing how and to what extent this is impacted by hyperconnectivity. It presents the pedagogical foundations to address the training vacuum that is the root of problems associated with connection times, highlighting the need for education – beyond mere literacy – on use of screen time. It develops essential educational actions needed to address the challenge of connectivity and defines screen-use habits, or identifies responsibilities or undesired behaviour when using screens.

The human-screen binomial is also covered, and its repercussions on most aspects of connected social life, onlife, with a clear social and educational interest. It shows a life approach to education from an onlife perspective, and identifies and describes mechanisms for the online construction of oneself, challenges to society and possible responses from education. Because if one thing characterises this hyperconnected society, it is that the traditional differentiation between the online and offline worlds is losing meaning, and that other conception of human life linked to an onlife conception is gaining strength.

The so-called ‘triangle of knowledge’ – research, education and innovation – is developed. On one hand, it presents guidelines for citizen training on screen – education – on the other, it presents with some basic and applied research on perception of technology usage time at different ages and in different digital spaces – research, and finally, it attempts to improve the situation of people in terms of social and cultural inclusion, gender equality, affective balance, nature deficit, etc., as well as policies on standards and regulations on the use of technology – innovation.

This book is interesting for readers as it studies the challenges and possible risks of hyperconnectivity in basic human elements such as freedom, self-determination, emotion, affection, responsibility or critical thinking, among others. Numerous risks are associated with the Internet that we need to know more about every day: sexting, abuse, harassment, gambling, etc., which require pedagogy to study the phenomenon as the risks are an increasing everyday concern in our society.

In turn, it presents educational strategies and responses to possible human problems when in and interacting in different digital spaces (content platforms, social media, interactive games, etc.). Regulatory, research, philosophical,

anthropological and pedagogical studies that offer the reader a series of strategies to understand how to establish a positive and constructive, ultimately edifying, relationship between technology and human beings.

It offers a pedagogical perspective of the extent to which identity is affected – damaged or empowered, normalised or distorted, orderly or disorderly, located or misplaced, meaningful or meaningless, sociable or sullen – by the phenomenon of hyperconnectivity, analysing the effect of hyperconnectivity, possibilities or restrictions, and main risks. Readers can understand the elements necessary for comprehensive and sustainable human development in front of screens. And offers visible digital active leisure models as well as guidelines to associate them with sociability practices.

In summary, it provides guidelines for technological education, exceeding the well-known digital literacy mechanisms that have proven insufficient, based on affective, relational and communicational processes and not so much on uses or abuses of technology. Therefore, the aim of this book is not to explain digital skills and competences interpreted and limited to handling this ‘tool box’. Rather, it aims to gain in-depth knowledge of how to work this technology, digital grammar and digital infrastructure, as that is where cultures and subjectivities are created and shaped, where individual identity processes are configured, where thought, action and socialisation processes take place. The topic of the book, hyperconnectivity and identity, is not therefore a technological problem, but an educational challenge that requires pedagogical approaches such as the one we present.

And I’m almost done. In order to be honest with history and with reality, we cannot end this preface without mentioning that this book is the result of a line of research we have been working on for over two decades. We have analysed how the Internet, the virtual education space and social networks are transforming our societies, our notion of being human, the definition of identity and vision of education. The reader has in their hands a text that brings continuity to a line of research we began over 20 years ago by pedagogically characterising virtual education spaces; we studied and analysed social space and time on the Internet, as vital references for humans, also when they are connected. So, with more concerns than certainties, we highlighted the educational potential of the Internet for training and educating. Here and now, in this polyphonic and plural text, perhaps with more evidence thanks to the numerous research projects that endorse the work of the participating research groups, we reflect on hyperconnected society, its needs and expectations for a world—of education—that reflects on the advantages and risks, problems and challenges posed, as well as their influence on building identity.

Salamanca, Spain

José Manuel Muñoz-Rodríguez

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Part I
Pedagogical, Anthropological,
and Political Underpinnings

Shaping Identities in a Hyperconnected World: Notes for the Refutation of ‘Pedagogical Levity’



Antonio Bernal-Guerrero

1 Introduction

Under the fiction of being accompanied by perpetual connectivity, individuals generate instantaneous virtual identities, multiple and unconnected but capable of providing the gratification of immediate response, a satisfaction that languishes as it is experienced, waiting for instant reconfirmation. It is as if the identities of the world, as it is lived today, are projected into oblivion, as if they definitively renounce any portion of eternity.

Is there any chance of surviving the shaping predominance of the ephemeral? Can the art of living in a fast-paced, accelerated, fragmentary and vaporous world be learned? Potentially, yes, but it requires, along with an awareness of the problem of dehumanisation brought about by practices related to technological gadgets, new procedures that favour an understanding of the scope of the phenomenon and open up new horizons of humanisation in a highly technological world. The proliferating pedagogies focused on the continuous improvement of technological applications, in an incessant and never-ending process (consonant with the dominant orthodoxies in the regulation and evaluation of training processes), enjoy a valuable and fleeting usefulness, forming a slippery and provisional argumentative constellation. Against such ‘pedagogical levity’, typical of contemporary liquid societies, it is urgent to propose new ways of counteracting its effects, if we want to provide consistency to the flourishing of subjects and the communities that they integrate.

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2 An Over-accelerated World

Prophetically, Ortega y Gasset [1] announced almost a century ago the dissolution of individuals into ‘masses’ and the unlimited manipulation of them by the media forces that identified ‘modern times’. With the same title, Charles Chaplin’s unforgettable film was released in 1936, in which he criticised the depersonalising threat of ‘developed societies’. The ‘taken-for-granted world’ [2], as a precondition for the practice of thought and action by any human being, is breaking down. Forgetting history and ignoring cultural traditions lead to the emergence of a generation devoid of roots [3], predisposed to a perpetual immaturity guided by the appetite of the moment that, once satisfied, withers away to make way for the next.

That given world shatters among the multiple interpretative versions of reality. That is dramatic in the least, because world contains the cultural heritage that makes up our tradition and, therefore, delimits our primordial social and affective warp. All interpretations are elevated to the same rank of value, while any reference to truth, to any version of it, susceptible to discussion and contrast, is discredited. With reliability undermined, the process of modernisation has been accompanied by the fracturing of confidence in finding common sense in reality as a whole [4]. The Enlightenment idea of ‘progress’, associated with development, was proclaimed and expanded in modernity until it was challenged by the postmodern thought [5]. As Peter Sloterdijk has asserted [6], the project of modernity is founded on a ‘kinetic utopia’, the greatest relevance being acquired by the rhythms and impetus of the origin and end of the world where people figure. Speed has become associated with modernity and progress: ‘it has become an end in itself, often with strange and disturbing links to prestige, fashion systems, the most shameless exhibitionism and the exaltation of superficiality and economic arrogance’ [7].

Settled in the rush of life, in the midst of vibrant everyday life, our existence seems to glide by at a speed that barely gives us time to reflect on it. In this volatile society, agitation and movement prevail and blur the sense of waiting, of stillness, of rest. Zygmunt Bauman [8] graphically expressed this sign of our times: ‘walking is better than sitting, running is better than walking, and surfing is better than running’. Lack of time has become a social circumstance conditioning our individual and collective well-being. The interconnections between speed, technology and the different spheres of reality have ended up accelerating the rhythm of life, as if we aspired to outline the multiplicity of the guaranteed world, upon which Western culture had settled itself [9]. The Eastern philosopher Byung-Chul Han states that the current acceleration is due to the general inability to finish and conclude. The acceleration of time reveals that the temporal levees have been broken. There is no regulation or guidance of the flow of time, and thus time is atomised, all moments become similar, indistinguishable from each other: ‘The fragmentation of time is accompanied by increasing massification and homogeneity (...) The acceleration of the life process prevents divergent forms from being forged, things from distinguishing themselves, independent forms from developing’ [10].

It is difficult to foster in this world, in which contours are delimited by presentism, the search for purpose, for meaning, capable of bringing together the different temporal dimensions in a balanced way. This lack of memory and horizon, this absence of context, hinders the unfolding of personal identity, as it lacks the substratum that allows for the construction of a meaningful autobiographical narrative with a projection into the future [11]. As is proverbially known, Benjamin Franklin [12] warned a young merchant that time is money. Although the ideas of one of the forgers of the American ethos belong to the eighteenth century, his famous advice is of throbbing relevance (how many times we hear the same thing or something similar...). But we are persuaded that time is much more: it is simply all that we have.

2.1 *Volatile Identities*

Devoid of the scaffolding of prescriptive rules or codes of what is to be done, the human beings of today have to make determinations for themselves. The postmodern distrust of precision is not an intellectual ‘pose’ but the recognition that reality is imprecise. Abandoning the modern belief in determinism, the postmodern condition assumes the ambiguity of the real. The construction of the self is at the same time the ultimate source of rootedness. In liquid modernity, identities are like a volcanic crust that hardens, melts again and permanently changes shape [13]. Identities seem stable from an external point of view, but when contemplated by subjects themselves, fragility and the threat of unravelling appear. The only external reference value, in the postmodern condition, seems to be the need to achieve a flexible and versatile identity capable of facing the various mutations that subjects have to adopt throughout their lives. In this way, identity is configured as a reflexive responsibility that seeks autonomy, being doomed to continuous inconclusion.

Like the face of the Roman god Janus, identity has several dimensions. Identities are shaped by contrasting possibilities which, to some extent, we can select or are attributed to us by our circumstances. Thus, depending on our own cultural traits, the variety of activities we carry out and the relationships we maintain with others, we configure our identities, dynamically, full of differential nuances, among multiple possible combinations. From this it follows that an open society is one in which the majority of people can choose from a range of preferred identity possibilities without being subjected to extortion, coercion or persecution of any kind. But it only takes a fleeting glance at our world to realise that for many people today this is an ideal rather than a reality. Exclusion, if not reduction to a particular religious, nationalist or ethnic quality, for which there is no shortage of guardians or commissioners defending its ‘unique value’, can, as is well known, turn the process of identity construction into a phenomenon of violence, where the different is not seen as the other but as an enemy to be eliminated from the human landscape, as an unbearable threat to our preferences, whether chosen or imposed. Beneath this cruel reductionism, ‘there is a great conceptual confusion about people’s identities, which

turns multidimensional human beings into one-dimensional creatures' [14]. The Anglo-Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah [15], has recently shown that there is no essence associated with a given social identity that provides arguments as to why people are the way they are. The manipulation of personal identity-shaping processes has grown exponentially due to the power of technology with its multiple and seductive tentacles, encouraging us to follow the accelerating course of events that follow one after the other in the digital world [16].

In this way, while narcissism advances with its various manifestations, individuals are progressing in their defoliation, the loss of relevance of their inner life, although paradoxically, unthinkable levels of absence of modesty have been reached in the never-ending parade of procuring exhibitions of intimacy in the voracious and varied digital showcases. The decline of the cultivation of the inner world of the person is a patent sign of a social body seriously afflicted by the proliferation of sameness, of the search under various labels, of the equalisation of everything. The absence of originality, of the uniqueness that lies in the depths of each person, reveals the devastating effect of growing depersonalisation at the dizzying pace of the search for shortcuts to be 'authentic'. Indeed, the excesses of commodification reach the individual, considered as a 'brand', and thus differences are restricted to the realm of marketable distinctions, multiplying the plurality of commodities with which 'authenticity' is made material. As Han states: 'The imperative of authenticity engenders narcissistic coercion. Narcissism is not the same as healthy self-love, which has nothing pathological about it. It does not exclude love of the other. The narcissist, on the other hand, is blind to the other. The other is twisted until the ego recognises itself in him/her. Narcissistic subjects only perceive the world in the nuances of themselves. The fatal consequence of this is that the other disappears' [17].

Our constitutive slowness contrasts with this global scenario prone to complete uniformity and the exponential increase of the fragmentary and of a false autonomy. Only reflection, waiting [18], makes it possible for us to become aware of our temporal perspective, to realise that true growth requires both an appreciation of the past and an ideation of the future, trying to integrate the different perspectives as harmoniously as possible. As we have the capacity to reason, remember and imagine, our good depends on a vision broad enough to be able to shape our identity, irreducibly, through the integrated narration of the different moments. Our personal identity is closely linked to time, to its various dimensions. It is not the only factor that shapes us, but it is a fundamental axis. The temporal orientation we adopt, our awareness of and attitude towards time, has a profound influence on our lives and our environment [19].

3 Technological Gadgets and Socio-Cultural Practices

Günther Anders [20, 21] called the mismatch between human beings and their products a 'Promethean mismatch', to the extent that human beings themselves are considered an 'outdated' product in relation to the products generated by them. The

sophistication of technological progress has outstripped the possibilities and consequences of the biological and cultural evolution of humans. In this way, the world has been unified, globalised, by technology and not by any anthropological ideal. As Duch distinguishes, while as 'homo technicus' humankind remains a subject of history, beings capable of imagining, designing, producing and using multiple artifices, when we refer to technology we enter a different sphere, in which we cede our secular protagonism: 'The technological system, because it has a negative impact on human memory, imposes finalities, cancels the past and the projects for the future' [7]. Depersonalisation and anonymity thus exponentially increase their chances.

But technological gadgets enjoy a high power of seduction, continually renewed, progressively reaching greater heights of attraction. These gadgets have become part of our daily lives; they have invaded our work and leisure spaces, our homes, our cities. In short, they have significantly modified our socio-cultural practices. These artefacts change our minds by offering us some gratifying fantasies: to have constant attention, to always be listened to in some forum and the feeling of not being alone. In nurturing the relationships which we control, the digital ones, more hope is often placed in the technological system than in people. MIT professor Sherry Turkle [22], a specialist in the study of the relationship between technology and the self, has turned her initial optimism in the possibilities of identity construction through technologies towards a more sceptical position, affected by the irrepressible power of the technological system to mould the practices that shape us. The uncritical acceptance of new habits brought about by the new technologies is changing the way we relate with each other.

We relegate the discomfort of relating to people, the full manifestations of face-to-face communication, gestures or tones of voice, in order to live 'hidden' in communication through the network. Along with the tyranny of the immediate response, imposed by the instantaneousness of the circulation of information, this flight from a face-to-face interpersonal relationship is overlaid with fictions, the concealment of emotions, a certain mutual objectification. This denaturalises the communicative flow, more geared towards the care of the image that one wants to give to the preservation of one's own 'brand', than to the genuine flow of the personal encounter. While today's young people have grown up with the expectation of a permanent connection, even during sleep time, they feel the deep emptiness of the lack of human communication, which always reserves a space for checking and reflection. To be connected is not to be in real conversation. Being on the net, with other people, who become units, does not eliminate a certain sense of loneliness. Being in permanent contact with everyone, perpetual connectivity, does not prevent suffering due to a lack of authentic interpersonal communication. However, solitude is necessary for self-knowledge, reflection, meditation, imagination, etc. If we consider that adolescence is the liminal space for the configuration of personal maturity, the threat of immaturity, as a disease of our time [23], becomes greater as the fatal attraction of the new technological gadgets increases.

With his vision of consumer society in terms of the political economy of the sign, the analyses of Jean Baudrillard [24] form a point of reference for the study of contemporary technological society. The reorganisation of products in a system of signs

involves shifting the centre of gravity of the capitalist system of production from material goods to the signs that represent them. To the Marxist concepts of 'use value' (utility of objects) and 'exchange value' (commercial or monetary value), Baudrillard added 'sign value', which confers prestige and represents the social position of people. When buying a product, one does not so much acquire the product itself as its differential value, the value of the sign that differentiates it from other products. Thus, consumer goods constitute a system of classification that in turn codifies the behaviour of consumer society. For the analysis of such system, Baudrillard found the differential semiotic approach as a privileged way, over and above classical political economic analysis. Objects, insofar as they are signs organised in systems of signification, are what decide the motives, fantasies and behaviour of subjects.

Particularly interesting is the analysis of the orders of the simulacra that make up society. Baudrillard distinguishes three orders. Until the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, society functioned with first-order simulacra, that is, through copies of things, which had a natural basis. The second order of simulacra, following the commercial law of exchange value, was originated with the possibility of the mechanical reproduction of copies of things. With the post-industrial society, with technological change, the third order of simulacra is established, for which simulation is guided by a media code that transforms the real into the hyperreal. In the information society, the media generate, according to Baudrillard, a phantasmagorical world in which the frontiers of the real and the fictitious cannot be distinguished. This annulment of borders between the real and the simulated gives rise in society to a schizophrenic process of loss of reality. And the problem is exacerbated by the fact that simulation is not limited to the production of unreal objects but manufactures objects and experiences that pretend to be more real than reality itself, that is, hyperreal. It is not a matter of imitation nor of parody but of the supplanting of the real by the signs of the real. For the French philosopher, simulacrum is obviously not the same as sign. The simulacrum is a kind of repressive sign, tending to cover up its incapacity to be the real or to reproduce it. The fatal theory of which Baudrillard [25] involves assuming that the object is smarter, more ingenious than the subject, contrary to what happened in the trivial theory, where subjects always believe themselves to be smarter than the object. Letting oneself be seduced by the object is at the core of the 'fatal strategies' announced by Baudrillard, since this is what true postmodern liberation is all about.

In his conversations with Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs, Peter Sloterdijk laments that 'the discrepancy between the media form of the world and the psychic capacity to have a world is increasingly striking' [26]. As the meaning-producing devices of solid modernity are diluted, their symbolic efficacy is also diluted [27]. If we assume the consequences of the 'fatal strategies' announced by Baudrillard, there is no room for concern, events follow the correct course, since the capacity that increases is the one of the media power of the world which we have produced. But if we do not resign ourselves to its triumph, we must vindicate the full value of the symbolic

capacity of human beings and their expressive possibilities given the predominant socio-cultural practices in today’s hyper-technological societies.

4 Against the Levity of Philo-Technological Reductionism

Is there any way to survive the empire of transience, with all that it implies, in the midst of this over-accelerated world? Umberto Eco answers us: ‘There is, and it consists precisely in being aware that we live in a liquid society which, in order to be understood and perhaps overcome, requires new instruments. The problem is that politics and, to a large extent, the intelligentsia have not yet grasped the extent of the phenomenon’ [28].

Henry David Thoreau had three chairs in his house: one for solitude, one for friendship and one for society. This is how the American poet and philosopher narrates it in *Walden* [29], the proverbial essay in which he recounts his experience, in the mid-nineteenth century, next to Lake Walden during the more than 2 years that he lived there in a cabin he built himself. His communion with nature was a form of resistance to the bondage of industrial society. All imaginary visits to Thoreau’s cabin would today be mediated by virtual interactions. Private life, family, friendship, education and work are today mediated by virtual social interactions. Sherry Turkle adds a fourth chair, asking: who do we become when we talk to machines, what do we forget and what do we remember? For the most expansive conversations, Thoreau went out into nature. Now, to nature we must add the virtual world which we have created. In it we find machines that lend themselves to communication, machines that harbour the power to mediate interactions between people.

This is not about rejecting the social advances and benefits that technology can bring us in different areas but rather about reconciling us with ourselves. These are the ‘simple salvations’ Turkle refers to, related to the impossibility of machines ever understanding what things mean to us, as they are only programmed to pretend to understand. In the effort to feed the fantasy that they understand us, machines are ironically treated as if they were almost human, while mechanical behaviours are developed to treat human beings. But, beyond the gadgets encompassed by so-called artificial intelligence, human interactions in networks seem to combine the enquiry of personal identity with its expression, in a chain of unconnected fragments. In these interactions, the approach mediated by words is replaced by the mediation of screens, which make discussion possible without the emergence of improvisation, indeterminacy and equivocation. Although the technological system itself is not lacking in those who hasten to offer innumerable applications to compensate for the deficiencies detected, which are predominantly emotional, the solutions do not seem to come from the system itself. This is why Turkle proclaims the imperative need for conversation: ‘This is our time to improve the opportunities before us, this is our challenge: to recognize the unintended consequences of the

technologies to which we are vulnerable and to rely on the resilience that characterizes us as human beings. We have time to make the necessary corrections. And to remember who we are: creatures of history, deep psychology and complex relationships' [30].

Beyond the standardisation of educational processes, particularly justified for basic questions of citizenship training and for the achievement of professional foundations, participation in conversation means recovering the face-to-face encounter, with its risks and possibilities. It means opening up to the search for meaning with those who do share with us, not falsely, the real experience of life, with its greatness and miseries, with its prose and its poetry.

Michel Desmurget, from the field of neuroscience, warns against the disproportionate use of information and communication technologies (computers, tablets, smartphones, etc.) by the new generations – perhaps extensible, we think, to the not so young, too – which leads to physical and mental health problems and affects overall development. Three basic pillars of development are affected by screens, according to Desmurget: human interaction, language and concentration. The director of research at the French National Institute for Health and Medical Research points out that 'the hours taken away from the hegemony of screens must be made available for life' [31].

Human reality is an expressive reality. Precisely, the noise of the colossal amounts of data and information that flow through the digital world makes it impossible to access what is singular, what is different. This mass of information makes its contents seem uniformly discoloured, making the task of 'separating the wheat from the chaff' [27] a titanic one. All cats are black in the eternal electronic night. As information loses relevance, due to its unlimited and unapproachable growth, knowledge gains importance. Trying to bring order, never exhaustively and once and for all, is both unrenounceable and impossible to fully achieve challenge. It is not an easy mission, since the digital illusion, the belief that it is not necessary to learn because everything is in the devices that we handle, spreads at the speed that bits travel through the circuits that support the virtual world. Edgar Morin, when he calls for the regeneration of Eros, directs us to our core as people, to the place where the equal is interrupted, to that inner call that drives us to live creatively: 'We cannot advance on the basis of an average opinion, which is not democratic, but mediocre. One moves forward on the basis of a creative passion' [32].

All the proposals, not without a certain dose of naivety, formulated from the pedagogical redirection of the technological system itself, in an attempt to alleviate its pernicious effects, aspire to provisional solutions while awaiting new problematic emergencies. Rather, it is necessary to innovate from a full awareness of the origin of the problems, which invites us to re(think) education at this crucial moment.

Each person, individually and in their relationship with the world of work, with other people and with society, in their cultural links, may or may not imply a partial suspension of some of the pathogens of this era: information overload, hypercommunication and hyper-consumption. This interruption affects the need to open up to a better linking of personal time with the different spheres of life [33], showing us the way towards goals of greater fulfilment. It is up to us to ensure that the

demands of today’s lifelong learning are not limited to mere survival, giving way to the deployment of the capacity to inquire into the meaning of our own lives and to achieve a joyful and empathetic life. Are we ready?

5 Conclusion

The hyperconnected society opens up a range of benefits for humanity that can hardly be denied, but at the same time the material and moral progress advocated by well-meaning enlightened minds, as is well known, never happened. The configuration of identities today cannot be understood without the virtual world produced by humankind, which has been overwhelmed by it. Meanwhile, there is a generation that has already grown up surrounded by gadgets that feed permanent connectivity to a virtual reality, shaping itself with volatile identities, subjected to the tyranny of speed and the experience of the instant. The education system, as a social system, has been subject to the same influences of the technological system as the rest of the social systems. In general, we cannot appreciate symptoms capable of giving people the confidence to cultivate their inner selves and to meet others. It is necessary to call for the problem to be recognised and for the necessary measures to be taken to ensure that people have at their disposal the circumstances inherent to their human condition for the construction of their identities.

With the universal Spanish poet Antonio Machado, through the mouth of his Juan de Mairena, we understand that among the bundle of possibilities of (re) humanisation, we do not find today, as we did yesterday, the dissolution of the subject in any social category: ‘Even if the concept of mass can be properly applied to everything that reaches volume and matter, it is not useful to help us define humankind (...) because those who defend human agglomerations against their most abominable exploiters, have taken the concept of mass and turned it into a social, ethical and even aesthetic category. And this is frankly absurd. Imagine what a pedagogy for the masses could be: the education of the mass-child! It would be, in truth, the pedagogy of Herod himself, something monstrous’ [34].

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