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The Vicinity Paradigm in Information Society

Abstract: The present paper aims to analyze some of the most important consequences of the superposition between cyberspace and geographical space, taking into account a few social and economical transformations that define the Information Age. In order to improve the accuracy of our endeavour, we decided to introduce the concepts of "vicinity paradigm"and that of "thematic identity", which are ment to underline the new social geography of our times. The paper aims to explain the increasing vulnerability of the general public in front of manipulative political discourse, starting from the emergence of axiological relativism favored by the new structuring of contemporary society in the "vicinity paradigm". In the last part of the work, two possible solutions to this problem are briefly discussed.

Keywords: vicinity paradigm, cyberspace, information society, thematic identity.

1. Introduction

Knowledge Society and Information Society seem to represent two quite popular concepts these days, at least in the jargon of some institutions who claim to be well connected to the cultural profile of our times. But the specificity of our age needs more than a simple semantic twist to be described and such an effort seems to be worthy enough, due to the tremendous social pressure regarding the imperative of adapting ourselves to a new type of reality that undoubtedly affects and will affect our lives far beyond our present capacity of understanding it and foreseeing it. However, it remains debatable whether or not such an effort will pay off on the long run, especially if one takes into account the speed of the present day changes at multiple levels of society, many of them being deeply linked to the concept of *information*. Therefore, the intention

of our endeavour might look a little overoptimistic, given the speed of continuous cultural changes in Information Age. In a way, this observation might sound surprising, mainly because Information Age favors our access to a tremendous variety of sources of knowledge that are expected to help us to overcome more efficiently and more rapidly numerous difficulties in a quite coherent and relaxed manner, at least by comparison to our ancestors. So, on one hand, one could consider that information means comfort, prosperity, success and many other good things the contemporary people are used with. However, in spite of all that, there is, on the other hand, as much discomfort, as much pressure and as much uncertainty related these days to the concept of information. Therefore, one could assume that accessing information involves certain advantages and certain risks for the contemporary society and its structure, risks that one cannot ignore any longer and, in the same time, has to discuss alltogether.

We could easily observe that the architecture of society has been changed in the last decades by the aforementioned package of processes, including the fast development of technology, and in this context we could question ourselves about the fundamental shifts that happened and favored such a change. Among other elements we could discuss, the relation between time, space and the social dynamics stands apart.

Throughout the entire history of Human Kind the structure of society and the ideas (and the representations) about it (Nay 2008, 23-24), on one hand, and the structure of geographical space (or physical space) and the ideas (and the representations) about it (Chiriac 2011), on the other hand, were strongly interrelated. In other words, the "social relief" and the geographical (physical) relief were intricated one another, this fact having multiple consequences. The way in which wars were initiated and carried on, the way in which the competition for economical resources - from raw materials to human resources - emerged and, finally, the way in which territorial power was established and developed, all depended on the relation between human society and the physical space. Of course, some limitations imposed by certain particularities of the geographical relief were surpassed through technology, which made historians to consider that sometimes the harshness of geographical relief was, in fact, a gift for certain societies in which it boosted the intellectual effort for developing knowledge and applying it in an ingenious way. The cases of Great Britain or Japan are emblematic in this respect. But, generally speaking, various civilizations were created throughout the efforts made by different groups of people to adapt themselves to the

particularities of the relief encountered within the geographical regions in which they were forced or they decided to stay and to develop themselves. In this context, natural barriers like mountains, rivers or oceans play in the past a crucial role in shaping the historical experience of different communities.

2. Territorial Identities and Thematic Identities

During the process of such development a few types of identities emerged, like the national identity, the cultural identity, the local communitarian identity and so on. All these can be considered, in a way, as types of *territorial identity*, because each of them, including the linguistic identity, is associated with geographical space and its geo-morphological characteristics. In this respect, one could easily notice, for example, that the spreading of a language within a certain territory is not uniform, so linguistically speaking each of us belongs to a structured and somehow "bordered" territory, in spite of the fact that one can encounter within the same geographical territory a superposition of linguistic identities.

As in the case of many other moments in the history of Human Kind, in modern times human society was shaped by the relation between physical space and technology. The very architecture of civilizations, with all their package of diplomatic relations, internal politics and territorial conflicts, was shaped by the structure of geographical (physical) relief. The management of *identitary vicinities*, that were basically territorial ones in the past, was deeply influenced by the configuration of the geographical space. Looking back at the dynamics of this relation between identitary relations and terrestrial space, we could conclude that there is so much Geography in human history that the slightest change in this area would inflict deep changes throughout the entire society. And this is exactly what happened in the Information Age. Due to the spreading of cyberspace, a new relation among human beings, time, space and technology emerged and favored a deep conflict between *territorial identities* and a new branch of identities that are less *territorial*, but more *thematic*. We choose to call them like that, using an Aristotelian term acknowledged in Philosophy of Science by Gerald Holton (Holton 1988, 1), who related *themata* to the directions towards which various scientific communities choose to direct their research efforts in a specific period of time.

In our use of the term, *themata* can be associated with certain common places or certain crossing points within the social imaginary (Chiriac 2011) that defines a certain community. Thus, the online

communities that gather people from different places under the umbrella of the same subject, of the same values or of the same lifestyle can be seen, in our view, as *thematic clusters,* giving the fact that the members of these thematic clusters describe themselves as having one identitary component in common, a *thematic* one. What is remarkable, as regards this thematic identitary component, is that it could coexist with other identitary components or identitary layers that could be *territorial* in their nature. For instance, national identity, in its territorial classical form, could coexist with those thematic identities that help individuals to define themselves by taking into account the feed-back of the other members belonging to the same online community, as regards their own communication prophyle.Whilst territorial identities interact to one anoter in what we use to call *territorial vicinities,* thematic identities share in cyberspace a non-local type of vicinities which can be called *thematic vicinities.* The two types of identities we mentioned above and the two types of vicinities are intricate in the real world, due to the superposition between cyberspace and geographical space. In fact, we could call the thematic identities and the thematic vicinites *informational identities* and *informational vicinities*, giving the fact that they are less territorial or even non-local, but in the same time seem to have what we could call *a virtual* nature, being defined by a complex and genuine potentiality whose profile represents in fact the main subject of the present endeavor.

As we already mentioned, the new paradigm is centered on digital information. Therefore, it can be characterized by analyzing the epistemological and ontological status of information. In the digital age information means *data*. Data helps any cognitive system, natural or artificial, to guide himself throughout the surrounding world. What is interesting about data refers not only to its non-material nature which induces the non-local character of cyberspace and its structures based on the processing of data, but also its interaction with society, with science (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier 2014, 94) and with territorial structures of society.

Such a process has important economic and geo-strategic consequences that could be analyzed philosophically, but what interests us the most is the fact that western world seems to be quite unprepared for this new paradigm in which territorial forms of power and identity collide with thematic non-local identities and vicinities that cannot be easily controlled by traditional strategies. Obviously, the development of new, adaptive strategies able to overcome the challenges posed by the new type of society represents a long and complex process. Given the aforementioned transition, undoubtedly the new type of social

competition will have its winners and its losers at a global scale. But the criteria of selection will be different for the winners this time in comparison with the past. In order to better understand the specificity of the new environment it is necessary to clarify the distinction between local identities and non-local identities.

As far as they are concerned, traditional communities were characterized by the specific way in which they used to organize the space, namely the territory they lived on. Once the cyberspace became a reality, not only the internal architecture of communities changed dramatically, but their direct relation with geographical space changed dramatically. They became less territorial and their social structure developed in accordance with their main domain of interest. Traditional communities did not lose their territorial component, but, on one hand, they developed a non-territorial identity and, on the other hand, they were competed by genuine non-local communities which were, structurally speaking, nothing else but thematic clusters of people with common interests. Not only in business, but also in science, in art and almost in any domain this competition between traditional territorial communities, of all kinds, with their own territorial identities, on one hand, and their non-local counterparts, with their own non-local identities and non-territorial inner structures, on the other hand, became a reality.

Thus, the development of Internet as a global phenomenon changed dramatically the communication patterns, creating new types of opportunities, but challenging in the same time the older forms of social organization, especially if we take into account the whole new category of vicinities that emerged. Cyberspace induced a completely different relation of communicators with space and time; in this way, we are dealing nowadays with radically different types of communication barriers. As a consequence, on one hand, new protocols in communication were devised in the effort of taking advantage of the new situation but, on the other hand, new forms of identity protection were initiated by encrypting messages, by maintaining various forms of surveillance and so on. All these may be related to the special relation between the ontology of the objects in cyberspace and the ontology of physical objects. As Luciano Floridi pointed out in one of his works (Floridi 2014, 50), the identity of virtual or "abstract" entities that populate the cyberspace is very different in comparison with the identity of real objects. For instance, the identical copy of a file has no correspondent in the real world, since no identical copy of a real object is possible, except, maybe, the case of the objects produced by the 3D printers. This creates a unique

type of autonomy of cyberspace in relation to physical space, an autonomy that has a deep influence upon the way we situate oureselves within this superposition of cyberspace and physical space.

3. New Types of Vicinities and Theirs Challenges

The emergence of information technology created an unprecedented competition between the geographical (physical) relief and the virtual relief of cyberspace. This competition led to the development of an entire new system of vicinities, some of them really appealing for certain cathegories of people and others highly uncomfortable, at least in the Western world.

Among the newest and most disturbing vicinities we could mention are: the economical ones (e.g. the proximity of Chinese labor market for the western multinational companies), the demographic ones (e.g. the proximity of the refugees from Middle East that know very well how and where to go in Western Europe), the political ones (e.g. the proximity of Eastern European democracies for the authoritarian regime in Russia) and the ideological ones (e.g. the proximity of Islamic radicalism (Assange, Appelbaum, Müller-Maguhn and Zimmermann 2016, 98) for the western countries, especially for theirs islamist citizens that are poorly integrated in western society).

The superposition between cyberspace and geographical space favors a special kind, somehow immaterial proximity between entities that were a few decades ago very far away one another, which is why we are going to link the paradigm of vincinity to the concept of "informational proximity". Each of these new types of vicinity can be *actual* or *potential*, *real* (involving territorial identities) or *virtual* (involving mainly data exchange in cyberspace), *unidirectional* (as in the case of colonization policies or in the case of migration trends) or *bidirectional* (as in the case of commercial relations)*,* but we also could talk about the limits[1] of such vicinities, about what they could not change in the world-wide geography of power.

Being a direct result of the existence of virtual space, the new vicinities are not a marginal aspect of social reality, because they come together with a wide set of consequences that change the very "texture of social reality" as much as the emergence of virtual reality marked a turning point in the evolution of the "texture of reality" (Deutsch 2006,

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[1] This idea of vicinities' limits was suggested to me by my colleague, Professor Viorel Țuțui, together with some insightful thoughts regarding the use of propaganda in the new Vicinity Paradigm, for which I am grateful to him.

168); therefore they can be considered as parts of an entire new paradigm. For example, economic vicinities favored by the emergence of cyberspace are changing dramatically the lives of people from different parts of the world, forcing them to compete for the same working place. Thus, their professional lives are intricate[1] in a manner for which none of them was culturally prepared.

One should not forget that any territorial identity is based on its own founder myth, which depends, on its turn, on an arbitrarily selective history which includes only those experiences and historical information able to confort psychologically the owner of that specific identity. In this respect, the national identity, for example, is based on those historical episodes that underline the moral qualities and values associated by the citizens with that specific nation. In this perspective, those less heroic historical episodes in the evolution of the nation are not included, reminded so often or, sometimes, they are even ignored. Thus, belonging to a certain nation involves a process of identification with that nation and that process cannot be an unpleasant one for any individual that aims to belong to that nation. In the same time, belonging to a nation or assuming the territorial identity specific to that nation depends to what the members of that nation think of themselves, on how they see semselves throughout the historical trip of that nation towards its maturation or towards its present image or reflexive image. This process is less dependent on what that nation is seen by others, by specialists in history of other groups of people. However, nowadays, due to the superposition between digital environment and physical environment, the self-image of a nation can become more dependent on the opinions of other nations about it. The same thing can be said about other, more restrained layers of identity, such the communitarian one. The priority order of the different identitary layers is in a continuous transformation nowadays, due to the multiple cultural influences the individual is exposed to on the internet.

However, due to the superposition between geographical space and cyberspace, nowadays it is really difficult to keep intact the addiction towards a specific territorial identity, mainly because its fondatory myth is based on an arbitrary selective history which cannot be kept intact after the collision with other points of view expressed by other people on the internet. Therefore, we can talk about a real thematic challenge of the territorial identities which increases theis transformation. In time, they become less stable and, in the same time, they become prone of being

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[1] I have to thank to my colleague, Professor Gheorghe Ilie Fârte, for suggesting me this idea of intricacy of human lives generated by the new economical situation specific to the Information Age.

replaced by thematic identities or to be mixed with a thematic identitary component which has its own dynamics. Some of these territorial identities continue to exist in partnership with the thematic ones, others become thematic and others are almost completely replaced by thematic identitary components. In any case, the process involves a more fragile and dynamic ontology of identities, which became predominant in the digital era.

This identitary instability manifests in various ways, including the possibility of change within the pattern of identitary concentric spheres. For instance, in certain social and psychological conditions, some components of the territorial identity of a person can be"replaced" by some other components of a thematic identity. Sometimes, this change can be sudden and with important consequences as far as the behavior of the person is concerned, some other times the change can be gradual, very subtle and almost undetectable, due to the fact that it happens unconsciously. In the case of the descendents of Muslim immigrants in western countries, whose identitary profile has a deep influence over the behavioral patterns, including consumption (Wright 2015), the religious radicalization can occur as a consequence of this kind of replacement at the level of identitary spheres. The territorial national identity related to the western country their family leved in, which was never very strong, was easily replaced by the radical ideological identity of religious extremism. However, this replacement took place, most of all, in terms of identitary priority rather than in terms of ontological replacement, meaning that territorial national or even local communitarian identity did not disappear entirely when it was replaced by the ideological one. The two of them continued to coexist, but the ideological one became prioritary, urging the individual to follow the imperatives of the thematic religious identity.

The continuous clash between multiple axiological manifolds that characterizes the digital space has various effects. Among them, two seem to be more interesting for our discussion. The first one refers to the increasing skepticism regarding the founder myth that stands beyond any traditional, territorial identity. Giving the fact that the majority of the founding myths that stand bedind territorial identities relies on a selective communitary history, which purposely neglect those historical episodes that are less glorious or those informations that are less confortable for the selfesteem of the members of community, the continuous flux of information from various sources that represents the trademark of internet (Beciu 2011, 285) may represent a real threat for the intentionally oriented ignorance or arbitrary selective lecturing of local history that seems to be a necessary condition for maintaining the trust of individuals

in the traditional territorial identityes. Thus, on one hand, the stability of traditional territorial identities is reduced in the cultural context favored by the superposition between cyberspace and the physical space, due to the axiological relativism of post-modern times. On the other hand, the lack of a unitary and well-structured axiological paradigm prevents individuals from developping a consistent argumentation against the founding myth or against the associated set of values crystalized from the very communitary historical experience mentioned above. And this happens because each argument has to be linked to the thesis it defends by a warrant which is usually a moral or a juridical principle accepted by everybody. Finding such a warrant in the new cultural paradigm characterized by axiological relativism seems to be quite difficult (Toulmin 2003, 97).

Taking into consideration the two consequences mentioned above, one can easily understand how axiologically divided becomes the general public, which means in fact that it is less sensitive to a consistent argumentation that aims to convince the people of the rightfulness of a particular point of view. Such a public becomes less sensitive to rationality and more sensitive to extreme persuasion based on instincts, on fear, on hate and various kinds of prejudices. In other words, in the post-truth era, due to the fundamental axiological relativism favored by the emergence of internet, the general public becomes less rational (Lynch 2017, 46) and more vulnerable in front of different types of propaganda (Bernays 1928, 150).

4. Possible Solutions

One could ask himself what could be done in order to prevent the profound negative consequences induced by the changes described above and favored by the superposition between cyberspace and physical space. Among these consequences, the most disturbing one is represented by the fact that the general public seems to become less rational and more sensitive to seductive propaganda of various types. Some authors argue in favor of a continuous positive propaganda, seen as a logical countermeasure. In our opinion, such a solution is limited by at least two kinds of limitations. At first, the decay in rational attitude towards identitary and even political problematic could be seen as more dangerous for democratic social systems than for dictatorships. After all, the election process in democratic societies is officially based on the rational capacity of the citizens to deside which political contestant would be more

representative for theirs interests. The fact that the general public becomes more sensitive to propaganda and has the tendency to be more emotionally involved in the election process can expose the entire democratic system to real threats, as it was the case recently in United States and Europe where populism and extremism seemed to be quite seductive for an important part of the general public. Of course, the specific axiological relativism and the continuous flux of contradictory information available in cyberspace represent a real danger for the stability of dictatorships and authoritrin regimes as well. But in this case the control of external sources of information is an old solution that was used from a very long time and seems to remain a widely used one even today for limiing the skepticism or the lack of enthusiasm in perpetuating the founding political myth. North Corea, China and even Turkey are vivid examples of states in which the flux of information accessed through internet by the general public was limited or filtered by authorities in the last decade.

Coming back to democratic systems, in their case the very use of positive propaganda poses uncomfortable deontological questions, because any propagandistic discourse involves the lack of transparency in what concerns the real purpose of the speaker and the real consequences of the behavior proposed to the citizens. So, the natural question that occurs next refers to the alternative solutions that might be taken into consideration in order to counterbalance, as much as possible, the negative effects of the superposition between cyberspace and geographical space upon the general public. It seems that such effects occurred due to the speed of technological development in digital era in contrast with the socio-cultural inertia of human communities that struggle to preserve their identitary heritage in the new communicational environment dominated by the World Wide Web.

Given the fact that technological systems evolve more rapidly than social systems, it could be a reasonable strategy to ask ourselves whether or not technology itself could be developed and used in such a way that technological impact upon human communities at the cultural level could be controlled somehow. For the moment, we are going to propose two directions of research that look promising on medium and long term. As a matter of fact, both directions are deeply linked to the way in which poltical argumentation is structured.

The first direction regards the validity of political argumentation, which has two components: the material validity and the formal validity. The material validity refers to the relation between the arguments used

within the political discourse and the surrounding reality. In this respect, the arguments have to be true, which means that false information must be eliminated from the discourse. It is not an easy task, especially if we take into account that in the post-truth age politicians are tempted to use false information that suits their pragmatic objectives. The so-called fake news represent a good example in this respect, but in the same time their spreading triggered the interes of some media institutions towards informatics means that could help the general public to detect the unreliable news by verifying theirs sources.

In other words, the first solution for minimizing the effects of propaganda or the effects of the manipulative political discourse (Sălăvăstru 2010, 50) consists in confronting the general public with a set of informations that are true and in the same time are deeply relevant for the public as regards the very intention of the political discourse and the very understanding of the subject of the discourse. They represent a proper and necessary completion of the discursive schematisation proposed initially by the politician with informations that have been deliberately omitted by the author of the political discourse. The omittion took place for pragmatic reasons, but due to the deliberately narrow discoursive schematization the real intention os the speaker is ignored, is missed or is misinterpreted. The kind of informations we are talking about represent a fundamental condition for a lucid attitude of the general public throughout the elections. The use of digital technology for such a informative completion process involves efforts in two major directions: first of all, in the direction of technological development of informatics applications; second, in the direction of adapting the media legislation and attaining a professional agreement among the majority of media institutions in order to assure an unbiased use of the technology in the election campain.

But, in order to be more explicit as regards the nature of informations we refer to, we are going to give a historical example. In the Second World War, in a moment when German Army exerted a huge pressure on the Red Army implementing the so-called Barbarossa plan of invading U.S.S.R, Stalin pronounced on 6th of November 1941 one of his most well-known discourses, in which he encouraged all the Russians to make a unite effort for resisting in front of the German Army. What is particularily interesting in this speech is the fact that he admitted in front of the Moscow Soviet that the Red Army suffered important losses, openly discussing the main reasons for the temporary reverses of the Red Army. He did that for two reasons. First, the general military situation was so difficult that it would have been impossible to hide it. After all, a

very important part of the U.S.S.R. was under the control of German Army. Second, in front of a real danger citizens would react, therefore Stalin had no choice in this respect: he had to explain to the people how critical the situation was, in order to motivate them. The results of this discourse and of the other discourse pronounced on 7th of November 1941 were remarkable, the communist leader succeeding in encouraging the population to continue the resistance. However, there was sensitive information that the communist leader "forgot" to mention: the fact that Stalin himself had a crucial contribution in diminishing the fighting capacity of the Red Army by killing or deporting an important number of its officers in the `30s. We could presume that, had the Russian general public known about that episode before listening to the discourse, it wouldn`t have had the same attitude regarding the speaker any more. Of course, given the gravity of the situation, it is hard to believe that the outcome of the discourse would have been very different, but the sensitive information avoided by the speaker would have helped the general public to better evaluate the real profile of the political leader.

This kind of sensitive informations we are taking into account of when we are proposing the development of algorithms able to confront the public with relevant informations hidden up to that moment by those politicians who use a deliberately narrow discursive schematization in front of their public. In addition to the software applications used nowadays to identify the so-called fake news by analizing the trustfulness of the independent sources of each important information circulated in the media, the software we refer to should be able to select from the media and from the public space those informations from highly authorized sources that are relevant for the subject treated in the political discourse. The relevance criterium has to do with the thematic convergence between the discursive schematization used by the politician and authorized information regarding the same subject which can be accessed on the internet. For example, when some politicians refer in their discourses or in their election campain to the economical situation of Romania, the software should be able to access immediately the most important reports of specialized national and international institutions regarding the real economical situation of Romania in the last few years. In doing that, three simple criteria have to be used: the presence of the words "Romanian economy" within the texts of the documents, the period of time (the last five years, for example) and the presence of the source of the documents on a short list of the most well-known and authorized institutions in the domain of economy in in Romania and in the world.

Of course, sometimes the computers could be tricked by some sophisticated expressions or some linguistic subtleties within the text of the political discourse, so that their correlations between the official economical reports regarding the situation of Romania and the claims of the politician might be quite inaccurate sometimes. And such inaccuracies might be exposed in some political debates on the subjects. But the most important gain in all this process is the fact that such correlations between the claims and the intentions expressed by politicians and the official informations about the real economical situation of the country become the main subject of the political debate. And this very fact would mean a better thematic correlation between the public debate around the election campain and the real economical situation of the country. This way, many false subjects and false claims might be exposed and eliminated from the public debate increasing its general quality.

All the aspects mentioned above refer to the material validity (Sălăvăstru 2003, 242) of political discourse and could represent a first step in using artificial intelligence for counterbalancing some negative socio-cultural effects of the superposition between cyberspace and the geographical space, but the next more difficult step in this direction would be the development of software applications able to analize the formal validity of argumentation in political discourse. This might seem a pretty bold idea, given the subtleties and complexities of the argumentative structures used in political discourses, but one has to keep in mind that it is not enough to select only the truth arguments in a consistent discourse, it is also necessary to be shure about the existence of a logical relation of those arguments with the thesis of the discourse, in order to decide whether or not the entire argumentative effort is solid enough. The dimentions of the present paper do not allow us to describe in detail the way in which such an automated analysis of the formal validity of the political discourse could be implemented using artificial intelligence. However, some steps in using software applications for representing the argumentative structure of a text have already been made (Peldszus and Stede 2013), even though in a mainly pedagogical manner (Reed and Rowe 2004). Obviously, within such an endeavor the contributions of Aristotle regarding the rhetoric syllogism, the Toulmin Model of argumentation and the so-called Rhetorical Analysis may play an important role (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tytheca 2012, 109). Nevertheless, the results of an automated argumentative analysis of the

political discourse could not replace the human judgement[1]; rather they could be seen only as a useful complementary tool ment to make the human decision regarding the argumentative validity and consistency of a discourse an easier one.

The second solution we take into account for diminishing the fragility of the general public in front of propaganda or in front of various attempts of political manipulation regards a new perspective upon the relation between the political discursive endeavor and the specific sensitivity of the public. In this respect, we are going to take into account the new perspective on the functioning of human mind based on researches in cognitive psychology and neuro-physiology. What differentiates, basically, the present-day understanding of human cognition from what psychologists and neurobiologists believed on the same matter a few decades ago regards the relation between the conscious level of processing information and the unconscious level of processing information by the human brain. First, the unconscious level of processing information seems to play a very important role in shaping our perspective upon the world, due to the fact that at this level we continuously make inferences, while, in the same time, we only seem to be able to become aware of the conclusions of these inferences. In contrast with the classical psychoanalytic perspective on human mind, nowadays we know that human unconsciousness is not dominated solely by instincts, its cognitive activity being also important. Second, our introspective capacity of understanding what is happening in our mind at the unconscious level is very limited, which means that a normal person cannot become aware and cannot express the entire complexity of his unconscious cognitive activity. Now, if we take into consideration the fact that some of our wishes remain for a very long time at the unconscious level, while influencing the way we think and the way we behave, we understand how different should we conceive at the pragmatic level the interaction between the political speaker and his public.

Usually, the politician intends to persuade his public by focusing on the needs and on the wishes of that public and emphasizing in his discourse especially those aspects that interess the majority of his listeners. But, if we take into account the distinction between the conscious level of processing information by human mind and the unconscious level of processing information, we could easily understand that the interess of the public

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[1] I am grateful to my colleague, Professor Constantin Sălăvăstru, for pointing me out some inherent limits in the use of Artificial Intelligence within the argumentative analysis of the political discourse.

towards some issues as also an unconscious component and a consciouss component as well. If asked, people are not able to express in detail what drives them towards some specific issue, but this doesn't mean their unconscious wishes are less important than the consciouss ones.

In this very moment, let us reflect upon the communicative relation between the political speaker and his public. And let us analyze the political oratoric performance in terms of usefulness. We could consider that an honest politician might be useful for himself by gathering the support of his pblic throughout his oratorical performance, but on the condition that the people from the public understand the utility for themselves of the election program of the candidate. This usefulness regards the potential fulfillement of the real needs of the people. But in considering that, we assumed that the people know very well what are theirs real needs, we assumed that for them the fulfillment of these needs corresponds to a specific set of conscious wishes. Moreover, at the bottom of this assumption of ours lays another one: that people know very well who they are and what their situation is (socially, economically, and politically). Because only a clear perspective upon their own identitary profile and upon their place in society allows people to clearly represent in mind the set of their most important needs. This kind of identitary consciousness of his public becomes a fundamental condition for the honest politician; no matter how he chooses to use it. In case he wants to convince the public, he will use this identitary consciousness in an objective manner, while in the case he wants to pursuade his public he will use it in a subjective manner. As to the seductive politician who prefers to manipulate (Sălăvăstru 1999, 132) the public, assuming that such a public would have a quite strong identitary consciousness would force him to make false promises, in order to give the impression that he will fulfill their set of conscious needs. Another manipulatory strategy adopted by the seductive politician is that of creating a set of false needs in the mind of his listeners which afterwards he refers to as representing a set of real, indispensable needs. Then, he claims that he will do his best to fulfill those false needs of the public transformed in the meantime in conscious wishes.

But nowadays, in the so-called post-truth age, with the increasing tension between the thematic and the territorial components of identity, things became more complicated. The continuous variety of contradictory information available on the internet, combined with the consequent axiological relativism, the impossibility of a direct verification of the sources of information that induces a certain "captivity" of the public

within the narrative regarding what is really happening in the surrounding world induce the increasing dependence of the personal identitary profile on the self-esteeme based on the feed-back from the other members of the social networks. The continuous fluctuations and juxstapositions between the thematic and the territorial levels of identity determine a very different relation among the listeners of the political discourse and the speaker. People not only have to recognize himself within the discursive schematization used by the politician, but sometimes they begin to discover themselves, to gradually redefine themselves wihin the narrative induced by the discursive schematization. In these circumstances one can talk about a veritable "demiurgic effect" of the discourse upon the people, given the fact it helps people to better understand "reality" and to better understand their own place within that "reality" seen as a semantic context or a semantic universe.

In this point, it seems necessary for us to make the distinction between two levels of "reality". In doing that, we are taking into consideration the fact that people are only partially able to introspect, to understand and to explain to the others their inner cognitive activity. They can reflect upon themselves, but they are able to become aware of a very small part of their unconscious processing of information, basically resuming them to reflect upon the final conclusions of their own unconscious inferences. Thus, we choose to define the level of "reality" that comprises the actual information processing within the mind of human beings, including those neurological processes that lay beyond the reflexive capacity of human mind, "social real". Further on, we choose to define the image about the "social real" that people are able to become aware of and are capable to communicate to the others "social reality". In this way, we can consider that people are driven in their behavior by cognitive processes and human interactions that cannot be fully understood and fully scrutinized consciously. But the most disturbing observation is that sociologists, at least those of them that continue to use exclusively traditional methods of investigation, are able to investigate mainly the social reality, as an incomplete image of the fascinating social real that lies beyond it. Namely, in spite of the fact that their goal is to understand the whole spectrum of processes that take place in the domain of social human interactions, sociologists remain somehow at the surface of the social phenomenoa, which cannot be fully understood starting exclusively from the limited range of conscious introspection. Of course, there are some limited possibilities to underline unconscious attitudes of the subjects using smart strategies of questioning them, but what interests

us the most is the fact that only a little part of the cognitive processes (Goldmann 1993, 368-382) that lay beyond various human motivations can be emphasized by classical sociological investigations and can be used as guidelines for the producers of the political discourse. The politician who takes into account only those elements that define the social reality as an incomplete image of the social real, sometimes an image distorted by the peculiarities of the social imaginary of a particular community that has the tendency to be obsessed of some episodes within its historical experience while ignoring in the same time other episodes simply because they don't "fit" into the identitary mythology of that community, risks to be severely limited in his pragmatic effort. Taking into account in a discourse only the conscious wishes of the people is not, in our opinion, a very effective strategy these days.

The main reason is that nowadays, in the post-truth age, when the territorial components of identity and the thematic components of identity suffer continuous changes favored by the superposition between cyberspace and terrestrial geographical space, the unconscious wishes of the public, which is more thematically segregated than ever, play a major role in motivating its reactions towards different types of incentives, including different kinds of propaganda. As a consequence, one efficient strategy for an honest politician, in order to counterbalance the bad influence of different types of propaganda and extremist discourse, would be to address those problems the public is uncounsciously engrossed with. If such an action was possible, it would have a major impact upon the public, which could experiment a feeling of extreme comfort, a feeling of identitary refreshment generated by the discovery that the discourse itself, based on the great intuitions of the speaker, helps them to better understand their place in the world and to find out who they really are in terms of a new identitary mythology. Actually, such great orators existed in history, even thow some of them, like Napoleon or Hitler, abused their power of influencing people through political discourse. Others, like Winston Churchill or Martin Luther King, were able to maintain a special relation with theirs listeners, helping them to re-invent themselves, to better understand themselves and to remain motivated in spite of the difficult situation they were forced to act. However, in the future intuition might not be the only source of information for a political speaker as regards the unconscious wishes of the public. Using non-invasive investigation methods like MNR (Nuclear Magnetic Resonance) and others, sociologists and neuro-biologists may uncover in the future at least a small part of the "social real" that lays beyond the human capacity

of introspection, revealing some valuable information about the relations among education, axiologic orientation, unconscious reasoning and the sensitivity of the subjects towards certain messages expressed in a specific persuasive manner.

But the most important aspect in this context remains the development of a discursive strategy able to encourage the public to pay more attention to the insidious attempts of various manipulators. Many of such manipulators take advantage of the identitary crisis by orienting people towards some of theirs false needs which are presented to them as being much more important than the real ones. In response to that, an honest politician could try to identify the real needs of his listeners and to focus on them, but the most difficult part in his effort would be to find out whether or not such real needs transformed themselves in conscious or unconscious wishes. In this point, we believe that the new technologies, including those able to identify the activation of certain neuronal networks when some specific words are listened or some specific images are seen, could be used to uncover more about what is really going on in the brains and in the minds of the listeners. In fact, making people to become aware of the identitary challenges of our times could strengthen their vigilence regarding the use of a very narrow discursive schematization within different types of propaganda.

5. Conclusions

The social and cultural transformations that take place nowadays as a result of the emergence of cyberspace represent such a radical process that one could consider it as representing a paradigm shift in terms of culture and civilization. As far as we are concerned, we propose to name it *the vicinity paradigm,* a name we are going to justify by using a few relevant examples. As we already mentioned, the spreading of World Wide Web induced a dramatic replacement of the conventional, geographical relief, together with all its consequences regarding historical development of different civilizations, with a new one, which could be considered *an information relief.* As the old one, the new type of relief will favor the development of certain components of global society, the forming of new centers of power and of new peripheries of power. The new aspect which could be considered as a genuine characteristic of the information relief is the digitalized nature of power that is going to be unequally spread throughout cyberspace. The fact that power has now a digitalized nature does not mean that its hierarchies do not have important

territorial consequences, from an economical, a political or even a geostrategic point of view. It means only that some of its characteristics changed, the practice of such a power becoming increasingly less territorial or, at least, less dependent on the old special boundaries.

No one can be completely sealed or secured in the new environment. Information travels with the speed of light throughout cyberspace and the interaction between information geography in cyberspace and the physical geography deeply affects contemporary society. No group of people with the ability of accessing information through internet could be confined any more into a physical geographical area, due to the fact that cyberspace allows them to interact specifically with the physical environment using an information interface. So, the virtual space, with its own geography and its layered structure, is deeply affecting the physical geography of population and the way in which terrestrial space is organized these days. Due to the relative autonomy of cyberspace, with its genuine relation between space and time that allows information to travel in all directions, almost instantaneously, its influence upon geographical (physical) space manifests rather indirectly. People start to organize theirs activities in accordance with the architecture or, if you prefer, the new informational geography of cyberspace. This way, gradually, the terrestrial space is signified differently and its relation with the social sctructures changes. Of course, there are limits of this influence. For instance, the fact that natural resources are unequally distributed on the Earth's surface will remain a major factor of influence upon international relations; no matter how isotropic is the cyberspace. But the two geographies tend to be nowadays so intricated that sometimes people try to compensate the difficulties encountered at one geographical level by using adaptive strategies at the other level and viceversa. For instance, on one hand, some of the most dangerous hackers try to hide theirs servers in atomic bunkers or other isolated places, in order to remain untouchable and unstoppable on the internet. On the other hand, however, secret services and various other types of organizations use data encrypting technologies in order to remain immune in front of theirs competitors ant to be able preserve their mobility throughout terrestrial space. As to politicians, by adopting a conservative stance regarding the preservation of terrestrial and political distances (immigration cautious politics, or protectionist economic politics), some of them hope to become popular in front of their electors, but sometimes their strategies fail especially because informational

vicinities or thematic vicinities cannot be controlled by implementing exclusively terrestrial strategies (e.g. the Brexit decision).

We can give many other examples that illustrate the fact that nowadays physical proximities and physical distances are doubled by informational proximities and informational distances. This new situation creates an immense pressure of the environment upon individuals that manifests like an identitary crisis. The emergence of thematic vicinities creates a pressure for which many peole do not feel culturally prepared, which triggers sometimes identitary shifts that make people more vulnerable to political manipulation. Due to the fact that information technology and its fast development seem to be one of the main causes for such tendencies, we took into consideration two possible solutions for counterbalancing the tendencies mentioned above by using the same information technology in a constructive way. The first of them involves the development of software applications able to help the general public to verify the accuracy of the informations used within the political discourse, while the second solution involves the effort to expose the public to a political discourse oriented towards the real needs of the people, needs that hopefully could be emphasized by using the same information technology.

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