

Self-hacking Narcis@'s Gaze in the Media and Digital Caverns: Autopoiesis, Automediality, and Autobiographical Audiovisual Story*

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Abstract

This article originated when I put forward the possibility of self-actualizing the gaze through the productive practice of the autobiographical audiovisual story from a situational point of view. However, the reflection now goes beyond to propose autopoiesis or the generation of reflective consciousness through various modes of automediality, expressed in multiple forms of subjectivity while producing the autobiographical audiovisual story. This process allows self-hacking the narcosis of the narcissistic look of which McLuhan spoke in the last century, but in today's "media and digital caverns," to become conscious of oneself, self-alienation, and self-exploitation in the

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era of the normative individualism of the I-company, which emerged in the last century during the formation of the neoliberal subject and its most elaborate product: the prosumer.

Keywords (Source: Unesco Thesaurus)

Communication; conscience; education; media education; individualism.

Auto-hackear la mirada de Narcis@ en las cavernas mediáticas y digitales: autopoiesis, automedialidad y relato audiovisual autobiográfico* **

Resumen

El artículo se originó cuando planteé la posibilidad de generar una autoactualización de la mirada por medio de la práctica productiva del relato audiovisual autobiográfico, a partir del punto de vista situacional, pero ahora la reflexión va más allá, para plantear la autopoiesis o generación de la conciencia reflexiva, a través de los diversos modos de automedialidad, que se expresan en diversas formas de subjetividad, durante el proceso de producción del relato audiovisual autobiográfico, el cual permite “auto-hackear” la narcosis de la mirada narcisista de la que habló McLuhan en el siglo pasado, pero en las “cavernas mediáticas y digitales” de hoy, para hacer conciencia de sí mismo, de la autoalienación y de la autoexplotación en la era del individualismo normativo de la empresa-Yo, que emergió desde el siglo pasado durante la formación del sujeto neoliberal, y de su producto más elaborado: el prosumidor.

Palabras clave (Fuente: Tesauro de la Unesco)

Comunicación; conciencia; educación; educación sobre medios de comunicación; individualismo.

* Este artículo es derivado de la tesis “La mediación (auto)biográfica de la competencia mediática. El relato audiovisual (auto)biográfico como método y metodología para introducir a los estudiantes en el desarrollo de habilidades (auto)reflexivas y (auto)expresivas de la competencia mediática. Estudio de casos en España, Brasil y Colombia”, realizada en el Doctorado en Comunicación y Periodismo de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, España, entre los años 2017 y 2021, con una estancia de investigación doctoral en la Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo.

** Nota del autor: Con mucha frecuencia utilizo el paréntesis en las palabras que llevan el prefijo auto, para subrayar la doble condición (auto)formativa y (auto)investigativa del método y de la metodología que utilizo, aquí lo omitimos a favor del estilo de escritura y para facilitar la lectura.

Auto-hackear o olhar de Narcis@ nas cavernas midiáticas e digitais: autopoiese, automedialidade e relato audiovisual autobiográfico *

Resumo

Este artigo originou-se quando propus a possibilidade de gerar uma autoatualização do olhar por meio da prática produtiva do relato audiovisual autobiográfico, a partir do ponto de vista situacional; no entanto, agora, a reflexão vai mais além, para propor a autopoiese ou a geração da consciência reflexiva por meio dos diversos modos de automedialidade, que se expressam em diversas formas de subjetividade, durante o processo de produção do relato audiovisual autobiográfico. Esse processo permite “auto-hackear” a narcose do olhar narcisista de que falou McLuhan, no século passado, mas, nas “cavernas midiáticas e digitais” de hoje, para tornar consciente de si mesmo, da autoalienação e da autoexploração na era do individualismo normativo da empresa-Eu, que emergiu desde o século passado, durante a formação do sujeito neoliberal, e do seu produto mais elaborado: o *prosumer*.

Palavras-chave (Fonte: Thesaurus, Unesco)

Comunicação; consciência; educação; educação sobre os meios de comunicação; individualismo.

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What Narcissus represents, for media and communication studies, goes beyond self-contemplation and falling in love with oneself since it implies a confrontation with one's own gaze as a system of ideas, sensations, perceptions, prejudices, and beliefs about oneself and about the visible world. During these twenty years of research on autobiographical audiovisual story² in the training of communicators, edumunicators, and teachers of media, information and communication technologies (ICT), and education (Marín Ossa, 2003, 2010, 2014, 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2022a, 2022b, 2023³), I have found elements that allow me to propose a methodology that gives students the ability to reflect on themselves, observe themselves, and reflect on their mediated life experiences until they achieve self-learning and updating in relationships with their own methods, objectives, didactics, means of communication, and languages while reflecting on their object of study and disciplinary area in relation to other disciplines, theories, concepts and practices. However, in addition, this reflective practice allows us to break through the cognitive closure that each of us elaborates with the media and with ICT. In other words, this practice enables us to leave the media and digital caverns to look with greater breadth and depth, even to look at ourselves, not only as spectators but also as protagonists of the world. In this sense, the process of the *transformation* of this gaze influences the way in which information is received, selected, filtered, interpreted, and mapped and, as a result, produces a point of view or an opinion regarding reality.

What does it mean to autohack Narcissus' gaze in the media and digital caverns?

Each era brings with it the expectations, fears, doubts, possibilities, and changes brought about by the new technologies that emerge and are inserted into society, as McLuhan (1996; 2020) warned during the last century. These transformations involve arduous and deep research and creative solutions to the phenomena that disturb us and that put our intuition, our

2 The video "Autobiography, media et éducation. Trajectoire d'une ligne de recherche" synthesizes the process of constructing one of the research lines of the Edumedia-3 group and a formative research hotbed. YouTube channel: Diego Leandro Marín Ossa (2020).

3 The text was published in the *Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa (Auto) biográfica* (Marín Ossa, 2023).

imagination, and our capacities for invention to the test. The supposed isolation, lack of communication, and lack of a critical attitude toward the world are some of the problems pointed out by educators, parents and, in general, people who have opinions, regardless of whether they are based in fact, whether in public spaces or private spaces, even in the media and social networks. Accordingly, if we do not do something, then sooner or later, we will succumb to self-alienation and self-exploitation in a dystopian world dominated by technology, very similar to that described by George Orwell (2022) in the middle of the last century in his novel *1984*, which Charlie Brooker staged a few years ago in the Black Mirror series.

In this sense, it seems that the tensions and debates between technophobes and technophiles again focus not only on perceptions, beliefs, and even prejudices about the media, ICT, and social networks but also on studies, research, and reflections that contribute valuable elements in regard to advancing the media and digital education of the population. Hence, the allegory of the cave, the seventh book of Plato's *Republic*, remains in force at the beginning of the 21st century, both in research and in training and reflections on media, ICT, and education. Even the allegory of the cave is a concept that long ago made its transition from oral and written diegesis to audiovisual diegesis (Caminos, 2018), in films such as *Matrix* by the Wachowski sisters, in the first episodes of the Catalan series *Merlí* and in the first episode of the educational series *Mentira la Verdad* del Canal Encuentro, starring the Argentine philosopher Darío Sztajnszrajber. The debate is so current and Plato's story is so illustrative that we can even speak of media and digital caves to refer to that existential bubble that consumes us and in which we frequently isolate ourselves. We devote hours, days, weeks, months, and years of our lives to screens, social networks, and digital devices without setting limits, with few educational tools to make better use of them, and allowing the economy of attention to exploit our thoughts and emotions.

Now, it should be remembered that in 1964, Marshall McLuhan published his book *Understanding media: The extensions of man*, whose 1996 Spanish edition I refer to in this text. In the above work, the author dedicated the fourth chapter to the myth of Narcissus (p. 61), a character that

he related to the Greek word *narcosis* or numbness. For McLuhan, this story represented the confusion that the protagonist of the myth experienced when thinking that his reflection in the water was another person; thus, her extension desensitized his perceptions until it became his own extended or repeated image, and the nymph Eco tried to captivate his love with fragments of his own words, but to no avail, for the young man was numb, had adapted to the extension of himself, and had become a closed system.

Almost sixty years later, this idea of McLuhan describes the narcosis of the narcissistic gaze, which, in the current context and as an interpretive hypothesis, can be said to make human reason and sensibility two instances of the same closed system in the media and digital caverns. In this sense, I find a relationship between this idea and the emotional, rational, and cognitive closure experienced by generations of internet users, media audiences, social networks, and consumers of digital devices a product of the *numbness* or *narcosis* of their nervous system in the face of new technologies.

If we verify this, then we can avoid, restrict, and even prohibit the use of ICT, social networks, and digital devices in the family environment, at work, and in educational institutions. Moreover, we can surrender without repairing the fate imposed on us by the corporations that currently handle ICT, including social networks, or on the contrary, we can imagine, design, and implement methodologies that help us address this phenomenon without underestimating the possibilities of ICT, social networks, and digital devices in science, culture, and education.

Currently, beyond the exciting and necessary debates between the apocalyptic and the integrated (Eco, 2009) of yesterday and today, such as that of Desmurget (2020), entitled “The digital cretin factory”, with which he questions the label of “digital natives” that has been widely spread since Prensky (2010), McLuhan (1996) affirmed, based on Narcissus’s story, that excessive stimuli from the environment induce narcosis or numbness, which is why the central nervous system acts to protect itself “with a strategy of amputation or isolation of the offending organ, sense, or function, thus the stimulus to invent results from the acceleration of the rhythm and

the increase in the load” (p. 62). This allows us to infer that paradoxically, this situation is due to the irritation of the nervous system when humans innovate and invent technologies and the means by which we use such technologies. This situation can be considered an extension of our limited organic and sensory conditions through experiencing increasingly intense and numerous stimuli from various sources. Thus, the image of Narcissus is “a self-amplification or extension induced by pressures and irritants,” and in that sense, “self-amputation prevents self-recognition” (p. 62).

This concept explains the emotional, rational, and cognitive closure of which I speak and that generations of internet users, media audiences, social networks, and consumers of digital devices experience today, to some extent, as the product of their narcosis, when thinking, like Narcissus, of the images on the screens, including those images that they produce for their social networks while suffering from conceptual, physical, emotional, and mental numbness. The abundance of technologies that irritate their central nervous system and that affect their curiosity, imagination, and creativity should also be considered. When innovation is stimulated, it is considered good, and when internet users, including parents, teachers, and students, close in on themselves and find only a mental and emotional placebo in cognitive biases, fallacies, dissonances, and false dilemmas that abound in the media and digital universes and that confirm their fears and prejudices, it is considered bad.

Consequently, for McLuhan (1996, pp. 66-67), the electrical age is the age of anxiety, of the unconscious, and of apathy—which, according to Benjamin (2019), is the age of technical reproducibility, in that alienation or self-alienation exists. Paradoxically, for the above Canadian author, this age is also the age of individual and collective consciousness of technologies as an extension of our physical body, although, nevertheless, this consciousness must be developed over time.

In this sense, an ecology of the gaze implies a permanent process of awareness of the ways of seeing, internalizing, interpreting, and expressing the world with the media, through the media, and for the media.

Therefore, how can we educate today's generations of teachers and students to become aware of these processes?

What are the methods or ways in which the views of the academic population regarding the visible realities and the possible realities in current societies can be identified? Perhaps it is necessary to *hack* the media and digital system from the gazes and points of view of the audiences that coexist in educational environments. In this sense, how can one self-hack the narcosis of the narcissistic gaze in the media and digital caves from the situational point of view of each individual?

Production of the audiovisual autobiographical story as a methodology

From the point of view of media ecology, Lance Strate (2012) states that if we introduce electronic media and digital technologies into modern society, then we will bring about changes in communication, awareness, and culture, an idea inherited from Marshall McLuhan, for whom the key to any medium or technology is the change in scale, rhythm, or patterns that it introduces into human affairs (1996). In the educational context, methodologies profoundly transform the subjectivity of students and teachers. For this reason, it is worth remembering the comment of the anthropologist Ashley Montagu that “in teaching, the method, and not the content, constitutes the message” (cited in Strate, 2012, p. 64), to which he added that the process of cultivating a person does not depend on the transmission of knowledge but on the methodologies, strategies, and activities that teachers use to transmit such knowledge.

Twenty years ago (Marín Ossa, 2003), I began to investigate the autobiographical audiovisual story as a complex paradigm that does not separate critical thinking from creativity; that considers the theoretical development of practices; that involves the subjects being familiar with the objects of knowledge; that considers the various processes of audiovisual, discursive, and textual products; and that considers the stories of such contexts, as I argued a few years ago (Marín Ossa, 2022a, p. 21). A methodology for the

ecology of the gaze that enables the development of metacognitive skills of self-observation, self-knowledge, and self-learning is needed.

An example of this situation can be my first educational experiments in 2006 in the absence of means that would have allowed me to produce practice videos with students when I proposed that they distinguish the videographic language from other audiovisual languages. Without audiovisual equipment and with practical needs, I proposed to the students that with their own resources, they should perform a retrospective analysis of the media and personal situations that influenced their audiovisual view of the world. Little by little, with each semester, I understood that proposing the production of an autobiographical audiovisual story to elaborate with them their personal history of the gaze allowed us to develop several purposes such as the following: to constitute the audiovisual practice as a reflective practice; to use video as a means through which to generate content and, at the same time, as an instrument with which to collect and analyze information in research; and to transform the gaze of the sensible and rational worlds of the students by making them aware of the way in which each of us looks at and represents the world on screens. This step was the first step toward broadening their views of the world, and over the years, I managed to assimilate the methodology as a conceptual and procedural tool that they could use in future training and research.

In conclusion, by that time, I was no longer teaching video lessons to students in the classic and traditional sense of the didactics of the medium, conceived as functional literacy. Instead, I was teaching them to look and, therefore, to think and communicate audiovisually. Mastering hardware and software was part of learning but not fundamental. From then on, my way of understanding this experiment has evolved, and today, I conceive of audiovisual production as a creative research tool that at the same time, allows students to observe and allows them to make their own self-observations. This approach can be considered a contemporary and sophisticated version of the Socratic method of self-knowledge, similar to the cognitivist and constructivist methodologies of self-learning.

Recently, I went a step further, and the case study allowed me to look at several generations from various countries in relation to more complex phenomena, such as that I propose in this article. Regarding that order of ideas, qualitative and experiential research (Marín Ossa, 2022a) allowed me to observe the process of mediating the experiences remembered and related to by the students and the processes of reflection and expression generated through the audiovisual production of their autobiographical audiovisual accounts. This approach was based on the life experiences with the media that these students had beginning in childhood and the ways in which these experiences were represented through their points of view on visible reality.

In addition, such explanatory research allowed me to structure an argument with which I managed to explain the uses of the autobiographical story as a viable methodology through which to improve the media, education, communication, and educommunication skills of students of three universities located in Spain, Brazil, and Colombia. This approach involved the development of self-reflective and self-expressive media competence skills among these students.

The collection of information took place during the development of a thematic seminar carried out with the students of each country, taking advantage of the fact that according to Abrahão and Bolívar (2014) and Bolívar and Segovia (2019), the thematic seminar constitutes an ideal environment in which to adapt the methodological and epistemological principles of autobiographical research in all formative processes. In the aforementioned study, this approach was coupled with the process of *media education* (Buckingham, 2005) and, specifically, with the *media and information literacy* (Pérez and Varis, 2012) of students.

Finally, I articulated the semistructured interview to the stages of the production of the autobiographical audiovisual story to form the focus group, with the objective of obtaining cases to be used for the study. The research instruments were designed and used during the development of the thematic seminar to collect information.

This research, which focused on productive practice, understood as reflective practice, allowed us to self-observe during audiovisual production through the use of audiovisual, photographic, and videographic archives; chronological timeline of the remembered events; storyboard; performance; staging; audiovisual narration; *voiceover*; and editing, visualization, and group conversation regarding autobiographical audiovisual stories, among other elements, all of which were articulated in the semi-structured interviews (Marín Ossa, 2022a, p. 43).

Conversely, the principles of autobiographical research in education (Abrahão and Bolívar, 2014; Bolívar and Segovia, 2019) applied to the production of autobiographical audiovisual stories can be summarized as follows: 1) The life experiences of students in relation to the media, ICT, and social networks are a valuable source of information investigated during the production process, from which the data and knowledge obtained through direct experience and mediated experience emerge throughout life. 2) The production of the autobiographical audiovisual story is a reflective and productive practice of self-observation, self-knowledge, and self-learning that allows for the development of reflective skills of critical thinking and expressive skills of creativity. 3) The thematic seminar is an ideal environment that allows the teacher/researcher to use the production of the autobiographical audiovisual story as a training and research method. 4) The autobiographical audiovisual story is an adaptive method that can be contextualized in relation to self-structuring and heterostructuring; cognitivist, connectivist, constructivist, and situated pedagogical models; and active, participatory, and relational didactic strategies. 5) Autobiographical audiovisual media can be considered environments used in education/research with the following purposes: as educational resources, as information gathering instruments, as objects of study, and as means of the scientific dissemination of knowledge.

Autopoiesis of self-mediation in the autobiographical audiovisual story

The production of an autobiographical audiovisual story is a reflective practice that allows individuals to look at themselves for a long period of

time. To this extent, such production requires a growing introspection that with the incidence of multiple information gathering instruments—such as semistructured interviews—transforms production into an exercise of self-observation, self-knowledge, and self-learning that is not exhausted in the individual or in the media representation of its subjectivity or, in other words, its self-mediation. In addition, this situation radically transforms their sensitivity, their cognitive maps, and their self-reports or mental stories. Hence, in the autopoiesis of his or her gaze, the person not only finds the coordinates of his or her autobiographical gaze, of his or her audiovisual gaze, and of his or her critical gaze but also finds a technology of the self that far from being alienating, is constituted in a technology of permanent liberation to enter and exit the media and digital caverns.

It should be noted that since autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1991) is a biological, creative, and productive process typical of living beings, it can be said that the production of the autobiographical audiovisual story is also a process of self-regeneration, self-invention, and self-actualization of the gaze and situational points of view; that is, this production is existential, cognitive, and communicative, thus constituting the individual in increasingly complex and elaborate states of self-consciousness owing to his or her ability to interpret his or her own life experience to the evocation and interpretation of the memories of those experiences and their way of relating them, narrating them, acting them out, and putting them on stage in a process of self-mediation.

Specifically, media self-training of the gaze is a complex process in which students use critical thinking, creativity, and their sensitivity and reasoning capacity, as well as their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, to perceive, evaluate, assess, and take a position on an issue or point of view of another person, in addition to making judgments and generating actions of social transformation, regarding, for example, access to qualified information and its responsible use in the different contexts of communication and education (Marín Ossa, 2022a, p. 240).

The observations made during my research in relation to the self-observations made by the students focused on the production process of

their autobiographical audiovisual stories led me to obtain various results (Marín Ossa, 2022a, pp. 203-230), which can be synthesized as follows: 1) students, as users of the media, ICT, and social networks, are the content of their mediated self, produced throughout their lives by transitioning from passive consumers to active *prosumers*; 2) in their interactions with the media, ICT, social networks, and digital devices, students create media and digital identities from their situational point of view, expressed in media images of the self; 3) when recounting their life experiences, students generate mediated experiences in relation to the media, ICT, social networks, and digital devices; 4) for students, interaction, individualization, and immersion not only contribute to their processes of emancipation from communications through *self-media* but also serve telecommunications corporations to produce processes of the self-alienation, self-exploitation, and self-actualization of the media self as a result of the miniaturization of the media, the digital synthesis of *hardware* and *software* in ICT and digital devices, and the emergence of social networks; and 5) the media and digital generations in transition oscillate between the normative individual, with whom he or she seeks to adapt to the dynamics of the market, and the autonomous individual aware of his or her rights; between normative critical thinking, which leads individuals to produce more of the same, and emancipatory critical thinking, which allows them to imagine and transgress repetitive patterns imposed by the market economy; and between the two new classes of workers—the *precariat* and the *privileged*.

Conclusions

The media self-training of the gaze, from an autobiographical point of view, is one of the self-learning processes that teachers and students go through throughout their lives. In this process, the productive practice of the autobiographical individual emerges as a reflective practice and, consequently, as a critical reading of the world that enables individuals to develop their self-critical capacity and self-actualization of their inner world, of their mental life, and of their vision of the world based on self-observation, self-knowledge, and self-learning. This is understood as self-reflective and self-expressive skills of media competence that enable self-awareness,

self-regulation, and self-government by applying the autobiographical audiovisual story as a device of autopoiesis. This can be achieved through the technologies of consciousness and the technologies of the self (Foucault, 2008) or self-mediation in education.

In this sense, the teacher/researcher during the process is dedicated to considering the observations made by his or her students regarding the reality of the media, ICT, and social networks and understands these observations for what they are—observations of visible reality and, on occasion, observations of possible realities. The teacher/researcher articulates the application of research instruments—such as the student’s narrative—as a form of audiovisual production as an active, participatory, and relational way of generating reflective practice through productive practice.

Finally, the production of the autobiographical audiovisual story in the process of the self-actualization of the gaze and of the points of view regarding the reality of the media, ICT, and social networks and on the visible and possible realities presents us with several challenges: How can we observe ourselves through the productive practice of the autobiographical audiovisual story when making observations of the visible reality produced by the media, ICT, and social networks to make sensible and rational observations of possible realities, which are more critical and creative but also more just, comprehensive, and balanced? How can we identify the different situational views of students regarding visible reality and interpret and express their various situational views on possible realities? What are the decisions that we must and can make to change our views of the reality of media, ICT, and social networks?

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