Extended Body Versus Intercultural Body: Reflections on the Use of the Media and Interculturality

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Abstract

This article seeks to reflect on the relationship between the extension of perception, predicted by Marshall McLuhan's media theory (1964/2016), and the organization of an intercultural society, based on the studies of authors such as Maria Aparecida Ferrari (2015), Lisette Weissmann (2018) and Natalia Ramos (2013). Starting from the concept of extension, as stated by McLuhan, that the media can expand the reach of the nervous system itself, it is intended to think of this extension of perception as a virtualized extension of the human body itself. Taking this premise, we seek to understand the consequences of this phenomenon in the constitution of a globalized culture. In other words, it seeks to answer the following question: is it enough for the body to be extended virtually by digital media to constitute a globalized and ethical society, or would an intercultural communication strategy be necessary for this to occur? Thus, it starts from the hypothesis that it is not enough for the body to be virtually extended by the media to organize itself as a globalized culture, but that an intercultural communication strategy would be necessary to develop a globalized culture, where exchanges information are balanced, and to develop an ethical relationship between different cultures. This reflection intends to prevent the globalized relationship between cultures from becoming another way of imposing ethnocentric cultural models. Therefore, it is believed that it is necessary to develop a globalized society that respects different cultures more than a body expanded by the media. In this way, it becomes necessary to develop an intercultural body so that it is possible to rescue otherness and society from its disappearance.

Corpo Estendido Versus Corpo Intercultural: Reflexões Sobre o Uso dos Meios de Comunicação e a Interculturalidade

Resumo

Esse artigo busca refletir sobre a relação entre a extensão da percepção, prevista pela teoria dos meios de Marshall McLuhan (1964/2016), e a organização de uma sociedade intercultural, baseada nos estudos de autoras como Maria Aparecida Ferrari (2015), Lisette Weissmann (2018) e Natália Ramos (2013). Partindo do conceito de extensão, como afirma McLuhan, de que os meios de comunicação são capazes de ampliar o alcance do próprio sistema nervoso, pretende-se pensar nessa extensão da percepção como uma extensão virtualizada do próprio corpo humano. Tomando essa premissa, busca-se entender quais as consequências desse fenômeno em relação à constituição de uma cultura globalizada. Ou seja, busca-se responder à seguinte

questão: basta o corpo ser estendido virtualmente pelos meios digitais para se constituir uma sociedade globalizada e ética, ou seria necessária uma estratégia de comunicação intercultural para que isso ocorra? Dessa forma, parte-se da hipótese de que não basta o corpo estar estendido virtualmente pelos meios de comunicação para se organizar como uma cultura globalizada, mas sim que seria necessária uma estratégia de comunicação intercultural para desenvolver uma cultura globalizada, onde as trocas de informação sejam equilibradas, e para que se desenvolva uma relação ética entre as diferentes culturas. Essa reflexão tem o propósito de evitar que a relação globalizada entre as culturas se transforme em mais uma maneira de imposição de modelos culturais etnocêntricos. Por isso, acredita-se que é preciso desenvolver uma sociedade globalizada que respeite as diferentes culturas, mais do que um corpo expandido pelos meios de comunicação. Dessa forma, torna-se necessário desenvolver um corpo intercultural, para que seja possível resgatar a alteridade da sua falência, bem como, a própria sociedade.

Palavras-chave

meios de comunicação, extensão, interculturalidade

1. Introduction

The development of lenses made it possible to reveal dimensions previously unknown to humanity: a microworld and a macro world. Telescopes revealed to the eyes of astronomers the organization of the orbits of planets: the macro world. Microscopes revealed the universe of microorganisms — bacteria, protozoa, among others — which revolutionized medicine and the treatment and prevention of diseases. The media have this potential: besides transmitting information, for Marshall McLuhan (1964/2016), they are extensions of human perception, extensions of the nervous system itself. Furthermore, for the Canadian author, the media and information change society and individuals' behavior and consciousness, both of society and individuals. Therefore, the media are pure information. They are messages.

> During the mechanical ages we project our bodies into space. Today, after more than a century of electrical technology, we have engineered our own central nervous system into a global embrace, abolishing time and space (at least as far as our planet is concerned). We are rapidly approaching the final phase of the extensions of man: the technological simulation of consciousness, through which the creative process of knowledge will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, as has already been done with our senses and our nerves through the various means and vehicles. (McLuhan, 1964/2016, p. 17)

McLuhan's (1964/2016) view on the media revolutionized communication theories, inaugurating a new line of research, media theory. Starting from the understanding that the media, more than transmitters, are human extensions, the need arises to study the relationship between the use of the media and the vision of interculturality in the formation of a society in order to develop respect for the multiplicity of cultures that make up different human groups.

The extension of human senses unfolds as an extension of the individual's own human body and, consequently, of the social body of a community. Hence, the extension promoted by the media ends up extending the individual's body, as well as the body of society itself.

Through this initial reflection, this article aims to observe the relationship between the extension of human perception, predicted by McLuhan's media theory (1964/2016), and the organization of intercultural relations in a globalized communication environment mediated by the use of media, digital communication, the internet, and social networks. Starting from the concept of extension, which predicts, as the author states, that the media can expand the reach of the human nervous system itself, one might consider the extension of perception as a virtualized extension of the individual's human body and of society itself.

To understand the relationship between media use and social transformations, we will draw on concepts from McLuhan's (1964/2016) media theories; to analyze intercultural communication and the organization of a global society, we will refer to the studies of Maria Aparecida Ferrari (2015), Lisette Weissmann (2018) and Natália Ramos (2013).

Based on this premise that the use of the media, especially digital media, produces an extension of perception in human beings and the virtualized body itself, we seek to understand the consequences of this phenomenon. However, that is a very broad subject. In this article, the relationship between the effects of digital media and the extension of the virtualized body will focus on the need for an intercultural communication strategy to efficiently develop this extension of the senses through digital media and establish a global culture. In other words, this article seeks to answer the following question: is it enough for the body to be extended virtually through digital media to constitute a globalized and ethical society, or would an intercultural communication strategy be necessary for this to occur?

Thus, in this article, we assume that it is not enough for the body to be virtually extended by the digital media to organize a globalized culture efficiently. Rather, developing a globalized culture, where the exchange of information is even, and an ethical relationship between different cultures requires a strategy of intercultural communication.

> In today's open and plural world, with globalization and the new means and technologies of information and communication, with the media, the internet, travel facilities and fast means of transport, cultural diversity, the Other, ethnic minorities have another status and image. Cultural diversity and the Other are not far away, but they are closer and present in everyday life, they cohabit with us in public spaces, in institutions, and claim respect and rights. (Ramos, 2013, p. 348)

This action aims to prevent the globalized relationship between cultures, mediated by digital media, from becoming an additional imposition of hegemonic and ethnocentric

cultural models, similar to previous civilizing processes, either through colonization in the past, or more recently, through the use of mass media, as in the 20th century.

Developing a globalized society that respects different cultures is deemed necessary for all those reasons. More than a body expanded by the media, it is essential to develop an intercultural body to rescue the otherness of its disappearance, as described by Byung-Chul Han (2010/2015) and to avoid the fragmentation and polarization of society, as described by Norval Baitello (2015).

2. Extended Body or Extension Through Means

The current polarization and fragmentation of society, mediated by the use of digital media, and perceptible, mainly in the truculent debates on social networks, seems to be contradictory to the positive, and perhaps utopian, perception of the unification of a global village advocated by McLuhan's media theory (1964/2016).

McLuhan (1964/2016) believed that, by extending the perception that the media produced in the sensitive human constitution, global society would become closer and develop collective relationships that would resemble the social organization of a tribe, creating, in short, a society of common and collective interests, that is, a globalized tribe: the global village. The researcher called this phenomenon "tribalization".

> The global village is a consequence of the extent of human perception and the changes it produces in human behavior. From the invention of electrical means, there was an increase in contact between cultures, and this expansion produces an effect of information exchange and, consequently, a uniformization of cultures, a phenomenon that the author believes will produce the global village. A term that seems antagonistic, as it refers to the global contact of cultures, which come closer together living more closely, such as the relationships of individuals who make up a small tribe. Therefore, for McLuhan (1996), the new electric media, later the mass media, are retribalizing. From this conclusion, one can extend this phenomenon of retribalization through digital media. An example that can be given of this phenomenon in the new digital media are social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc., where individuals come together in communities for common interests, and not only for reasons of spatial, legal, or national proximity. (Dugnani, 2018, p. 6)

Tribalization (or retribalization) is characterized by this process of bringing together different cultures in the same space that would merge through mediation, that is, through the use of the media. In short, the simple development and use of new media would create human groups with collective interests. This vision of McLuhan (1964/2016), I would add functionalist, seems questionable, given the increasingly common events of scattered cultures instead of mixed, as Baitello (2015) stated. The utopia of a global village

seems to have been replaced by a re-feudalization of virtualized communities, as Graham Murdock (2018) points out. Unification is being replaced by fragmentation and polarization, negating McLuhan's (1964/2016) vision. It seems that globalization boosted by the technological development of new media with global reach (such as electric media, mass media, and digital media) has run into a deglobalizing resistance, reflected in the protectionist and fragmentary ideology of contemporary political and social organization (Dugnani, 2018).

> Because of these protectionist signs and the closing of borders, which have been presented, more often, by the political proposals of nations, this article investigates the paradoxical movement of these policies, about the opposite movement of the digital media and the internet, which tend to pressure populations to expand contacts, increasingly globalized, given the high potential for reaching and extending the perception that these means are capable of producing in human relationships. Because of this question, a question seems to arise: is it possible that the apparent movement against globalization, or deglobalizing, will be able to resist the globalizing pressure of the media? (Dugnani, 2018, p. 2)

However, what did McLuhan (1964/2016) leave out when developing his concept of a global village?

Perhaps the researcher placed too much confidence in the technological development of the media, forgetting a fundamental aspect: the human being.

Both paradoxical processes of globalization and fragmentation that occur in hypermodern society (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2014/2015; Rosa, 2005/2019) are mediated, or even reinforced, by the advent, mainly, of digital media. This fact cannot be denied. However, what is the reason for such a contradictory effect: to have a high unification potential, yet also a strong fragmentation effect?

In this article, the answer is that technological development is not enough to create a global society characterized by ethical relationships respecting differences. For this to occur, human beings must develop intercultural attitudes and communication so that it is possible to reach, one day, fair globalization, or, who knows, McLuhan's (1964/ 2016) idealized global village.

Therefore, it is not enough for the media to virtually extend human perception, that is, to prolong the human nervous system, as stated by McLuhan (1964/2016). It is essential to develop communication strategies so that through contact, the exchange of information between different cultures, mediated by digital media (through the internet or social networks), humans can develop an ethical awareness of the use of the media and respect for the cultural multiplicity of the diverse communities that spread across the world. Without this, all globalization will remain unfair, as stated by Milton Santos (2001), and the mixing of cultures will remain a multicultural process, as stated by Weissmann (2018), rather than intercultural. Instead of cultures mixing in a balanced,

intercultural way, an ethnocentric vision will maintain the same historical and multicultural dynamics of overlapping cultures.

Finally, the extension of the media, which would lead to a process of creating a global village, according to McLuhan (1964/2016), will only be possible, in the view of the author, if the process is developed by an intercultural communication strategy, because, if not, it will be doomed to repeat the same mistakes made by humanity in processes such as colonization in the Modern Age, or imperialism in contemporary times.

It is not enough to extend the senses and human perception. It is necessary to develop strategies that lead different cultures to know each other, understand each other, and, finally, learn to respect each other. In other words, just an extended body is not enough. An intercultural body is needed to create a globalized and ethical society, a true global village.

3. Intercultural Body: Challenges and Possibilities

The main tenet of this article is that we need both an extended body and an intercultural body to develop more ethical and balanced relationships in the globalization process. This is supported by observing the fragmentation produced by the digital media (Baitello, 2015) and perceived in the development of hypermodern society. After all, in hypermodern contemporaneity, we can observe the multiplication of perceived polarized relationships, both in virtualized contacts in social networks and digital media (theme of this article) and physical contact, due to the increase in migratory movements and the globalized contact of different cultures. "According to United Nations data, one out of every thirty-five people is an international migrant, which means that close to 200 million people today live outside their countries of origin, essentially migrating to the cities" (Ramos, 2009, p. 10).

Many researchers and political institutions are looking into this problem in search of solutions, and Ramos (2013) highlights in her text several entities and countries that have developed projects to analyze cultural relations in their territories, among them: the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue.

> Intercultural diversity and the management of interculturality(ies) are the objects of concern of several international bodies, namely UNESCO, the OECD, the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and national bodies such as ACIDI (High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue). They have developed various projects and initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue, constituting one of the most important fields of contemporaneity in the various scientific and interventional domains. Examples of these initiatives were the promotion by the European

> Commission and the Council of Europe, in 1997, of the *European Year against Racism and Xenophobia* and, in 2008, of the *European Year of Intercultural Dialogue* and the European *Intercultural Cities* Project. (Ramos, 2013, p. 345)

This concern can be observed, for example, in the studies carried out by Professor Natália Ramos, from the Center for the Study of Migration and Intercultural Relations of the Open University in Portugal: "Interculturalidade(s) e Mobilidade(s) no Espaço Europeu: Viver e Comunicar Entre Culturas" (Interculturality(ies) and Mobility(ies) in the European Space: Living and Communicating Between Cultures; Ramos, 2013) and "Diversidade Cultural, Educação e Comunicação Intercultural – Políticas e Estratégias de Promoção do Diálogo Intercultural" (Cultural Diversity, Education, and Intercultural Communication – Policies and Strategies to Promote Intercultural Dialogue; Ramos, 2009).

> The increase in globalization, migratory flows, and multiculturalism mean that States and different social bodies are faced with a great linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of their users, professionals, and citizens, which requires them to adopt practices, strategies, and adequate policies to meet this new social, cultural, educational, communicational and political reality. (...) Migratory flows have been increasing, reaching all continents and different sectors of public life, and by 2050, international migration is expected to reach 230 million. The number of international migrants has almost trebled since 1970. Regarding the European Union (EU), the number of migrants from non-European countries has increased by 75% since 1980. It is worth noting that close to 9% of the world's migrants are refugees, 16 million people (UNDP, 2004). In 2005 alone, migration flows in OECD countries increased by 11% compared to 2004. In these countries, flows of international students have also increased by more than 40% since 2000, as have flows of skilled workers (OECD, 2007). (Ramos, 2009, pp. 10–11)

Ramos (2009, 2013) presents data on this phenomenon of physical globalization through migration and proposes the need to develop new methods to face the problem. She also presents strategies developed in Europe to seek solutions to this issue, as analyzed by this article, both through the physical contact of migratory movements and through digital media' virtualized and globalizing contacts, mainly through the use of the internet and social networks. In this sense, agreeing with Ramos (2013), developing strategies and methods through communication and interculturality is necessary.

> These issues imply a new methodological and epistemological repositioning, a new paradigm in terms of research, training, and intervention in the field of intercultural relations. Interculturality(ies) pose numerous questions to practices, strategies, and policies related to the management of interculturality and communication, in particular intercultural communication, as well as the management of interactions between the Self and the Other, the

negotiation of psychosocial processes inherent to intercultural encounters and to the negotiation of identities and conflicts. (Ramos, 2013, p. 344)

However, before presenting projects and strategies used to solve the problem created by the globalized encounters between cultures, it is essential to define what is meant by interculturality. For that, it is important to differentiate, agreeing with Ferrari (2015) and Weissmann (2018), two concepts: multiculturalism and interculturality.

This need to differentiate multiculturalism from interculturality, a frequent topic among researchers, is urgent, as the terms characterize two different and contradictory positions, which will affect the development of relations between different cultures. While multiculturalism is based on difference, recognition, and classification of multiple cultural identities, interculturality departs from and is guided from the notion of equality. It privileges not the classification of differences as the priority but emphasizes the need for contact and exchange of information between cultures, for the formation of a cultural synthesis that can reflect and mediate, in an ethical and balanced way, the contact between different cultures, communities, especially in a globalized environment, as presented in hypermodernity. Therefore, in this article, an intercultural vision is privileged, to the detriment of a multicultural stance.

> According to Lívia Barbosa and Letícia Veloso (2007), multiculturalism and interculturalism are two concepts worth differentiating. The authors argue that the notion of multiculturalism goes beyond identity politics, as it deals with issues of difference and identity under the umbrella of "recognition" of difference. This concept includes personal identities and broader themes such as multicultural politics, ethical dilemmas related to cultural and ethnic diversity, intercultural conflicts, and integration (individual and social) into new multicultural and transnational political communities. It also emphasizes the coexistence of several different ones within the same space and at the same time, without the need for interaction, with an interaction limited to the minimum necessary for the operation of everyday life or, still, limited to the public and legal dimension. Rodrigo Alsina (1997) understands multiculturalism as the coexistence of different cultures in the same real, media, or virtual space. Multiculturalism would mark the state, the situation of a plural society from the point of view of cultural communities in different identities. (...) The concept of interculturality, according to Barbosa and Veloso (2007), emphasizes the opposite: that "communication" between different people living in the same space at the same time is due to the need to establish common ground for communication and for the mutual understanding of what, in that particular context, should be the center of communication. (Ferrari, 2015, pp. 51–52)

Departing from both the concept of interculturality and an intercultural vision, it is now possible to reframe, through examples of intercultural communication strategies

presented by Ramos (2013), the central issue of this article: that it is not enough to create a globalized community, only a technological extension produced by the media, as advocated by McLuhan (1964/2016), but that it is necessary to develop intercultural awareness so that one balanced globalization emerges, based on respect between different cultures. In other words, an extended body is not enough, and an intercultural body is needed.

As an example, Ramos (2013) highlights the *Intercultural Cities* project, which aims to analyze immigration and cultural diversity in European countries and seeks to manage this phenomenon by developing strategies that render cultural diversity not a problem, but a factor of production, wealth, and collective well-being for the entire community.

> The European *Intercultural Cities* Project aims to analyze the impact of cultural diversity and migration in European cities, since more than 20 countries have at least 5% of inhabitants who were born abroad, and to develop strategies and policies capable of helping cities to turn diversity into a driver of development, enrichment and well-being for all. This project aims to manage cultural diversity in urban areas to make the city an open and a plural space and a privileged place for intercultural dialogue. (Ramos, 2013, p. 345)

Ramos (2013) further emphasizes the development of a new "intercultural paradigm" (p. 352), which will guide research on interculturality based on heterogeneity, plurality, discontinuity, multiplicity, complexity, intervention, multidisciplinarity, and interdisciplinarity. This new paradigm will seek to reposition research ethically and established by new epistemes and methods. This configuration should start from three structuring aspects: conceptual, methodological, and ethical.

> Globalization and the mobility of populations bring into contact a great diversity of cultures and identities, pose challenges to native and migrant populations and intercultural relations, and demand a new research and intervention paradigm, the so-called Intercultural Paradigm. This paradigm introduces plurality, heterogeneity, discontinuity, complexity, and multi/interdisciplinarity in research, training, and intervention, implying a new methodological, epistemological and ethical repositioning, based on three structuring aspects:
>
> *Conceptual* – Cultural differences are defined not as objective elements with a static character but as dynamic and interactive entities, which give each other meaning. The intercultural approach constitutes another way of analyzing cultural diversity, not based on cultures considered as independent and homogeneous entities, but based on processes and interactions;
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> *Methodological* – The intercultural approach is defined as global, multidimensional, and interdisciplinary to account for the dynamics and complexity

of social phenomena and avoid categorization processes. It is about the researcher/educator/intervener, acquiring familiarity with the social and cultural universe in which they work, understanding the representations that animate them, and reflectively questioning themselves not only about the culture of the other, but, also, and first of all, about their own culture;

Ethics – The intercultural perspective has as an objective the knowledge of cultures, but, above all, the relationship between them and the Other, implying an attitude of decentration (Piaget,1970). It involves a reflection on how to respect individual, social and cultural diversity, reconcile the universal and the particular, the global and the local, and adapt to the structural complexity of a society and its conflict. (Ramos, 2013, p. 352)

Finally, Ramos (2013) also notes that to form this new "intercultural paradigm", it will be necessary to develop three sets of skills: individual, intercultural, and citizenship.

- *Individual skills* that enable harmonious social interactions between individuals and cultures and promote an attitude of decentralization. Principles, models, and skills presented as unique and universal are abandoned and relativized to avoid many behaviors of intolerance and discrimination;

– *intercultural skills*, especially linguistic, communicative, and pedagogical, that facilitate, on the one hand, intercultural communication and cultural awareness and, on the other hand, promote interculturally competent and inclusive practices and interventions, as well as culturally sensitive and involved professionals and citizens.

- *citizenship skills*, which make the democratic functioning of societies and institutions possible. (Ramos, 2013, pp. 252–253)

From these three sets of skills, it is possible to highlight that the first (individual skills) develops harmonious relationships between individuals. The second (intercultural skills) is linked to the use of language, media, communication processes, and educational pedagogy in the sense of teaching strategies. The third (citizenship skills) relates to ethical and political issues, as these skills involve not only individuals but also social institutions in order to develop new paradigms for establishing an intercultural society. That is a society organized as a culture that respects the differences and complexities of the most diverse communities that make up the world's population. This globally organized society, which respects different cultures and makes up different human communities, is what the intercultural body represents. That is the direction that different communities are expected to take, mediated by the media: the development of intercultural relations.

Thus, by developing an intercultural body, it will be possible to create a society based on the interculturality vision. However, if human groups or individuals continue

to allow their meanings to be extended through the media, without reflecting on others and cultural multiplicity, the process of fragmentation in society, the weakening of alterity — denounced by Byung-Chul Han (2010/2015) —, and radicalizations will multiply. This could lead to the collapse of our concept of collectivity and society. Therefore, it is paramount to develop studies that relate the use of the media with the ideas and concepts of interculturality. In this way, it will be possible to seek a solution to a problem that increasingly produces misunderstanding, prejudice, and violence.

4. Final Considerations

To conclude this debate, it is worth noting that this article's premise about the relationship between an extended body and an intercultural body has been confirmed. It is now evident that a technological extension of human perception (an extended body), as in McLuhan (1964/2016), mediated by the media, is not enough to create a globalized community where the different cultures that form the world's human organization can live together with balance and ethics. The need to develop intercultural awareness (intercultural body) to foster balanced globalization based on respect among different cultures is reaffirmed. In other words, an extended body is not enough, and an intercultural body is needed.

Thus, developing fair globalization, as highlighted by Milton Santos (2001), or a global village, as referred by McLuhan (1964/2016), requires not only technological development but human development. In this way, it becomes essential to create strategies and skills that provide and enhance the process of approximation between cultures, mainly because this fact is inevitable, since, with all certainty, the advent of new means of communication will always have the effect of bringing people closer together, and mixing different cultures. After all, the advent of new means of communication always expands the reach of information exchange and extends human perception beyond the biological limits of the senses.

Therefore, alongside the technological development of the media, to develop balanced globalization that respects the diversity of cultures spread around the world, it is essential to analyze the processes of communication among cultures and the development of strategies that enable these contacts, not in a violent or biased way, but in an ethical way showing respect for human cultural multiplicity. Therefore, communication studies must join intercultural studies to create a path where different cultures can relate to each other, respecting their differences and joining efforts to produce well-being and, eventually, wealth for the human population. This action may prevent processes of fragmentation, polarization, prejudice between different cultures, creating a safe, fair, and egalitarian path towards constructing a global community that can live together collectively, as a tribe, as McLuhan (1964/2016) envisioned: a global village.

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