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HYPER ACADEMIA

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Abstract

Purpose – What ought we morally to do in a tourism academia dominated by metrics, quantification and digital codification? The purpose of this paper is to address this question by presenting the idea of ‘hyper academia’ and exploring ethical perspectives and values related to hyper-digital cultures.

Design - Drawing inspiration from classical and postdisciplinary traditions, the topic is exposed in a creative and multi-layered way using conceptual, philosophical and artistic tools. It is structured in four sections: An introductory essay on gratitude, a philosophical thought experiment, a literary short story and a manifesto.

Findings – Gratitude referencing is a method of personalizing the attribution of influence in scholarship and restoring the importance of depth and slowness over speed, novelty and quantity. The thought experiment allows us to see how we make value judgements on academic work under different scenarios. The dystopian short story shows the radical power that such a genre has to create emotional engagement whilst activating our critical reflexivity. Finally, the manifesto answers the question of what we morally “ought to do” by inviting scholars to engage with five duties.

Originality/Value – This article looks beyond previous descriptive studies of academic rankings and metrics, inviting tourism scholars to reflect on the values and moral justifications behind our evaluation cultures.

Keywords: academic cultures, digitalization, metrics, epistemology, ethics, postdisciplinarity

Introduction

It is early in the morning and I have just opened an email on my smart phone. Still sleepy, I read the subject lines of one email after another sent by academic platforms such as Academia.edu, Research.gate, Mendeley, informing me about my performance: “Somebody found your article on Google”; “People are recommending your work”; “Your publication has a new achievement; see achievement”; “Congratulations *Author* you reached a milestone!” I open the last email and beside the congratulatory message I see a shiny digital medal which seems stolen from a children’s cartoon. “I am now awarded a cute green medal. Thank you!” I smile sarcastically

and imagine the web designers who were responsible for the communicative style of these digital networks. If I was to put a name to this experience I would call it the “childification of my academic identity”. There is something (tragi?-)comical in being a middle aged tourism scholar in her pijamas being awarded and commanded to - “see this!” and “do that!”. But I should not be surprised. This is what in a previous study on social media I described as “Authoritarian Virtual Coaching”:

The voice addresses the user with a colloquial style, which tries to imitate that of friends or colleagues and is far from other types of more formal communication. However, it combines this “friendly” style with authoritative tendencies (such as the language of the coach of a sport team). Within the sites it is common to find plenty of commands: “Send a message to ...”, “Write on her wall ...”, “Suggest friends for ...” “Write a review ...”, “See what people are saying about ...”. The authoritarian language that appears in the main pages of the sites is always encouraging participation and speed of action; it does not encourage protection of privacy or reflexivity [...] The “coach” seems to say: “Well, let’s pretend that we already know each other and let’s get started”. (Munar, 2010, p. 145)

Real-time digitized performance systems of information rely on the cultures of exhibitionism, voyeurism, sociability and reward, known from social networks in general (Munar, 2010). These popular platforms represent a new actor in the play of metrics and quantification of scholarship, which has long occupied the attention of researchers in tourism studies and other fields. Some examples of this interest include the mapping of the most cited scholars (McKercher, 2008), the evolution and rankings of academic journals and research production (Benckendorff and Zehrer, 2013; Park et al., 2011), rankings of educational programs (Severt et al., 2009) and the impact of metrics in our academic cultures (Dredge et al., 2014; Munar, 2016). Additionally, scholars from the Critical Tourism Studies and Tourism Education Futures Initiative networks have, for years, denounced exclusionary practices in knowledge production (Chambers and Buzinde, 2015; Munar et al., 2017) as well as the challenges of neoliberalism and managerialism in higher education, while proposing a series of alternative frameworks for research and education (Ayikoru et al., 2009, 2014; Belhassen and Caton, 2009; Pritchard et al., 2011; Dredge et al., 2015; Young et al., 2017).

Parallel to this, and as a major cause of the increase in scholarly work on the topic of metrification, academic institutions and universities around the globe have seen their funding and legitimacy becoming increasingly dependent on performance metrics and evaluation systems (Deem *et al.*, 2007; Burrows, 2012; Collini, 2012; Giroux, 2014). Digital technologies are at the core of this evolution allowing for centralization, comparison and analysis, thanks to the massive collection, classification, standardization, storage and retrieval of academic data and content. Metrics have come to dominate promotions, recruitment, and talent development strategies, becoming a central concern for anyone wishing to pursue an academic career. They are ubiquitous and pervasive across scholarly institutions and networks, influencing our daily academic lives and relationships, shaping the ethics and morality of academic behaviour, providing dogmas and canons, and influencing the processes of inclusion and exclusion of knowledge production and education. Exploring ways to make sense of this evolution and strategies to regain empowerment, ethical responsibility and ‘adulthood’ in a hyper-connected and hyper-digitized academic world is an urgent matter this article aims to address.

“Hyper Academia”, began as a keynote speech I was invited to give at the “26th Nordic Symposium of Tourism and Hospitality Research” in Falun, Sweden. The inspiration for this work came from reading the introduction to the call for papers: “Everything is just a click away. The interactivity and connectedness related to the instant and social use of information technology create communities and social inclusion that both transcend borders and go beyond physical interaction and travel. At the same time, they produce new forms of inequality, disconnectedness and exclusion.” (26th Nordic Symposium of Tourism and Hospitality Research, 2017); the lecture became an opportunity to focus on a series of epistemic and ethical questions such as what considerations of falseness and truth, right and wrong were hyper-digital cultures fostering in academia? How can we imagine and become scholars in such cultures?

A multi-layered exposition

It is important to mention that this article does not follow a traditional academic structure or guidelines for academic writing. For example, it does not include the customary ‘summing up’ conclusion. The following text addresses the topic of hyper academia in a creative and multi-layered way using conceptual, philosophical and artistic tools. The genre that we use to create and communicating knowledge is not neutral; it has implications for how we comprehend and express knowledge, our abilities to think differently, more broadly or better. As research on creative processes has proven (Bilton, 2007) intellectual expressions do not follow the binary of ‘we think’ and after ‘we create’, but instead resemble a fluid process where ‘creating is thinking’. The combination of conceptual, philosophical, artistic and literary styles (such as short-stories, poetry, drama/theater plays) for advancing ethical and moral understandings has a long tradition. Some renowned examples include classical thinkers such as Seneca or Lucretius, philosophers of the Enlightenment as Voltaire, modern authors such as Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Octavio Paz or recently others such as Alain de Botton. The need for freedom and experimentation in scholarly genres has also been encouraged and practiced by tourism scholars advocating postdisciplinary approaches to knowledge production (see contributions to the special issue; Munar, Pernecky, and Feighery, 2015). The following reflection uses inspiration from both the classical and postdisciplinary traditions. It includes sound and visual elements as well as textual ones, and it is structured in four sections: an introductory essay on gratitude, a philosophical thought experiment, a literary short-story and a manifesto as a form of conclusion.

Gratitude referencing

You may recognize the experience of finding deep learning where you least expect it. My idea of *Gratitude Referencing* is one of these experiences. In the summer of 2017, I downloaded “The Meditations” of Marcus Aurelius (2012) (c. 121 AD – AD 65) , the famous Roman emperor and philosopher follower of the classical philosophical school of Stoicism. I was walking my usual route to work with a coffee-to-go in one hand and my mobile phone in the other, listening to the audiobook with my head phones. The issue with an audiobook compared to reading a digital or a physical book is that it is difficult to make a quick check and see when a specific type of content or paragraph ends. Under this digitally restrained conditions, I found myself bound to listen to what at the time I was experiencing as Marcus Aurelius’ never-ending praise-litany while thinking - “When does he begin with the real stuff? Did I buy the wrong book?” and feeling a strong sense of impatience arising in me. Marcus Aurelius begins his famous meditations with a long and detailed acknowledgement where he mentions his teachers one after another; the

persons and members of his family who have taught him something; and others that were examples of virtue or inspiration. He uses several pages to let us know the multiple ways in which he is indebted to them before he moves on to share any of his personal insights with us.

Sometimes we can be blind to beauty and at other times we can simply be deaf to it, because while Marco Aurelius' meditations have indeed made interesting insights, the most moving and human aspect of his work is precisely the beginning. There he was, the most powerful man, the emperor of the largest empire of his time, showing detailed humble gratitude to those who inspired and taught him something, and not as an addition to his work, an endnote or a footnote, but as a 'face-note', at the front, the first thing to be seen before seeing him. This resonated with me as a different and beautiful way of paying tribute when compared to our automatized referencing systems and citation cultures. Do not get me wrong; I am the first one to hate spending time on the tedious task of editing texts into the right citation and referencing styles. From Refworks to Mendeley, it has become so easy to search, store, retrieve and insert mentions of others' work. Our readings and influences appear incorporated as dozens of surnames here and there between parentheses and commas, many of which we will immediately forget once the paper is published, if not before; such a perfect example of hyper academia – smart, effective, productivity enhancing, fast, global and standardized.

Marcus Aurelius had a different relationship to those that inspired him. He appears to follow the invitation of Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 5 BC – AD 65), a Roman philosopher and a key figure of Stoicism, who wrote a letter to a friend, Paulus Pompeio, which is now preserved for posterity as an essay with the title "On the Shortness of Life" (2004) . Despite the impersonal title, I love to think of this text for what it was, a letter to a dear friend about what matters. Consciously or unconsciously we always have an audience when we write, sometimes our peers, sometimes an abstract global academy, or a faceless anonymous bad-tempered peer-reviewer. How different it would be if what we wrote was to be read by the one we cared for most, the one we admired or loved. What would happen if we began our papers with "Dear beloved,"? Would we be willing to waste the time of our loved ones on something that was not worth reading or did not search for truth or beauty or goodness? And what happens when we read Seneca's words that were meant to be read by Paulus. Aren't we also sharing, as benefactors, part of the love that existed in that first communication?

Seneca (2004) concludes his letter-essay about the finitude of human life in a hopeful note by letting us know that despite our limitations, we are given the power and the art to connect to many, to be part of the many and add the wisdom and beauty of many to our own:

By the toil of others we are led into the presence of things which have been brought from darkness into light. We are excluded from no age, but we have access to them all [...] There are households of the most noble intellects: choose the one into which you wish to be adopted, and you will inherit not only their name but their property too: Nor will this property need to be guarded meanly or grudgingly: the more it is shared out, the greater it will become. (pp. 23-25)

How lucky we are, we humans, to tap into these worlds of beautiful treasures. Here we can encounter friends that will trust us in despair and enlighten us in our angst. How easy it is for us to become part of a long lineage. We were given a family and an upbringing, and not a lot was in our power, but the product of chance (or for those of you that have faith, of providence), but

Seneca has good news; we are, as part of the human species, given this special gift of transcendence by connecting to and learning from others. However, our contemporary digital times of speed searching, scrolling and our obsession with whatever is latest or newest fuel specific transformations and adaptations between humans and technologies (Hayles, 2012). The expansion of hypertext and web reading in general tend to degrade comprehension and as mentioned by Catheryn Hayles (2012) in her excellent book on digital media and technogenesis:

[A] shift in cognitive modes is taking place, from the deep attention characteristic of human enquiry to the hyper attention characteristic of someone scanning webpages [...] As contemporary environments become more information-intensive, it is not a surprise that hyper attention (and its associated reading strategy, hyper reading) is growing and that deep attention (and its corresponding reading strategy, close reading) is diminishing (p. 69)

And while academics often mix hyper and deep reading strategies, we may consider in which ways managerialism with its productivity focus and prioritization of speed jeopardizes reflexive in-depth reading and interpretation thereby diminishing our collective capacity to cope with complex phenomena. Stoic philosophy reminds us of the power of deeply engaging with the work of great thinkers, not as a way of becoming subservient to the ideas presented in these works or deferent to the authority of the powerful, but as a way to activate our capacities to think and our critical autonomy:

Don't just say that you have read them; show that through them you have learned to think better, to be a more discriminating and reflective person. Books are like training weights for the mind. They are very helpful but it will be a bad mistake to suppose that one has made progress simply by having internalized their contents (on the role of reading in Stoic education, Nussbaum, 1994, p. 346)

Marcus Aurelius' exercise in gratitude shows us a way to do this. Gratitude referencing is a method of personalizing the attribution of influence in scholarship; an approach that can help us to slow down, pay attention, recognize the value of engaging deeply and broadly with the work of others and restore the importance of depth or patience over speed, novelty or quantity. With gratitude referencing we offer recognition to those who have helped us exercise the muscles of our rationality, and to take charge of our human freedom to address important questions in society and in life. Therefore, in this article, I have adopted gratitude referencing as a way of paying tribute to all of those who have inspired the ideas presented in this text.

The thought experiment: recruiting a hyper academic

Gratitude Referencing I

I realized the power of thought experiments from the philosopher John Rawls, (1971/1999) whose experiment "the veil of ignorance" aims at exploring the morality of a specific society or situation by asking participants to imagine themselves without personal identity considerations. Imagine that you were not born yet. Now imagine that you do not know if you will be born in a rich or poor family, with this or that gender, or race, or sexuality, or religion, etc. And now, from

this original position and not knowing the specific identity mix that would be given to you, ask yourself in which kind of society would you prefer to be born? As an explorer who discovers a new view of the world, the idea of a pre-identity position makes us consider issues of privilege, inclusion and exclusion and invites us to explore alternative perspectives to those presented by our current situation. I am also deeply indebted to Kellee Caton (2012, 2016) for her work on dialogue epistemology, morality and a humanistic paradigm, and to the insights on value free, value laden and value judgement in science of Elisabeth Anderson (Anderson, 2004, 2015) and Kristen Intemann's (2010) feminist epistemologies. The content of the following thought experiment is a creative exercise that was born out of the main ideas and philosophical discussions of these thinkers. It presents an application of their multifold critique of objectivism to challenge understandings of meritocracy in hyper academic cultures.

Before proceeding with the thought experiment, I ask you (the reader) to select one of the three letters: A, B, or C, and write the selected letter here:

Thought Experiment

Imagine that you are a junior academic who has recently been accepted into a PhD program. You are looking forward to starting an academic career. This is what you have always wanted. You feel a little nervous because this morning you are going to attend the first meeting at your new university. But you are also excited and happy, and most of all looking forward to conversing with the senior academic who has been assigned as your supervisor.

Your supervisor welcomes you and explains that she has some good news to share with you: the university has decided to allocate funding for a future tenured position in the area of research of your PhD. This position will be available in a few years' time. Of course the tenure position will be advertised and open to competition, but you will have a reasonable opportunity to get this job.

The supervisor explains in detail the conditions of this process: Your future recruitment committee will consist of three academics and they will have access to all the documentation related to your scholarly production and academic activities. Everything will be digitized and available online. This includes extensive metrics such as numbers of publications, journal rankings, citations, h-index, number of readers and downloads, evaluations, etc.

The supervisor informs you that there is an element of uncertainty and that a key aspect of the future recruitment process has not been decided yet. There are three possible scenarios for the evaluation of the applicants' academic performance: the virus scenario, the fake-data and immoral agents scenario and the meritocratic scenario.

The virus scenario. In this situation a virus has infected all university computers and information systems. It has deleted the journal names, the names of the academic institutions, replaced the names of co-authors with initials, and all other quantitative metrics have vanished. However, there is no need to despair. The members of the committee will still have access to the core of your scholarship, your writing, examples of the course curriculum, descriptions of the activities and the initiatives mentioned in your CV.

Please, take a moment to think how an academic evaluation of excellence and merit would play out in the virus scenario.

The fake data and immoral agents scenario. In this scenario the committee members have access to all documents, quantitative data, names and metrics, but these members are highly skeptical. They are aware that immoral agents have infiltrated the metric/ranking system. In this system some researchers can get authorship without writing; others will gain easier access to highly ranked journals because of their personal contacts with editors or by providing gift authorship to influential scholars. Others benefit from working in institutions which excel at playing the 'metrics game'. They are also aware of the existence of implicit biases and that comparison among institutions may be deceiving; productivity may differ a lot depending on job conditions, nationality/native language/gender of the applicants, quantity of teaching or engagement in academic citizenship, and so on.

Please, take a moment to think how an academic evaluation of excellence and merit would play out in the fake data and immoral agents scenario.

The meritocratic scenario. In this scenario the committee members have access to all data. These academics believe that all of the metrics and ranking systems available are neutral and objective. They also believe that academic institutions are essentially unbiased, and that appointments, rewards and recognitions are based upon objective judgements of excellence. They see the metrics of impact, productivity and evaluation as a literal and truthful representation of the quality of your work and of your talent and potential.

Please, take a moment to think how an academic evaluation of excellence and merit would play out in the meritocratic scenario.

Now the supervisor turns to you and asks, "Which of these scenarios do you perceive as more just for evaluating your work? Which of these scenarios will motivate you more to strive for academic excellence?"

There is a chance that at this point you may feel distressed, not knowing the right choice to make. But, happily, the supervisor announces that there is help at hand in the form of a crystal ball placed in the middle of the room. She invites you to look at the crystal ball and see the scenario that corresponds with the letter you chose.

Take a look at the letter (A, B, or C) that you selected earlier. Each one of these letters corresponds to a specific scenario: assigned: C. the virus scenario, B. the fake data and immoral agents scenario, and A. the meritocratic scenario. Take a moment to reflect on the scenario that corresponds with your selected letter. How do you feel about your fate? If you could change your letter with someone else, would you do that? What would the consequences of this change be in your way of becoming an academic?

A reflection

This experiment helps us to reflect on the values that come to the foreground and those that recede when we play with these different scenarios. It raises awareness about the personal and collective beliefs we take for granted and highlights the difference between relying on objectivism and meritocracy or on the culturally/socially constructed meaning of value. It

encourages us to see how we will proceed to evaluate and make value judgements on the work of others given different circumstances, but also to realize that technology is not a neutral tool. Instead, judgement and sense-making are created in the interplay between human beliefs and moral considerations, and technologically tailored processes. The potential consequences the random choice of a letter can have remind us of the aspects in our lives which, like fate or privilege (e.g. our social background, race, gender, nationality, language), are beyond our control yet still affect our career prospects.

Hyper Academia

Gratitude referencing II

The following short story is inspired by the tradition of dystopian story telling. This genre, which Margaret Atwood has named speculative fiction, has the ability to show us possible futures. I learned from Atwood's courageous literature the radical power this genre has to create emotional engagement whilst activating our critical reflexivity. Jean-Paul Sartre introduced complex philosophical problems and deliberations using literary and dramatic fiction, but most importantly, he allowed me to see how his use of artistic genres (e.g. *The Wall*) could illuminate even more of the deep paradoxes of the human condition than traditional philosophical essays (Sartre, published in Kaufmann, 1956, pp. 223-311). The audiovisual aspects of the story were inspired by the art of Laurie Anderson and her ability to juxtapose multiple media, but equally by her defense of creative freedom and digital experimentation. The philosophy and critical scholarship of Jürgen Habermas (1987, 1989) has been a core inspiration of my whole academic career, and the following story and manifesto would have not been possible without his insights on the colonization of lifeworlds, the alienation produced by bureaucratic and market systems alike and his defense of the power of rationality, communication and dialogue. I am also indebted to the psychiatrist and holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl (1959) for his argument of the counter position between the will to power and the will to meaning, and his reflection on the existential vacuum. And finally, the following is inspired in Hanna Arendt's (1958) scholarship for reminding us that the human condition always entails a public dimension – the capacity to use a public voice. From her insightful critique of totalitarianism, I used the idea of “the rule of nobody” and how automatized systems (being these bureaucratic and/or technological in nature) reward compliance. Hannah Arendt's life and stubborn determination are examples that nothing compares to the freedom of an independent mind decided to think.

A short story: The Hyper Hero¹

The light is softer now. It can't take much longer.

He would do well as a doctor, someone able to provide lethal news without changing the tone, the right convincing look, a sense of authority, the excellent institutional representative. The voice of the Metric Executive Officer bounced off the large windows. There was something seducing about his voice, something reminiscent of a mantra. After a while his words fell to the

¹ This story includes audiovisual elements, please see and or listen to the attached audiovisual files by clicking on the links.

background, inserted into our spines so we could walk out of the meeting straighten up, recently ironed, shiny. When did words start to resemble the digital bit and lose their texture? Long clean rows of ones and zeros, [absolutes entangled with each other](#).

Get yourself together! ... She shouldn't be so absent minded. She felt the wave of blame nearly as a relief. This was an important meeting of the newly established Hyper Academic Council. It was an honor to be among the top 2 percent of the excellent framework ranking.

How long had she been lost in her thoughts, she wondered? Thankfully, everything was being recorded and transcribed automatically by the obedient Alexa. There would be plenty of time afterwards if she ever wanted to listen more carefully to what Jack was saying. "All our meetings - one click away." This was not like when we avoided being the one who took the minutes – this was the age where we could have it all.

She pressed one hand against the other, under the table, harder. He was repeating something now, going once again through the key specifications of METRIT, the big data system that was to unite merit and metric.

"We need to move to the voting then. The official agreement for all recruitment, promotion and systems to be under METRIT. I have no doubt that this is going to be a major improvement to our talent management. Take a look - with the new centralized system the Head of Departments and any manager at our institution will have real time access to all metric on individual and collective performance."

He was pointing joyfully to the image in the big screen at the end of the room. A happy child with the latest toy.



METRIT

"This goes from the macro level of a department or research center, to the micro individual level. Here are all the details of our metric panopticon: How much it takes to submit a paper, all the metrics related to where it is submitted over time, its impacts, the time people spend on their computers, which programs do they use, the network analysis of their contacts not only for the

scholars and practitioners they may relate to, but also for their readings and references and who reads them, quotes them, recommends them, the frequency and intensity of those links, their web usage, their teaching evaluations, their email usage, their expenditures and project activity, we have now included a total of 186 metrics divided in seven color blocks: Research production, research impact, academic service, projects and funding, teaching, academic management, and other activities.”

“Look!” He pointed again at the screen.” It is a rainbow. The intensity of the color changes the more alive the category is. We are aiming at colorful people and liveliness. This is what we had been waiting for; the end of nepotism and bias, an open source system that finally achieves a total objectivity and transparency in the decision making of talent progression in academia. Clearly there is a before and an after the Google METRIT.”

He looked beautiful and bright, as he stood there, his lean body in front of the screen.

In which color would my e-mails of love and failure, the ones of bitterness and jealousy, and the ones of triumph and euphoria appear? How will the liveness account for the tears of reading “Madness, Rack and Honey”, the memory of the hand on the page, the deep friendship developed in one single conversation? Those special emotional bits are like hard liquor and burn inside me like a candle. Surely they deserve a heavy weighting in the algorithm; a deeper coloring of the tights between the network nodes.

I was mistaken; it was not words that had been transformed into ones and zeros – a bit after a bit and before a bit. It was our own biological tissue. I recalled my first sentiment index of positive and negative terms developed for tourism destinations – my beautiful semantic web. It was now many years ago.

He cached my eyes and smiled.

“The system is self-learning. It improves and learns as all our employees will continue feeding it with information. They log in for work every day through the METRIT tension, the rest happens automatically.”



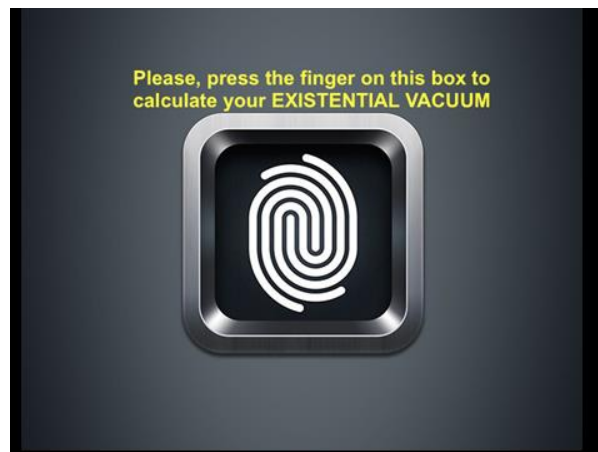
[“Please, press the finger on this box to calculate your METRIT tension.”](#)

And who is the system I wonder. It is difficult to imagine beyond the stereotype of a group of software geeks dressed as rap singers on a Monday. The problem was a problem of imagination. I had always thought that vampires would come dressed in black silk filled with lust and desire. Evil is faceless. How could I have forgotten this? Or did I think that this kind of lethal banality was only to be found in the darkest periods of European history?

I was among the chosen ones of the new competitive position “Hyper Academic”; a member of the Metric Academic Council. Pride did not come in waves, but as an armor. My numbers were way beyond average. One of the firsts to mine into the field of digitalization; a reference in the field, I had been lucky. And now, I was also officially a powerful shiny rainbow.

“Please, press the finger on this box to calculate your METRIT tension.”

If someone held her gaze for more than a second, they may see the void.



[“Please, press the finger on this box to calculate your existential vacuum”](#).

The existential vacuum is a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century. This is understandable; it may be due to a twofold loss which man has had to undergo since he became a truly human being. At the beginning of human history, man lost some of the basic animal instincts in which an animal's behaviour is imbedded and by which it is secured. Such security, like Paradise, is closed to man forever; man has to make choices. In addition to this, however, man has suffered another loss in his more recent development inasmuch as the traditions which buttressed his behaviour are now rapidly diminishing. No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism) or he does what other people wish him to do (totalitarianism). (Frankl, 1959)

Victor Frankl's voice sounded round and old, a distillation of the learnings of years of survival in the concentration camps, but I had forgotten, it wasn't his voice I was listening too. It was the digitalized voice of the unknown reader of an audiobook downloaded into my mobile device.

By comparison, Jack's voice sounded impatient –“ If there is no one against this decision the METRIT model is now adopted.”

What would I have for dinner? I most of all needed a drink. One to celebrate that I was now officially hypermetric, a hyper hero....and bored

The human academy: a manifesto

The quantification of our intellectual work acts as the monetarization of intellectual production and relationships in academia. Massive digitized metric systems function as dynamic stock exchanges where the worth of human scholarship is translated into digital bits, which have more or less value in a codified system of rankings and statistical data sets. The price tag is now the amount of Google citations, the impact factors or star systems, the H-index. Habermas teaches us how highly complex societies regulate human relationships through steering systems, that is, using as mediums of interconnectivity financial monetized systems or bureaucratic ones, and also how an increase in steering systems results in a decrease of personal autonomy and rational deliberation. We may imagine our possibilities of freedom, self-expression and reflexivity as fire. There is no fire without air. Air is our capacity to engage in rational deliberation, our compromise, as advocated by the classical Stoics, to think and act responsibly. Every time academic institutions or individuals decide to obey systemic steering processes we block for air, but also we engage in a de-humanization process where our relationships to ourselves and others and to scholarly work become automatized and commodified. It is not possible to enact this freedom of thought without also considering our political capacity or what David Held defines as the principle of human autonomy: “the capacity of social agents, agencies and institutions to maintain or transform their environment, social or physical. It is about the resources that underpin this capacity and about the forces that shape and influence its exercise” (Held, 1987, 275-277).

Hannah Arendt in her book “Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil” (1963/2006) gives us a formidable insight into the nature of evil (i.e. of acting immorally). The Western cultural tradition has conventionally imagined the evil as something highly individual, subjective and cunningly wise (something similar to the archetype of the bright devil). Arendt's deep teaching is that contrary to this belief, evil often does not demand complex reflexive thinking. On the contrary, evil appears as the abdication of the intellect, as the abandonment of critical rationality and the blind following of orders or of regulations: “The essence of totalitarian government, and perhaps the nature of every bureaucracy, is to make functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them.” (Arendt, 1963/2006)

The philosophy of Derek Parfit (2011) highlights an intrinsic and fundamental relationship between caring if our acts are right or wrong and which reasons do we have to care to avoid acting wrongly, “whether some act is wrong depends on what, in certain actual or imagined situations, we or others would have most reason or sufficient reason to consent to, or agree to, or to want, or choose, or do.” (2011, p.149). However, what Arendt's thesis shows is that we can freely abandon our human condition and there are societies and political systems that instigate that abandonment. Instead of “thinking better” and being a “more discriminating and reflective

person”; we find solace in the following of orders or the blind belief in steering systems (money, rules, military orders, metrics and rankings, etc.).

In a similar way, Sartre maintained that we are afraid of freedom and our own humanity and therefore engage in self-deception. The existential philosophers have provided us with two major insights. One that the modern individual does not have any more a “God or higher authority” that can tell us what is right and what is wrong to do, and two, that scientific advancement and science in itself is not the same as what is good or what is morally right (e.g. the atomic weapons or what we can do genetically today). Modern individuals are therefore ‘condemned’ to doubt (or for some philosophers like Kierkegaard to a permanent state of angst). Still, because we miss this “God” so badly, we create panopticon hyper-systems that can act as God so that we can be free from doubt or responsibility in our decision making.

According to Sartre, the modern individual appears condemned to be free, but also appears condemned to hide freedom from themselves through self-deception (bad faith). Individuals try to deceive themselves into believing that there are acts they have to do or ways they need to be. There are two modes of being – in itself (*en soi*) (this is the mode of being of things, things exist all at once; for example a stone) and for itself (*pour soi*) (this is the human mode of being. Individuals want and wish also to be ‘all at once’ – a fixed identity like the stone – but instead they are not, their identity is always becoming). In Hannah Arendt abandoning our human nature is what nurtures the unethical. This takes the form of blind subordination to rules and authority. In Sartre this process is more subtle. It takes the form of the acceptance and embodiment of socially constructed roles (e.g. by uncritically playing the role of ‘the proper academic’). In Arendt’s case the challenge to humanity comes from compliance and the will to power in Sartre’s from the fear to doubt and to choose.

Habermas, Arendt, Sartre, Seneca, all point in the same direction - that our moral being stands or falls with our commitment to fully embrace our human condition, i.e. our critical reflexivity and rationality. Morality cannot be comprehended without understanding that our capacity to think is deeply linked to our capacity to act rightly or wrongly.

What could be then a road map for our contemporary academic world that instead of having the logic of quantification and metrics had at its core the art of being human? What would it entail to imagine the humanization of academic cultures and environments as a way to increase our moral responsibility? Looking back at this philosophical/artistic exploration what appears as today’s most urgent task is not a bill of rights, but a bill of duties.

A Duty Manifesto for a Human Academy

1. The duty to doubt. We claim our doubt, rejoice in our human capacity to doubt and demand the time and respect to engage with our doubt. We state that doubting is not the same as being cynical or sarcastic or hopeless. It is reclaiming our duty to question the truth, goodness or beauty of steering systems and deterministic technological processes; to connect with reality and to care for others and the world through inquiry.

2. The duty to engage in public dialogue. We are aware of our own limitations, biases and the partiality of our views and value judgement. We commit to create spaces of dialogue, to fight for

the inclusion of different social groups (also marginalized groups) among those that ‘do’ research, to allow for dissent as a motivation for us to present stronger and clearer justifications for our positions or interpretations.

3. *The duty to think and search for meaning.* We work for creating a university that resembles a fitness center of thinking, where we, our students and our colleagues can strengthen our thinking muscles so that we can exercise rationality autonomously and in different contexts and conditions. We advocate the search for meaning vs the search for power or control. We embrace the need for deep reading and engagement with the academic work of others; treating this work not as a commodity, but as something precious and worthy in its own right.

4. *The duty to reclaim responsibility for our actions and our political being.* We expose that blind beliefs and reliance on hyper metrics result in the abandonment of our personal responsibility and moral judgement. We reclaim the need to exercise our political autonomy and engagement as the way to transform our institutions and our societies.

5. *The duty to be grateful and rejoice.* We are deeply grateful for the honor of being academics and the privilege of being “*led by the work of others into the presence of the most beautiful treasures*” (Seneca). We celebrate the joy and hope that is intrinsic to our creative work. We are deeply thankful for the possibilities of emancipation and transformation which are at the core of research enquiry and teaching.

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