

Emerging configurations of form and content in Facebook prod-user culture^(*)

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Abstract

In times of immense cultural change due to technological evolution in the field of communication and transmission, the arrival of social media has been a truly innovative tool shaping our new culture in previously unexperienced ways. This study delves into the constituent parts of the modern process of cultural generation in times when virtual communication is informing cultural production in new ways. The new agency and prolific role-formation of prod-usage is today creating new configurations of form and content in its interactivity with the technological medium that was originally designed for advancing a certain vision of man. The study will explore these new virtually filtered conceptualisations that are redrawing our cultural maps in a selection of culinary Facebook posts, memes and photo-posing in Facebook pictures as examples of digital structures diffusing new significations where form overpowers content.

Keywords

Cyber-culture, Facebook , Digital Form and Content , Meme, Techno, culture , The Medium is the Message , Technic Image , Visuality

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المخلص

لقد شكل ظهور وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي في الحياة المعاصرة ثورة أعادت تشكيل الثقافة بأساليب غير معهودة نتيجة للتداخل الملموس والخلق بين التقدم التكنولوجي وإتاحته إمكانات غير مسبوقة في المجال الثقافي بشتي أشكاله. تخوض هذه الدراسة في بحث الأجزاء المكونة لعملية الإنتاج الثقافي في عصر الإتصالات الرقمية علي يد فاعلين ممكنين لإبداع هائل بسبب إستخدام أدوات إرسال وتواصل إفتراضية عالية الإمكانيات. فقد غيرت نشأة دور المنتج-المستخدم كثيراً من علاقات الإنتاج والإستهلاك الثقافية كما أنها غيرت الشكل و المضمون للمعاني التي تتجول في الفضاء السيبراني cyberspace. فإن إستخدام آليات التواصل الإفتراضية قد خلق واقعاً جديداً متكاملأ نحن في أمس الحاجة إلي فهمه و تقييمه و تحديد معالمه إذ أن التكنولوجيا تعد بالمزيد من التعامل البشري مع تلك العوالم الإفتراضية التي تغير الركائز الثقافية وعلاقة الإنسان بالواقع الملموس منقصة المسافة بينه وبين الآلة. تتناول الدراسة الراهنة تحليل شكل ومضمون مجموعة من بوستات الطهي والميمات واوضاع التصويرعلي فيسبوك كامثلة علي الشكل الذي يطغي علي المضمون في المحتوى الرقمي (بحسب معادلة مرشال ماك لوهان Marshall McLuhan) فينتج ذلك معان جديدة تتمحوربالاساس حول العنصر المرئي والوسيلة الرقمية التي اضخت امتدادا للذات وللجسد.

الكلمات الدالة

الثقافة السيبرانية ، فيسبوك، الشكل والمضمون الرقمي، الميم، الوسيلة هي الرسالة، الصورة التقنية، الثقافة المرئية

Introduction

At this stage of our cultural history, we are communicating with each other with machines that science has managed to render coherent and expressive to the point of obliterating their ontological rigidity and inhuman literalness. Facebook is one among several of these complex artefacts that were built out of electrical impulses to use McLuhanesque signifiers.

This new medium, together with other interactive social media platforms, is our new means of representing the world, of patterning it

beyond the older tools that one day did a similar job. New digital media are designers of reality, they express modern patterns of cognition, perception and thinking the world. This new medium of expression is the outcome of how we, one day, envisaged and organised the world we wanted to live in, and, in the meantime, it is shaping proliferating new realities born with the omniscient act of prod-usage.

In a world where information and communication are dominating and forming our epistemic universes, narratives and human forms of expression have metamorphosed into new cultural forms and visual structures. This is nowhere more apparent than in our daily experience of social media which suffuses with memes, colourful postings, live conversations, private and public pictures of ourselves, shared links, etc.

The following is a study of the new configurations of form and content in selected culinary Facebook posts, memes and photo-posing as examples of the new structures of meaning in our cyber-cultural era with an introductory part relating back to the origins of the cybernetic worldview. The study is carried out in the light of key notions from both Marshall McLuhan and Vilém Flusser on the precedence of medium over message today translated in the work of prod-usage as the predominance of creative digi-visual form over a fluid content.

Cybernetics and the new world order

It is not irrelevant as we look into social media form and content to draw a picture of the world that was born out of the ashes of the two World Wars giving us the science of cybernetics that did away with an immutable body, man as thought and form, and a stable humanity. The logics of technology became founded on the apparent necessity of certain actions, and technology was the realm where a desired but inexistent action could come to life. Technology spotted the existential emptiness that it could later come to fill in the form of pretexts of insufficiency concerning time, the body and

an entire vision of the world. Change thus occurred, cybernetics shed light on imperfections then offered the tools to change them.

Some such flaws were for example Freud’s psychoanalysis which delved into the human interior, the realm of the incomprehensible and the mysterious. Cybernetics reversed this interiority by viewing man as best determined by his social entourage and by exchange of self in openness. The unconscious is a dark thickness that needs to be interpreted via an external humanist judge. This therefore needed to change into some ultra-openness where the individual is at his/her best as a point in a rhizome of encounters and influences, as a nodal point in a networked structure where fusion and separation happen consecutively, metastasising human creativity, controlling contingency rather than being at the mercy of fixity.

This led to one of cybernetics most fundamental characteristics and achievements: the simplification and reduction of the real, in other words, the formal redesigning of reality in data. When complexity could be simplified in cyberspace this aided its quick transmission and this is how cybernetics formalised the world and created the materiality from which its new forms were cast. The technological medium therefore took precedence over its message.

Time was exorcised from its cumulative, burdensome chronology. Presentism and instantaneity became more suitable forms since the past mattered no more and the future made no sense. The body was thus relieved of the weight of its temporal dimensions and overcame its biological and cognitive finiteness in the realm of the virtual. Reality became contingent and could be controlled with the tools to manoeuvre this contingency.

As for anxiety, machines promised protection from it. They produced a body in conformity with desire. Relations with other human beings as well as with nature passed through a network of technologies and services that have recycled time, space, social structures, representations and even knowledge. In other words, computerised systems effectuated a real renaissance of everyday life and culture today culminating in the form of social media that we have all come to use ubiquitously.

Science and aesthetics moved away from the freedom of ideas to the freedom of form. Objects and machines no more adapted to humans, but gradually man was adapting to the rhythm of objects. Form moved out of the symbol of the written word. Technic form replaced the typographic word and came to shape human ideas and the mind. Information was cybernetics' point of research, to be released without constraint in the incommensurable space of the Web no matter what the signifieds are to the signifier; an information that matters more than its content. This formal progress crushed the referent.

Cybernetics can be said to have become the dominant cultural *episteme* as it came to be viewed as a solution to solitude and to the misery of the world. First launched as a scientific conception, cybernetics is today integrated in the deepest levels of our outlook on the world, and this has recently materialised in the contemporary forms of social media this study intends to research certain aspects of in terms of their reconfiguring of our epistemological structures..

Form and Content of Facebook

Multimedia applications have merged several cultural forms such as photography, television and writing in a unified new digital form of streaming human expressiveness. McLuhan's exhortation that "the medium is the message" has in recent times found itself explicative of this current state of affairs where "media determine our situation" (Kittler, xxxix). It had not persuaded many at the time it was uttered for its then much doubted explicit technical determinism, yet in recent years, it is making a conceptual comeback on the cultural scene for it aids in our attempts at understanding our digital existence in a world of advanced and ubiquitous tools of socio-virtual technologies.

The endless flow of creative information on Facebook, its being a multi-form modern tool of transmission and communication, installed on mobile phones (as were the radio and television almost a century earlier), dependent upon prod-usage or content production by its users, renders it

inevitably a multi-media medium that overpowers its own content. The capabilities of Facebook that have been augmented with users’ creativity all direct towards its capacities as a medium first and foremost. Content then follows, and its endless flowing and ephemerality inevitably relegate it to this McLuhanesque secondary position.

The medium’s power to evoke so much, to design so much in innovative ways has truly been a revolution in emergent forms of cultural expression. Our original human pattern-making imagination today finds itself in full bloom with current digital media writing the world and re-designing it in new hitherto inexperienced ways. This study will look into Facebook culinary posts, memes and photo-posing as examples of innovative digital form and content. But before doing that it will investigate some of the notions related to McLuhan’s dictum and Flusser’s theory of what terms technic images. Both visionary theorists will fuel the research with its methodological infra-structure.

The Medium is the Message

The idea this phrase brought into perspective since the sixties is that media *per se* overwhelm their content, that if a medium contains a message it is *itself* this message. This notion has gradually become paradigmatically meaningful with recent advancement in broadcasting and current internet technologies. The medium as *episteme* is today informing our attempts at understanding our media ecology since the affordances of the medium have become enhanced and omnipresent, and available to all alike with ultimate ease in usage (user-friendliness), and also in the medium’s unprecedented ubiquity.

McLuhan’s defining of electronic technologies as “extensions of the senses” and of consciousness (1964) was in itself a notion that allowed for setting the medium above its content since it rendered it a tangible, material and cognitive prosthesis. When applied to mobile phones and tablets today, with what they can do, and can make us do, this notion comes to acquire deeper meaning, as this type of media are truly extending our cognitive

abilities and our bodies' capabilities, and completely altering the means and the forms by which we formerly designed and formulated our worlds.

McLuhan introduced a new way of thinking about technology fitting the new times. Today digital machines, more than ever, are technologically extending our capacities and re-configuring the verb "to do" in radically new ways. This is the main reason why McLuhan was prophetic and aids in understanding the present since he "provid[ed] a method for studying the effects of the forms of communication on cognitive functions and culture, on social relations and knowledge systems" (Marchessault, 157).

New media create new form. Without a medium to create its form, content does not exist. Facebook manipulates several high-definition media at once, in other words, several cultural forms: pixelated images (real and photoshopped), digital writing, television (live or video), emojis, emoticons, camera, emotions (the 'like' and 'heart' buttons); all flowing together onto digital screens in endless creative combinations, innovative cultural fusions and visual designs. This multiplication of media working harmoniously under the iconic logo Facebook accentuate the medium's affordances more than its content, especially since the latter is in constant reproduction and endless variation and mobility.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), McLuhan wrote about the passage from the Gutenberg technology of print to electric technologies (he was the first to shed light on the electric bulb as a medium) and the new cultural era this turning-point in history heralded. Today, we are at a new phase of these techno-cultural metamorphoses where digital writing with all its connotations is fusing with a maximised visual culture on user-made social media. "Culture is [...] recreated anew by every medium of communication _ from painting to hieroglyphs to the alphabet to television. Each medium, like language itself, makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility" (Postman, 9).

McLuhan specified the era prior to the discovery of the medium of print as the period of orality of tribal man. He relocates orality in the electricity-laden times he sought to theorise with its defining traits of

“decentralisation, implosion, outering [of the senses], instantaneous connection” (Marchessault, 171). Today, these notions have acquired new significations with the profusing content on Facebook and other social media. The medium’s affordances are creating new epistemological and cultural circuits that suffuse with creative prod-usage and what can be termed a digi-visual orality in a further elaboration of McLuhan’s vision of this electrical re-turn to tribal orality.

Being an extension of ourselves, each new medium introduces new scales, new dimensions of perception into our affairs, new epistemological proportions into our lives. “It is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content and uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. Indeed, it is only too typical that the ‘content’ of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium” (McLuhan, 1964, 9).

McLuhan stated that the content of any medium is another medium (1964, 8-18) and this is best epitomised in our contemporary social media artefacts. They are media structurally encrusted one in the other, forming what is termed multimedia technology. Facebook’s multi-layered architecture comprises of many media from the typographic letter to sound, photo, memes, icons, emojis, television, gifs, etc... All functioning in digital co-existence creating a modern form of cognitive compositions on vertically flowing portable screens able to condense the whole of society in a book (de Certeau, 1984, xxii).

Gutenberg technology with its conceptual linearity and the Cartesian culture that came with it were revolutionised by electric technologies, and the new world they inaugurated was characterised by simultaneity, intersected non-linear structures, excessive semantic viscosity, etc. Today as Facebook prod-usage culture is occupying center stage, and before another new technology sets in, it is imperative to attempt an understanding of modern digital cultural forms and how they signify for today’s culture. Our modern, concretising, technological prosthetic existence and dependence on

cyberspace, is giving birth to myriad new forms and genres of expression and consequently to new content.

In his “The Galaxy Reconfigured”, McLuhan runs across different poetic epochs to explain how culture moved from the linear, Newtonian and closed system of perception, to “a mode of broken or syncopated manipulation to permit *inclusive* or simultaneous perception of a total and diversified field” (1962, 267). What interests us in this notion is McLuhan’s concluding that electric technology brought about a new kind of literacy, media literacy, more suited to the new world and born out of its dialectics. Today’s social media forms are an expression of a culture utterly detached from former notions of temporal, spatial and epistemological closures (where cause led to effect), a culture synchronised alternatively and homogenised heterogeneously (where effect precedes cause).

Facebook is one significant form of expression of this culture. Its digital pluralistic form combines visual technologies (face) with miscellaneous writing techniques (book), photography and portable television side by side with posting concise textuality, and all this within a networked system of smart internet technologies (algorithms, cookies, sliding touch screens, etc). It is epitomising our era of fusions and mergers, technological and cultural, where distinction of one from the other is becoming less and less tangible, and less and less relevant to the current cultural discourse. The social platform has moved from its original role of connecting people to a virtual cultural realm where user production is expressing new forms of post-modern envisioning of reality.

Vilém Flusser on the technic image

Flusser’s work is of importance to this research for he has theorised the image culture brought forth by the media in the last decades of the previous century. He saw it as a turning point in critical thinking and in historical consciousness. The image today is central to all social media, be it still photography, or televisual postings. It has tremendously evolved on our portable screens and make up a congruous part of the digital forms studied

in this research, namely culinary posts, memes and photo-posing. The portable internet plus camera technology has multiplied photos and images in our lives to the point of becoming a syntax of its own, recycling visual culture in this beginning of century, once more, as an ultra-evolved meaning-laden object of study.

Flusser wrote in the cold war period on the technic image, isolating photography as a socio-cultural object of critical inquiry. His notions precluded the very times we live in today. Like McLuhan, he was not interested in the content of images but in photography as a cultural form; not in ‘what’ pictures meant but in ‘why’ they signified for our culture. “Flusser disagree[ed] with Benjamin’s claim that the image’s auratic character [Benjamin’s “aura” Flusser calls “magic”] has disappeared through the techniques of reproduction. To Flusser, it has taken on a different form” (Van der Meulen, 188).

Flusser investigated the camera as a “prototype for the ontologically conditioning apparatuses of post-industrial society” (Van der Meulen, 187). Unlike McLuhan who traced the evolution from written culture to electronic culture, Flusser researched the future of writing in the age of image technologies considering the image *sui generis* to be the existential cultural message.

Flusser distinguished between “traditional” photography (visuality prior to linear texts) and what he termed “post-historical” photography (contemporary visual structures that today exist side by side with linear texts which were the only carriers of information). The former was two-dimensional, magical and mythical. In between these two eras, linear texts dominated, imposing a one-dimensional approach to understanding.

As for post-historical images, Flusser argues, they are not exactly a reverting to the pre-linear magical state. They are technical images that “rely on texts from which they have come [...] [they] are not surfaces but mosaics assembled from particles [...] [are] without dimension” (1985, 6). Then Flusser concludes “technical images are completely new media [...] constitut[ing] a cultural revolution” (1985, 7).

He formulated the concept of “projection” since images project something in *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985). At the time he wrote, he was describing a Copernican revolution taking place as images and the apparatuses that produced them were becoming superior to human beings. “The relationship between technical image and man, the intercourse between them, is therefore the central problem of any future cultural critique” (1985, 57).

Flusser considered the image a denominator of culture and of civilisation. Today, and after this visual explosion on social media of different genres of photography, it is important to understand the digital visual culture that shapes our life in terms of the intersection of user with machine and the epistemological consequences this has for the form and content that we produce and consume. In other words, we need to research the signification of digitally prod-used images as they shape our system of reality today.

In an interesting article on Flusser’s work, Emmanuel Brassat (2009) explains Flusser’s defining of the camera as a Cartesian structure that causes a concept and an element of reality to coincide through the means of an automatically produced image. This apparatus came to acquire significance where linear writing failed, although this latter had accomplished the Cartesian project it could not fully reconcile concepts with things. Science and technology, too, failed in accomplishing this ideal; and since the textual and the technological both failed, crisis led to a return towards images and “magic”. Cameras were born from this epistemological impasse as Flusser theorised these iconic apparatuses of visibility.

Brassat notes that Flusser specifies two characteristics of images: they are symbolic and they are meta-codes of texts, not always reverting to the real or to reality but to other texts that give them their structure of existence. This applies to Facebook and to all social media visual forms *par excellence*. They epistemologically refer to the post-modern culture they project, whose meanings they encapsulate and whose mental forms they articulate and optically design.

They are thus networks of information, signifiers and symbols assembled in an implicit way to refer to the world beyond them. They are not images of the real, but are paradoxically identifiable as real, and among what they may refer back to, is their ontological universe: the medium itself, what Flusser terms “program” in his earlier work *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983).

On the culture that images represent, and on the centrality of the medium in it, Flusser in this same *oeuvre* wrote: “our thoughts, feelings, desires and actions are being robotised; ‘life’ is coming to mean feeding apparatuses and being fed by them” (1983, 80). He clearly predicted our times flooding with social media visual production where we feed the medium, and thrive, both epistemologically and ontologically, on what we circulate on it.

In his *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, his last work, Flusser predicted our social media and screen culture:

“a dialogic, telematic society of image producers and image collectors [...] What we can no longer challenge is the dominance of technical images in this future society[...] it is likely _ bordering on certain _ that the existential interests of future men and women will focus on technical images. This gives us the right and the duty to

call this emerging society a utopia. It will no longer be found in any place or time but in imagined surfaces, in surfaces that absorb geography and history” (1985, 4).

His approach and research have conceptually paved the way for the current moment’s omnipresent digital visibility, polysemic user-made productions and multi-media technological affordances. His cultural mapping of our world dominated with images is of use to this study on emergent configurations of digital form and content as will be demonstrated in the following analyses of selected culinary posts, memes and photo-posing.

Form and content in four culinary Facebook posts

The following analyses looks into four different culinary posts in terms of the diversity of their digital form and content; the McLuhanesque formula of media being the content of other media which applies to how form and content is conceptualised on social media and on Facebook specifically; the contemporary extroversion of visual signifiers in culinary postings; forms of prod-usage; the meta-coding of cultural texts beyond the culinary recipe *per se*; and, lastly, concluding with proving via all that has preceded, the initial theoretic point of the medium being the message in contemporary social media.

1- Diversity of form and content

Culinary Facebook posts are created in a variety of forms and of content. The following is an analysis of four selected culinary Facebook posts with very different approaches to form and content. They range from the image of an exotic soup servings with the accompanying recipe in the form of a link (Nigella Lawson's post) to three very distinct video forms presenting different food contents, translating very distinct innovative digital visions that reproduce the culinary content in novel ways within a whole reconceptualisation of cooking as an activity or a pastime.

The first example studied is a post from Nigella Lawson's Facebook page. She is mostly famous for her TV shows and her cookery books. She started her career as a food writer. On her Facebook page, she posts photos of her preparations instead of demonstration videos, as is the tradition in cooking books. Yet these, on Facebook, are lit and bright photos because of the digitised screens that project them. She names her daily postings "Our #recipe of the day is... Spinach and Coconut Soup [our selected recipe for the present analysis]". Underneath it she gives the link to a textual description of the recipe. With a simple click the searcher navigates to the recipe on her website, nigella.com, where the recipe is divided into two parts. Firstly, ingredients; and secondly, method, in steps, as presented in traditional cookbooks.

The post always comprises of an attractive sentence, concise at times, more elaborate at others, describing the recipe with reference to cooking tricks one can opt for to adjust the preparation to one’s taste like the following one precluding the soup on the Facebook post:

“This is an almost instant, super soothing supper made easily from store cupboard ingredients. I have stipulated two tablespoons of Thai green curry paste, but do be prepared to add more if you like a bit more fire”.

Nigella’s cooking remark is longer if one opens her recipe on her website. It continues as follows:

“If you want to adjust this a little, consider adding some little cooked prawns; just make sure they’re heated through before serving. The chopped red chilli I add on serving is not obligatory, but I like the glossy red confetti!”

Nigella’s Facebook recipes completely differ in form from the following digital examples of videos analysed in the coming paragraphs. The witty words that prelude the visual part of the comparatively still post refer us back to some pre-digital linearity absent in forthcoming examples. Nigella is well known for her recourse to poetic and richly evocative language accompanying her delectable kitchen in whatever is being cooked or sliced or marinated in the homely aromatic atmosphere of her televised series. Her Facebook posts preserve this exact same spirit and semantic technique without the televised part or the digitally playing screenings. The short culinary thoughts written above each photograph are very sophisticated in terms of their expressive richness as is found in ‘good’ literature; a feature, today, absent from contemporary digital writing characterised by its virality-oriented visuality and textually minimalist content in line with prod-using and mobilising the culture of speed.

Scrolling down Nigella Lawson’s Facebook page is delightfully poetic as in books. Witty words, catching remarks and phrases, stimulate the mind in place of taste buds unlike upcoming digital videos, besides some real-life issues of the kitchen world also formulated in words, appealing to connoisseurs, and accompanied by one visual at a time. Nigella, ever since

her television episodes, has always been a lover of words whom she exquisitely uses to describe her ingredients as she cooks them, adorning the whole process with language, and rendering the culinary experience, for the viewer, of the realm of the purely aesthetic and poetically sensory. She artfully selects subtle cooking details well-known to kitchen habitués to head her recipe of the day and to frame its posted photograph.

This particular example juxtaposing old-school photography with sensuously descriptive textuality as in books of culinary literature, together with Facebook's multimedia basic affordances, shows how, as a medium, Facebook has the capacity to accommodate all genres of media without exclusion. Nigella's page today resembles Facebook forms when it first started, without televisual elements. Facebook can be described as a digital-textual book, a tele-visual book, an interactive book, an algorithmic book, and much more, all combined. In short, it is a digitalised 'palimpsest', a cultural product of our cybernetic times, with an extended ability to absorb diversification of form and of content due to its limitless prod-usage and user creativity.

The second example is from a page by the name of "Recipe 30". It is a video tutorial of a tomato soup. The name of the recipe plus its link on the Web are written above a soundless playing video in the form of a tiny television screen. You can watch it play silently or press the image to hear the sound and enlarge the screen that becomes a small portable television on your phone (multiple media playing a cooking recipe). On your vertical Facebook feed it plays without the sound. The image of the act of preparation of food without audio differs from the one with audio. The mute play is purely visual and more sensuous. As sound penetrates the image it becomes television.

The video opens with the final product with the name of the dish written on the left side of the screen: "roasted tomato and basil soup", in a casual font. The puff pastry covering the soup is knocked open with a spoon that lifts the succulent reddish fluid. After this prelude that opens with what will be the end product, the preparation stages are filmed with a joyous uplifting music as background. First, some red green tomatoes with a leafy

green background that looks like basil are shown with the inscription “fresh tomatoes” on the upper left side of the screen. Then stem and core are removed as two inscriptions express the two consecutive acts: “remove stem” and “remove core”. Then follows: “cut in half”. The picture zooms on the inside of the succulent red halved vegetable.

The next step is the slicing of some fleshy red onions. The music playing throughout the video allows the sound of the firm knife hitting against the wooden cutting board to be heard which stimulates and brings closer the feel of the kitchen. Then the sound fades and the music returns. Its a whistling joyous march that is used in many other “Recipe 30” videos. The male hands that perform throughout the video grab an oriental style silver-plated jar and the writing on the screen says: “olive oil”. This latter is sprinkled “in a roasting dish”.

In the dish where olive oil was sprinkled, the sliced onions together with a few whole peeled garlic cloves plus “fresh or dried thyme” are spread. The hands add fresh whole thyme sprigs and the halved tomatoes. The dish becomes mostly red with the raw tomatoes whose inside is made conspicuous to the viewer. Then the typed notes say “drizzle more olive oil” and the hands mix it with the tomatoes and the rest of the raw ingredients with the words “coat them well”. Then “bake for 30-45 min at 400oF-200oC” as the oven is closed with the pan inside it. Then the oven immediately reopens with the cooked vegetables after a twist of the photographing and editing camera. The focus is on the smoking succulent roasted tomatoes.

The next step is “place large soup pot on high heat”. Then “add roasted tomatoes”. As it cooks each ingredient that is added is shown and indicated in words such as “chili flakes”, “salt”, “pepper” and “chicken or vegetable stock”. Each ingredient is followed by a zooming on the surface of the cooking tomatoes that are changing in consistency and turning into a paste-like texture. The hands then chop “fresh basil”. Like the red of the tomatoes earlier, the green is zoomed on as another luscious color and texture. The chopped leaves are “add[ed] to soup” and stirred, then the

whole is left to “simmer 20 minutes”, then “add cream”. Each time an ingredient is added the tomatoes look more cooked and steamy. Then a hand mixer is shown to mix the soup ingredients. It is then served in a white vintage “oven proof dish”.

For the finishing touch, a puff pastry dough is cut in the size of the soup bowl cover area and egg washed, “fold[ed] over and press[ed] firmly” and baked for another “20 min”. The final piece is placed on a flat dish and a spoon is added beside it. The music recedes allowing the metallic ticking sound of the spoon to be heard as well as the finale sound of the spoon slowly cutting open the puff pastry in a crunchy mouth-watering sound. Then the camera focuses on the dish from above to show the opening of the pastry from which the spoonful of spicy red hot soup comes out. The video then ends here where it had begun, with the served end product. As the video terminates, it refers the viewer to another “Recipe 30” hit recipe “leek and potato frittata”.

The experience of the numerous enmeshed media co-working to illustrate a culinary recipe that Facebook allows to be shared like this one, has revolutionised former forms of written and televised cooking that our culture has hitherto known. It has by-passed the medium of writing that forms the content of cookbooks illustrated with professionally shot photos (the kind Nigella Lawson’s page digitally mimics) or the recipes in women magazines in earlier decades. And also substantially differs from cooking television programs, that are still aired, but are today watched in parallel with these newer forms of communicating recipes on Facebook pages rightly called recipe-generators and which have very high viewer ratings.

Facebook, as medium, has relegated old-school culinary forms to the cultural background and into the forgotten slots of our memories (books, scraps of magazine torn recipes, personal cooking notebooks with human handwriting, etc) and positioned newer forms at the centre of daily life as will be discussed in the next chapter on the new configurations of time. The digital videos, easily and enjoyably accessible in relation to real-life occasions, or just as now popular virtual pastimes, incarnate the essence of the times’ new forms and new dialectics, articulating speed, condensing real

time, de-activating the existence of space, translating desire into digital reality, beautifying the banal, experiencing vicarious pleasures, visual and sensuous, and lastly, creating interactive platforms for exchanging ideas and tips, activities that also fuel the humane side of living conquering distance and solitude.

The third example is a “Tastemade UK” video of four recipes compacted in one: stir fried beef, courgette pappardelle, chicken quinoa salad and chicken and coriander. The video opens with a divided screen where the four meals are shown in their final apparel in four different playing images. The words on the screen say: “4 Easy Make Ahead Meals”. This form of quadrupled screen is among today’s trendiest genres designing Facebook culinary information sought by millions of followers.

The first recipe is filmed vertically over an electric heater and a pan being filled with the ingredients one after the other in their cooking order. Each time the element added is named in the middle of the top part of the screen in thick white font. The wooden table plus heater plus pan, all three form a dark brownish background to the vividly coloured meaty and exotic ingredients that are being presented in culinary crescendo. The consecutive images on the video mimic food posters with big written words.

The music on the video is an energetic jazzy beat that accompanies the quick rhythm of happy cooking either for the platform viewer or for the person who watches this while doing the same preparation in his/her kitchen anywhere in the world. Facebook allows one to view the recipe in still consecutive images on the “play” touch line at the bottom of the screen. Wherever one stops from touching the line, the still shot appears on the main screen like a high resolution photograph of a specific instance of the larger filmed process.

The second recipe in the four-episode video is filmed in the same way as the former recipe except for a brighter background table where the list of consecutive ingredients is written in black capital letters. The final serving is a bright green and red sauce portion decorated with sprinkled basil leaves.

The third recipe is the most elaborate dish of the four recipes. Only the chicken is shown cooking followed by the baked cinnamon pumpkin cubes, then the ingredients are added one after the other in the colourful seasoned salad bowl. Then comes the fourth recipe followed by the end part of the video which reviews all four final dishes beginning with the last one then returns to the first, followed by the second and lastly the third.

This four-in-one culinary configuration exemplifies the creative potential of the digital medium where cybernetic ‘bits’ create a form expressing the new media literacy of simultaneity McLuhan had prognosticated. Content, in its diversity and multi-lateral significations, is itself generator of this type of innovative form characterised by a fragmented and ultra-compacted digital pseudo-linearity. In more accurate words, a linearity of quanta, a thread of bits where disparity and multiplicity can be channelled into digital oneness and congruity only the digital medium is capable of producing, and where speed is a deliriously organising factor of the entire digitised design.

The fourth selected video is Nadia’s amateur video of a Palestinian recipe of renown in the Middle East: “Chicken Musakkhan”. In it, she addresses her audience spontaneously in English, sometimes using the original Arabic word to describe a culinary act (“fatfet” when piecing the chicken meat) or an ingredient (sumac). She shows her cooking steps in the family kitchen as it is in real life. The portable camera allowed the creation of such real-life visual content and tutorials that do not use any forms of writing and reading as in the previous examples referred to here where ingredients are named in digital writing on the playing video. Sometimes a typed word or some English translation appear on screen without specific reference to any cooking step in Nadia’s video.

The content of this video is peculiar because of the cultural message intended by Nadia in reference to her Palestinian culture which is only symbolised by the nutritious typical dish demonstrated by herself aided with a Palestinian expert-teacher speaking in her local Jericho accent. The adjective Palestinian is not mentioned at all throughout the demonstration. The video form and content is casual and life-like similar to our private

cooking spaces with its crowded tables and greasy pans as Nadia’s chicken is cooking on the stove.

Her performance is passionate as she explains every step and refers to the local key-ingredient around which the whole dish is constructed: fresh red sumac. The kitchen sounds, noise from cooking utensils, come to the foreground as the recipe builds up and transmit a warm, homely, Middle-Eastern feel. Nadia dances in the kitchen and is shown wearing only socks as she enjoys her learning-cooking-tutorial experience and shares it with her viewers.

Overall, it becomes clear from the previous examples how Facebook as a complex multi-media platform accommodates the contemporary digital diversity of form and content. Its networked design and ultra-digital openness allow for so much coexistence of forms and genres which find a limitless space for expression and diffusion. It is certainly the new realm, as are all contemporary social media, where cultural trends are being engineered and where prod-user made cultural signifieds navigate freely, not in search of particular signifiers, but rather to prove the potential of post-modern endeavours for new alignments of meaning and for innovative epistemic mergers materialising in digi-cultural prod-usage creations.

2- The content of a medium is another medium

McLuhan’s theoretic formula is nowhere more apparent than on Facebook. His technological analysis of media, today, takes the form of imbricated material media where content is implicitly encrusted and released in relation to complex networkings of media and meaning. Nigella Lawson’s post consists of a “recipe of the day”, a link to the needed ingredients and procedure for preparing the soup, an opening statement (often incomplete followed by “see more...”), and, lastly, a colourful image of the edible concoction. Below the image the usual “like”, “comment” and “share” touch buttons are found. This particular post has 40 shares, 732 likes and 38 comments. The latter contain appraisals of the soup, invitation for friends, family or partners to try the dish. One post comments with a

smiley face and some of the comments are liked by those they are addressed to.

Besides the usual material medium-inside-media which makes up Facebook's general architecture, Nigella's page, as referred to earlier, juxtaposes reading with seeing. The page is a vertically sliding book with text and colourful images together with Facebook's made-easy interactive activities effectuated with simple digital clicks on lit surfaces. It is not possible to determine the amount of media organising the whole digital process. What can be stated is the complex networked whirlpool this entire process is, that ends on the side of the prod-user with his/her posted image of his/her cooked version of the original dish, or expression of admiration or disgust with a happy or sad emoji, or just words.

Camera-filming cooking steps, televisual form and content, written notes on the playing picture, zoom in, zoom out on color, raw and cooked textures rendered sensuously attractive to eyes and tastebuds beautifully enhance the desired message. All that plus the affordances of Facebook allowing one to share the recipe on a friend's page, to copy it on one's page, to 'archive' it on one's Messenger or via the "save" button (the almost unnoticed three dots on the upper right hand-side of any post), to tag someone for it, to comment on it and read other people's comments.

Platform users-friends' comments vary from the cooking-related idea to the most unexpected thoughts to do with issues like class (critiquing the high cost of a certain ingredient or recipe), politics (posting one's political opinion randomly in the midst of culinary comments or defending a certain cause especially animal rights ones that are most common when recipes contain animal meat), culture (specifying the nuanced differences in ways of preparing the same dish from one culture to another) or parenting (referring to the food preferences of one's children). Comments also contain critique, jokes and corrections if they find errors or think certain food combinations are unsuitable.

As to the numerous technological easy usages of the multi-media, today normalised, but of the realm of science-fiction in the not- too-distant past: one can move the playing screen to the lower right hand-side of the

larger phone screen to scroll over one’s Facebook feed as the recipe plays. The smaller screen inside the main portable one physically reproduces McLuhan’s notion of the content of a medium being another medium. As you are watching the video, you can always rewind backwards by touching the dot that is moving rightwards on the “play” line at the bottom of the screen. When you press that dot a mini screen appears above the line showing every instant of the video in consecutive still images, either backwards or forwards. If the video is halted, the dot takes you back and forth to still images of the recipe.

Culinary pages, like many other examples of Facebook common interest pages, represent McLuhan’s notion of the content of a medium being another medium but at a much vaster scale where the content of media is more media. In today’s digital broadcast technology, and especially social media, this has taken the form of imbricated media structuring a digital design that combines miscellaneous media of communication where the visual teaching and learning processes can be easily configured and shared with the delimiting line between them blurred in the all-at-oneness McLuhan heralded in his writings.

In the comments on recipes, for example, active participants sometimes post their own cooked version of the dish in the form of a picture they post for others to see besides writing or posting animated gifs or emojis. When a recipe ends like the “Recipe 30” tomato soup a reference to another recipe appears on the screen in the thread of recipes the page automatically generates. It is, overall, a universe of interconnected material media (television, photography, animation, etc.) with textual and visual human means of transmitting meaning and performing real acts in cyberspace with digital multi-tasking tools.

The “Tastemade UK” form of fast-paced televisual culinary recipes are *en vogue* on social media together with the idea of combining sets of recipes in one single video. The same can be found in DIY videos and home arrangement ideas where the screen would be divided into four or six smaller screens playing several different preparations at once. This example

is a concrete example of McLuhan's envisioning of a medium's content being another medium. Modern-day multiplication of data, images and information by advanced technologies is taking the form of a multiplicity of media whose content is more media, allowing for more time-space compression which can stack more images and knowledge in digitally compressed/ing spaces.

Media inside endless media, a quick recipe, inside a video containing three other quick culinary preparations filmed in speeded form, is posted on a page full of other culinary videos generating many per day. All exist on a networked platform where many media interact at the hands of users performing endless acts of sharing, reacting, searching for a recipe to cook in real life then returning to the platform to comment on the recipe that has generated a large number of views, posts, likes, photos and gifs from producers who navigate inside and outside their private networks of friends due to the work of algorithms and sharing common interest pages. Facebook is a gigantic magical machine of harmoniously proliferating and co-working media, the outcome of a very advanced diffusion and communication high-tech science.

Nadia's video differs from previous ones in terms of the amount of medium-within-medium format. Her delivery of her preparation in person within a real-life setting is slower in pace in comparison to the advanced technology of the previous examples. But on the technical level, it is made of layered media: material media as in Facebook's affordances represented by its digital format that allows so much to be transmitted, viewed, shared, liked, commented upon, etc. Nadia adds speech, performance and cooking real ingredients that build up a final content for consumption, digitally and literally, in the edible end-product.

Facebook is, in short, imbricated media whose content is structured of medium-inside-medium and where medium and message fuse indistinguishably in cyberspace forming one whole. Facebook is the book of everything whose millennial *raison d'être* is none but the McLuhanesque medium, the digital tool *per se*, whose epistemic forms reproduce how we

are shaping our world, and the contours of our post-historical minds as Flusser foresaw.

3- Visuality: the image is the message

The digital visuality the medium has been able to articulate by being a portable television playing colourful short videos according to personal selection is a true revolution in media and in cooking as far as the current study is concerned. Nigella Lawson’s example differs from the other examples studied here in terms of their televisual representations. Her page, as aforementioned, has recourse to photography in the classical sense. Each post is composed of a title, an opening sentence and a still image. Her transferal of her taste for culinary literature onto Facebook, as well as the homely spirit of her televised series without posting tutorial videos, translates so effectively in the photography she posts. Hers are images of home-made dishes or servings presented on what always seems to be the casual kitchen table, in the domestic pots, pans or family porcelain.

The spinach-coconut soup bowls, in this example, are clearer on the bottom part of the photo and hazier on the top part that represents the background. The brick red colour of the table match the chopped chilli “confetti” and serving bowls although one friend’s comment critiques them as “feeding dishes for gerbils”. Nigella’s containers are usually vintage pieces. Her page ‘reads’ like a photo album unlike the examples of the other posts that use mainly video and audio to visually bring to life their succulent recipes. Nigella’s linguistic selectiveness and loyal semantic accurateness about matters of the cookery world are a characteristic of her posts and are central protagonists besides the still images that make up her page.

In McLuhan, electrical times, with their new epistemic forms, would move away from the linear culture of writing and return to the orality that had preceded the Gutenberg galaxy using alternative forms suiting the new times. In Flusser, culture would return to what he terms “magic” or pre-linear visualness in computerised images. Both are views that are fully applicable to Facebook where what we do is exchange a digital orality in the form of images and digital typing on keyboards, itself a form of typographic

visuality on private portable lit screens. But besides typed speech, we mostly interchange short videos, emojis, pictures and selfies, tags, links, gifs; all are modern forms of accentuated visualness allowed by smart portable machines of communication and Facebook's wide variety of touch features.

"Recipe 30" tomato soup video, like most contemporary digital cooking tutorials, focuses closely on the luscious red tomatoes in terms of texture, colour and form, when raw and when cooked. The video also stresses the green of the background basil leaves and the thyme addition to the roasted red vegetable. The camera lens zooms all along on the recipe's ingredients accentuating, on the margins of the learning experience, their visual lusciousness which in turn invites viewers' appetite and desire to try the soup.

The camera closely concentrates, throughout the video, on the objects, and the ingredients it is formulating into a whole flavoured dish. The video, in its entirety, is a colourful culinary portable visual piece that renders cuisine much more than cooking and dining, but a new digital culinary art form instead, tailoring a whole new visual culture of a formerly private realm that gradually came out of its secrecy with the consecutive means of diffusion. This genre assembles ingredients in mouth-watering culinary formulae analogous to Facebook's own ability to digitally piece fragments together in innovative visual and epistemic structures that are innovating culture.

The "Tastemade UK" video is very symbolic of the trending digital visuality that is changing form and content of tutorial culinary videos. It revolves around a speeded visuality unlike the former example. The filming and lighting inside the first picture create a dim frame around the bright colours of ingredients that are thus well accentuated in terms of their luscious texture and the fast-forwarded made-easy act of constructing the final dish.

In the second recipe of the video, the focus is on the shape and color of the ingredients' form such as the sliced raw courgettes where the white inside is delineated with sharp green outer skin upon which the cooked red

sauce comes to settle. It is the viewer's eyes that are targeted first and foremost with this type of visual games, flirting thus with the viewer's desire to savour such tastes and inviting viewers to recreate similar concoctions.

The visual construction of such videos seems to have become addictive among many viewers who only cherish the voyeuristic act of the compressed food mixing speeded crescendo and not its translation into real edible material. This genre of visual 'feed' is becoming a favourite part of the Facebook content consumption of users. The visual speed of virtual cooking experienced in them is digitally delirious, a modern-day technological sensation concomitant with our accelerated rhythm of multi-tasking and pleasure-seeking living where our eyes can literally 'eat' and are becoming addicted to this visual saturation with food cinema.

Unlike the former videos, Nadia's post is an amateur video. It does not include colourful ingredients nor camera zooming on luscious textures. It is rather minimalist in terms of colour and camera visual accentuation of cooking content. The camera zooms on the boiling chicken and the rolled Syrian bread coated with olive oil yet their sight is one of home cooking which makes their appeal very life-like away from glamour and cinematic maximised special effects.

The video is mainly centred around the protagonist, Nadia, whose performance and passionate explanation shapes the core content of the video. She stresses the piecing of the chicken and the sumac addition and tradition visually, by using her fingers and showing the tactile act on camera. She also dances as the food is cooking. The Middle-Eastern spirit in the video is not of a cliched type (like containing Arabic music or Eastern style decoration), but is mainly revealed through the minute details structuring the content and the successful finalising of the dish, and foregrounding the cultural connotations it subtly insinuates in unnamed visual details. In spite of the elaborate recipe and the Arabic language that situates the dish in a certain part of the world, the setting is of a normal

kitchen with normal people in it, blending, with life-like ease and spontaneity, the culturally specific with the universal.

4- Prod-usage: (us) feeding the medium, Facebook feeds (us)

Vilém Flusser foresaw times when a human-machine symbiotic relationship would be strengthened and where images would occupy a place of paramount importance in terms of their epistemic signification for culture (1983, 80). These times define our Facebook and social media era whose characteristics comply with Flusser's forecasting conjecture. This analysis of a selection of Facebook culinary forms attunes with Flusser's analogy of "feeding apparatuses and being fed by them" (1983, 80). Food and images become similar in the way they form the substance we thrive on and daily reproduce in miscellaneous forms. Facebook calls its endlessly generated posts "feeds" which feed us in the virtual with a deluge of images and meanings.

Nigella Lawson's post studied here, as is the case with culinary posts in general, contain most of their prod-usage in the friends' comments who react fervently on these culinary agoras. They express appraisal as well as critique of Nigella's posted pictures and pose questions concerning the replacement of an ingredient or its exchange if it is performed in another part of the world. The medium through which all this is viewed also allows the tagging of friends and family to prepare the dish as the sender makes his/her way home, events that have become normalised by new media and are creating new areas of cultural exchange and creativity. If one mentally thought of food while driving home in the past, today, one can select a 'freshly' posted very attractive meal from one's Facebook feed and vicariously enjoy it before actually eating it.

Facebook, logistically and technologically, allowed former consumers to become real producers. This aspect of it concretises in one of the realities that shapes our world and it is its pronounced cultural diversity. The globalised/ing medium allows users to effect tangible cultural exchange in their prod-usage by sharing the cultural specificities of their local culinary

cultures with other virtual users belonging to other places and traditions. They, for example, substitute, eliminate or add a geo-culturally specific ingredient to a recipe, or share their cultural tips that were well-hidden secrets before social media, when distant geographies existed. They even correct famous culinary gurus when they perform a recipe that belongs to their (users’) culinary territory.

An edited television-like episode using multi-media, viewed on users’ cellular phones or computer screens, posted for the world to see and comment on, has changed the meanings of place, time, the act of cooking itself and modes of sharing and connecting. It has rejuvenated the whole idea of form and content fusing them through new media and creating totally new approaches to cooking, that is still a multi-dimensional process in real life, rendered digitally simpler, more sensuous and where participation of distant others is possible through the same media that allow a post to spread.

The “Tastemade UK” video exemplifies prod-usage at its best in the way it is conceptualised, filmed and in its usage of the medium’s capacities for broadcasting and for social interaction in new ways. The consecutive ingredients are poured in pans and result instantly in four appetising end-products. Facebook is daily ‘fed’ with hundreds of these prod-used recipes, and so are we, as viewers, in our non-ending Facebook ‘feeds’ in the most exciting ways of interaction between human and machine ever witnessed. A technology that made real producers out of us if we create a post or if we comment on a post, let alone cooking a recipe and eating it by prod-using it in real life as a de-virtualised product (returned to real life after the virtual detour of prod-usage). The process has allowed prod-user vision of things to materialise and to be seen in forms prod-users design to articulate “what’s on [their] mind”, the first thing Facebook asks when one opens one’s feed.

The fourth post is Nadia’s amateur video posted on YouTube and the performer’s grandmother shared it on her Facebook page. It is the mobile camera medium, first and foremost, that has allowed lay filming and posting of such private activities made public on the social platform. The medium’s

easy-to-use features allow so much to be composed and posted in the form of a concise film reproducing a real-life experience. The human desire to represent and share one's culture in the form of a culinary recipe is made possible via multi-media's easy clicks. Nadia performs in person throughout her video unlike the former examples where all we see are anonymous hands.

This last example serves as a digital form that new media has allowed for normal citizen life to be projected on modern broadcast media or social media with self-manipulated mobile apparatuses, that are prod-used to re-create our daily life, as will be further elaborated upon in this thesis' following chapter on the emerging configurations of time in the digital world.

5- Meta-coding other texts

The consecutive examples studied here epitomise the new digital forms and the consequent content that emanates from them concerning the culinary universe. The latter has gradually, with the different stages of development in the broadcast industry, moved from the personal sphere of the private kitchen to the more open public sphere of television and now unto social media and cyberspace. The work of cooking can also be said to have crossed the different cultural stages from the oral to the textual to the visual to the ultra visual as we are witnessing today with the new social media forms where new media prod-usage is redesigning food and its significations for culture.

Vilém Flusser had postulated technic images' reverting us to other texts of culture to imprint meaning on them. Facebook is one among many cultural artefacts that have resulted from and currently express the techno-post-modern culture beyond it. It is a reservoir where all that we know and still create is being displayed. Food and cookery have come to occupy a significant part of our cultural interests on Facebook, in a world preoccupied with taste and where technology is pushing this realm of desire into new frontiers and melting down distance between desire and objects.

Nigella Lawson’s example reproduces the quasi-linearity of books in the digital age. Her posts are structured around words, food for thought, and the delights of culinary semantics and warm issues related to kitchen’s meticulous work, a tradition appealing to older generations when compared with the other three posts analysed here. The practical part of culinary activity Nigella’s page avoids is known to her followers on television. On Facebook, she uses words and images to reveal a sense of exquisiteness and homeliness similar to the one in books and in traditional home and cookery magazines.

“Recipe 30” video is an example of the turn from the linear to the purely visual form that today articulates culinary culture on social media and in whom the whole of post-modern culture reverberates in terms of its eclectic tastes, sensuous style and non-linear forms; all united in what has surpassed television culture. The new digital globalised/ing culture addresses a connoisseur viewer, and digital prod-user, surrounded by culinary knowledge from different other sources, all equally competing for beauty, sophistication and image-like perfection, not different from those of the world of art, fashion, popular culture and cinema, but, rather, strongly impregnated by them and intertwined with their culturally porous signifiers spilling smoothly from one domain into the other. Today, cultural porousness and the imprint of one culture on another is nowhere more apparent than in the digital world.

The third video in particular epitomises our contemporary digital culture in the new form it reproduces on our Facebook feeds. Since pictures changed from still to moving pictures, our feeds became small, vertical, fast moving television screens, that translate so much about our fast-forwarded/ing culture. The speedy act of putting together the raw and the cooked is compensated for with the post-modern cultural stress on the attractiveness of cuisine as one of the contemporary realms of taste and style, today of utmost popularity among Facebook visitors and users. Quadrupled screens or six compartment screens are a symbol of a digitally ultra-active culture, challenging time’s limits and compressing it to fit in the ever-flooding content, the work of millions of networked prod-users.

Nadia's video introduces us very subtly to her Palestinian culture without overtly stating it. The medium and form of her content is today globalised, and any culinary specificity from any corner of the world can be seen on Facebook and reproduced in any other remote corner of the globe. The culinary universe, in the age of social media, is borderless, and the openness to new recipes and exotic tastes of other places is almost becoming a digital need in a world seeking novelty and stressing originality, glamorous fusions and glocality above all; and digitally creating the forms that accommodate these cultural demands and digital culinary explorations.

Nadia's video signifies beyond the simple act of cooking. It familiarises viewers with Palestinian culture away from any meta-narrative on Palestine, through its particular Levantine spice sumac and very localised family cooking traditions. Through prod-usage, Facebook is weaving the personal and local re-appropriation of the culturally specific and authentic into a wider and larger scale digital tapestry of mosaic-like human experiences that formulate the new glocal (global-local) sense trending today and the ultra-diverse material Facebook creatively recycles and airs.

Nadia's kitchen is not an Eastern-looking space nor her background music is Eastern. The subtle allusions appear in references to "Egyptian loumi" (dried lime), "Syrian bread", "Sumac" available in "an Arabic grocery store" or "an Indian spice store", and the use of some Arabic terms that are familiar to an Arabic audience. The rest resembles anybody, anywhere in the world and on Facebook. Nadia's cultural message layers the local (Palestinian) with the regional (Egyptian and Syrian) with the global (Facebook) coding thus the glocal in its virtual outcome and which ultimately shapes Facebook's many-layered text.

Nadia's age together with her reference to a family tradition of cooking this typical Palestinian dish combine many untold cultural issues, all diluted into a significant modern fusion video. It is this cultural text that Nadia's video encodes. Towards the middle of the video, she dances in the kitchen as the spicy ingredients cook in hot pots, and it is not the dabke dance as would be expected, just some expression of genuine human enjoyment. A few seconds are dedicated to the Palestinian teacher who is

attending Nadia and whose Arabic is heard in a very local Palestinian accent without ever showing her face.

6- The media are the message

The malleability of the medium of Facebook epitomises itself with its ability to accommodate many media and genres of writing and visual material. Nigella Lawson’s dependence on words and still images reveals Facebook to be not solely a visual medium. Writing finds its place equally in it and creates content of a stimulating kind in times of suffusing visuality. Nigella’s artistry at fitting words to culinary acts is well known and is achieved without any videos on her Facebook page.

Medium and content in the “Recipe 30” example form one structure where the latter has been re-designed by the former’s reconfiguration of reality, and given utterly new dimensions, meanings and scale of reach and exchange. The amount of media structuring the whole process of creating and posting a culinary recipe is innumerable: from image to writing to sound to a made-easy time-specific screening of a much larger and messier process in the physical kitchen, to the sharing on common pages where people instantly react and post from wherever they are; in their car tagging their partner for dinner or in a remote country in another time zone cooking the dish and using Facebook at once. McLuhan was truly visionary in forecasting the role of media in our lives, and how this latter would reframe meaning fusing both the form and the content in new ways on the material level, and in authentic creative acts at prod-usage level.

“Tastemade UK” video’s digital form is indeed its message. It is one of digital time-space-image compression so emblematic of our era. It configures the way we design our new world where media occupy the precedence carrying multiple information diffused in speed. “The rules that once sorted the universe into processes, concepts into judgements, are dissolving. The universe is disintegrating into quanta, judgements into bits of information [...] linearity is decaying spontaneously” (Flusser, 1985, 15). This video presents its four recipes in “quanta” and dissolves linearity, a

feature of our high-tech times, the form of the video is able to mimic and to reproduce.

It is the medium, whose easy-to-use features allow so much to be composed and posted in the form of a concise film like Nadia's video; together with the content of the recipe it projects, both, create a real-life experience. Youth like Nadia don't seem to deal with digital cameras as extensions of the self, but rather as an indivisible part of the self, and, mainly, as a technology of the self in the Foucauldian sense. They manipulate it, speak and move before it in utter spontaneity and ease, to send instant messages to stream down the digital deluge flowing on our feeds.

Form and content of memes

The word "meme" was coined by Richard Dawkins in 1979 in his book *The Selfish Gene*. In it, he was researching what makes species and families. He spoke of memes, who unlike genes, constitute what makes human beings what they are. If genes are DNA structures that define some of our traits, memes are carriers of culture and they too constitute a large part of our behaviour. The word then travelled to cyber-culture to become "internet meme" defined as "a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" (Davison, 122).

In Dawkins, meme described any cultural idea or behaviour as in fashion, language, religion, sports. Today, it is a trending word applied to internet photos accompanied with a sentence, a joke, a thought, sometimes even absurdist words. They are characterised by their "speed of transmission and the fidelity of their form" (Davison, 122). They are hybrid structures of cyberspace, fast-spreading and mutable.

In Foucault's essay on Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1983), some aspects of his analysis of what a calligram is, inform this research on memes. Foucault wrote: "the calligram aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilisation: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look

and to read” (21). Memes too disrupt and disturb everyday flowing meanings. They often produce an effect similar to Magritte’s visual critique of language. They are prod-used pieces repositioning meaning in new mental realms where textual and visual signifiers and signifieds can accidentally coincide, or only obliquely reflect one another, to create alternative significations. W.J.T. Mitchell saw Foucault’s meditation on Magritte’s pipe operating as “an exercise in unlearning” (Mitchell, 66-7); a functional concept as far as meme prod-usage is concerned and which will illuminate the following study.

The following analysis scrutinises six memes in terms of the relation meme form has to its content, and vice versa, being the formulation of consciousness into pieces of thought in the like of how information is structured and ephemerally travels in the congested self-renewable knowledge space.

1- Uni-form-ity and diversity of content

العيار دلو قتي بقت بتشيل اي باد واندرويد



احنا لما كنا صغيرين كان نفسنا نعرف

المتعبه دخلت جوه التليفزيون ازاى

The first meme contains the now famous Assahbi character created in Egypt in 2012 according to Wikipedia. The internet is full of memes with this figure to which any sentence can be added on any topic whatsoever be it a social critique, a political joke or any absurdist human matter especially relevant and significant in its cultural habitat: the Middle East and North Africa in this particular case.

Assahbi appears in memes with statements that are pungently critical or extremely funny never without the sarcastic tinge. The form of the meme in this case is stable and unchanging except for the place where the face is posted inside the rectangular form. It is the content that varies infinitely to address any subject whatsoever overturning the concept of form as content shaper into content as central axis of meaning in a uniform image. This particular meme says: “Kids now carry iPads and Android gadgets. When

we were young, we only wished to find out how the television presenter had made her way inside the television set”.

The second example of memes is a picture of a girl in tired housewife outfit, holding a big coffee mug in her hands and sitting on the kitchen floor. A friendly dog licks her cheek and a broom appears behind them. The meme says: “Behind every successful woman is a substantial amount of coffee, and a good dog”, travestyng the popular sexist saying: “behind every great man is a woman”.



The third example is from memes circulated on youth pages. The latter are characterised by considerable ingenuity and offer radically new



content and digital meaning-making born from millennial reality and epistemologically addressing it. This meme discloses an explicit content: the epic medium or smart phone’s revolutionary presence in our lives, with camera set on a selfie stick, an additional, literal extension of both the body and the medium combined.

The words of the meme refer to a student’s creativeness induced by boredom in the classroom. The image is of an unattractive printed school book page with a real-life image of a certain human figure on the side. The bored student replicates the figure in drawing in larger size on the other side of the picture superimposing it on the printed lines. The original black and white figure on the book page is drawn in larger size in blue pen holding a selfie stick, and through these latter media (both the stick and the camera) the original photo becomes the new figure’s selfie on the digital screen.

This meme differs from the former two that are much more common on Facebook, either reproducing the same image over different words or combining visual with a content-rich statement that reflects this visual. Here it is a real classroom production made into a meme. Its form and content are, literally and metaphorically, layered, evoking thought-provoking depth concerning the power of images to address a cultural message like this one about the story of an omnipresent medium in our lives.

The fourth and fifth examples are from girls’ meme pages that are also popular on Instagram and contain endless visuals of this type. They have as their main theme: girls menstrual periods and girls’ rebellious vision of them. The photos on the memes are photoshopped explicitly identifying periods in bright red colour, and, like all youth creations, they bluntly address silenced taboo issues with effortless and carefree pungency.



The second meme with two images says: “when you’re on your period and you sneeze or cough”. This type of sentence is common on many memes and refers to an uncomfortable private feeling that female readers are acquainted with. The second image comes to support the words humorously and very ironically. The signification is digitally achieved with only a difference of colour.



Unlike former examples, this sixth meme contains a picture in motion instead of a still-shot. The sentence heading it is again a student problem. It says: “when education has successfully destroyed your soul but you’re still determined to enjoy yourself”. The digital screen shows a baby laying on her back very slowly and lazily going down a slide without any movement of her body as if paralysed. The audio heard on the one-picture video is of loud laughs only (called “lol” in today’s normalised social media jargon).



2- The content of a medium is another medium

The selfie meme was specifically chosen for its illustration of the McLuhanesque formula. The student amateur drawing reproduces the containment of media inside other media. It represents one medium evolving into another and becoming its content and substance, culminating

in a multi-layered epistemic structure stressing the visual above the linear, and the photographic above the typographic. The shady type-written lines are relegated to the background as an ageing medium and so is the black and white photo metamorphosed and resurrected as the selfie. These media, undergoing what could be interpreted as a Gadamerian hermeneutic circle in this illustration, end up as a meme, a contemporary short digital message that does not end inside its digital perimeter but signify beyond it into the culture it addresses.

3- The interplay of the visual and the lingual

In their pictorial and textual amalgam, memes create linguistic and visual traps, pursuing a more devious path towards new meaning-making intellectual activity. The prod-users interchange of images and words on memes ultimately proves that both discourse and visuals defeat closed meanings.

The Assahbi figure is a common-looking young male face whose features linger between a laugh and a cry. The visual effects of the face mix the humorous with the disturbing for the viewer. Today Assahbi is well-known and his caricature is a signifier to which any signified can be incorporated. He has become an established visual medium for any short-worded message.

As in all memes, the interchangeability of visual and text is one of memes' main characteristics. The second meme's words can be incorporated on any other telling picture as well as the girl's kitchen picture can be coupled with completely different words.

This meme is a photoshopped picture with the elements that the words literally state, a dog and coffee, to caricature the popular saying and dismantle its initial semantic structure. In the meantime, this meme was taken from a Facebook page called "Animals are people too". The meme then clearly states an additional meaning: dog loyalty and love, by rewriting the currently controversial and memetically revised statement.

The third meme is visually powerful despite its drab colours. The student class scribble contains the multi-layered message, more than the words on the meme express, and which address only youth. The drawn picture re-envisioning a reality where the medium is, par excellence, the message, literally and metaphorically, in our digital times, by drawing in pen over drab typing and ingeniously turning the black and white book picture into the image (the selfie) of another image (the drawn larger copy in blue pen).

The fourth and fifth girls’ memes usually contrast pristine white with suffusing blood red and include caustic commentary. Their visual content is peculiarly explicit on formerly taboo subjects and overpowers the words inscribed on them. The second meme produces a story in two parts where colour is the element of difference generating the desired message supported with overtly stated words.

The sliding baby meme is similar to the second example studied here where image and words can be altered and replaced by others according to the situation at hand. The visual here expresses the dichotomous feeling of successful education coupled with incessant fatigue and stressful toiling, the fate of young people in the competitive modern world. The statue-like sliding child frozen in one lagging position caricatures the feeling of one’s post-education “destroyed soul” and the adamance to continue enjoying life.

4- Prod-usage

The medium’s creative affordances allow the creation and digital exchange of memes. Memetics had already begun in the very early stages of cyber-culture for the ease with which this compressed visual form allowed information to travel. Facebook today also allows memes to go viral inside groups, networks of friends and across cultures. The combination of a cartoonish picture like Assahbi with a humorous statement that could be a casual thought on someone’s mind, once posted, instantly spreads. The medium’s instantaneous delivery of meaning and the compact cultural form

and content of a meme has turned it into one of modern culture's most attractive and widespread digital forms.

This type of photo-mediated content is a digital design that is a perfect example of prod-usage where miscellaneous media intersect creatively to evoke a form of visual orality that, in spite of its seeming simplicity, contains meaning characterised by wit, truth, humour, existential depth. The banal thought once formulated as a media piece of this type and posted becomes meaningful, and in the act of re-posting and liking it, it acquires further user approval and establishment as a worthy human idea of everyday living. It is born instantly, is short-lived then dies out in the flood of endlessly flowing digital output as new memes are prod-used, spread and die out in the daily turnout of virtual material.

Humorous memes like the "Behind every successful woman" meme are innumerable on social media and have whole pages dedicated to their production and propagation. It is used here to illustrate how endless creativity in digital form and content is made possible in computer images. These memes are shared widely with a powerful medium like Facebook and the complex process of prod-usage it has set in motion where innovative visual and textual structures weave new semantic formulae.

The selfie meme is a meaningful example of prod-usage outside the digital world (the original student scribble) and inside it (the drawing turned meme). The whole piece is on the re-invention of meaning, structurally and epistemically, via technological innovations. It is also naively evoking the modern symbiotic relation of man with machine.

The girls' memes exemplify new meaning circulated on Facebook exclusively related to prod-users' breaching taboos. This theme in particular is the content of endless memetic creativity chosen here as a rich example of prod-usage circulating among teen girls. The prod-users of these memes are themselves their consumers for the issue's intimate interest to girls only.

The sixth meme selected here is of a form that has recently made its way into Facebook within the medium's constant innovation in the forms it

transmits to carry the meaning-making messages of prod-usage. The incorporation of motion picture in memes is a novelty. It has introduced further evolution on the visual meaning-compressing memetic structure that can now incorporate a mini-televised picture in place of a snapshot above or beneath a statement.

The medium's affordances are constantly allowing for innovations that help design new content and refuel Facebook with more memetic creativity. The picture on a meme can be removed and replaced with another to suit the words or vice versa. The picture may inspire another user to frame it with other words in a completely different context than the woes of education in this last example.

5- Uncoding earlier texts and weaving new ones

Memes are prod-used telegraphic text(ing)s principally characterised by their scathing sarcasm. They are compact cultural texts that rework culturally normalised notions. Their visual and textual conniving and duplicity releases an energetic flow of new meanings that span the range of the whole of daily culture. The textual part in memes like Assahbi ones contain the whole message, since image remains uniform while only texts change.

The non-alignment of visual with message, in other memes, unlocks hidden meanings about whatever theme a meme is treating. In this latter type, image and text present a disjunct structure, a message powerfully surges out of this visual-textual breach. A third type presents continuity and similitude between image and words which reinforces the intended message in more straightforward ways.

The Assahbi meme selected here refers to the difference between generations and age groups in relation to technology: digital natives differ from other generations who preceded them like Baby Boomers and Generation X (born between 1965 and 1976). The meme tells a pungently sad story of the large gap between those who, today, effortlessly handle smart technologies, and those who don't, because they belong to a time

where the television image was incomprehensible as to how it was formed and transmitted.

The meme epistemologically punctures a cultural reality today cynically revisited with the changes new media are effectuating in our lives. Memes are themselves, as new structures of thought, tangible examples of change in the forms and contents we consume.

The visual form and textual content complement one another in the second example, with a touch of humour in the girl in woman's clothes and head towel; unlike the former example where the same face appears on all Assahbi memes whatever the accompanying words are. The picture expresses comic visual complicity with its content.

The words contain strong critique of the original old-fashioned saying and create a conceptual catharsis by deleting the presence of a man behind the successful woman and completely disregarding any overturning of roles. The meme speaks of a post-modern liberated woman who only cherishes her coffee and her loyal dog. The meme also belongs to a popular Facebook theme, that of animal love.

The selfie meme is weaving a new text by superposing it on the elements of the past: the typographic, Cartesian world both McLuhan and Flusser refer to. The visual medium (hand-drawn) that represents another visual medium (smart technology) are both the content of a meme circulated on social media. These medium-inside-medium, networked in a complex techno-cultural structure, bring to the fore the medium as message, and the message as image, in our techno-visual contemporary culture.

This meme visualises a narrative, the main protagonist being the portable camera and smart phone. Through this revolutionary medium, the world is recast. Memes too, among many other digital forms, are recasting the world on Facebook. They are structures that reformulate digested meanings. They transfigure what was thought established notions blurring their linearity like the very technology that allowed them to be prod-used.

Girls' memes of the kind selected here exemplify the medium's openness both content-wise and in its digital creative features like

photoshopping that allow revealing approaches of what remained solely in the sphere of the private and intimate. Like the former examples of re-writing alternative stories, these red and white memes address silenced issues with utter explicitness and even a tinge of covert teenage anger. The first meme uses the direct signifier “period” as pun, in capital letters. The second uses the colour red to demonstrate a menstruating girl’s sneeze by simply juxtaposing a white figure with a red figure creating a visual effect in order to puncture the taboo topic.

The last meme’s message is a joke on education. It critiques the long-standing idea of education as career-enhancer and soul-lifter. It is here an education that has “successfully *destroyed* your soul”. The meme, both televisually and textually, effects a rupture from what is thought habitual and weaves an alternative story. Just after the word “successfully” creates the impression of what to expect when education and success pair the anti-climactic verb “destroyed” settles in.

The heading sentence creates an disturbingly humorous effect by mentioning destruction of the soul side by side with the human perseverance to still enjoy life despite hardship. A very common twenty-first century structure of feeling, in times of demanding educational effort and most of all the obsessive idea of success. Yet, in spite of this existential toiling after what might be illusive (both success and education), millennials (as well as pre-millennials) are adamant to stay happy, and one form to go around the woes of education, and work, and maybe even life as a whole, is to produce such memes and exchange them to register determined states of mind. It is in playing such roles that memes are carriers of meaning crystallising millennial prod-user anxieties.

6- The medium is the message

Memes, as widespread social media cultural form, exemplify McLuhan’s postulation in our digital age. Their capability for condensing a plethora of meanings in the form of a propitious visual coupled with minimalist wording describing a state of mind, a particular reality, an

everyday experience, etc., has fused the notions of form and content in a digital fluidity today engrained in daily life. Images and self-made television designed to express a certain desired prod-used meaning have intrinsically rendered form and message interchangeable, each symbiotically sapping its signification from the other's organic structure.

Figure three meme in this study literally illustrates McLuhan's dictum: "the medium is the message" in a genuine piece of prod-usage. It unpacks, in its multiple layers of signification, McLuhan's prophetic vision of technology in modern times. The medium, in the meme drawing (and in the bored student's imaginary), reverses the typed linearity of the book relegating it to the background and creates a pluri-dimensional figure where the older photo in black and white becomes, via the medium, a digital selfie on a portable screen.

Memetic structures also exemplify one form of the break away from what Vilém Flusser called "traditional" photography where signifier and signified corresponded (Flusser, 1985, 47). In post-history, he affirms, humans are "giv[ing] absurdity a meaning" in their projection of the world in the form of "photographs, films, videos, or computer images" (Flusser, 1985, 47) and we may add memes to this list. "The signified of a technical image [...] is something drawn from the inside toward the outside [...] Technical images must be decoded not from the signifier but from the signified [...] To decode a technical image is not to decode what it shows but to read how it is programmed" (Flusser, 1985, 48).

Flusser's theorising of technical images conceptually converges with McLuhan's vision of the medium being the ultimate message (Flusser, 1985, 49). Today's social media suffusion with images, what Flusser terms "projections", is, as he himself also put it, a defiance of common sense. Images are "projections that are programmed to make common sense appear mirror-like" (Flusser, 1985, 49). The medium's ascendance over its content, or its oneness with it, is the only meaning possible in a world where digital meanings generated from digital media have introduced new ways of deconstructing linearity; meanings that are infinitely multipliable with every prod-usage.

Form and content of photo-posing pictures

The form and content of personal and group photos posted on Facebook and other social media platforms differ from the examples of culinary posts and memes studied earlier. They are a revolutionary development in the realm of photography, in the way they have become a landmark of our digital culture and have become embedded in our everyday existence.

The portable smart phone camera allows so much to be done with it, from photographing oneself to photographing any happening or capturing any moment in time, with high resolution and autofocus, plus several easy-to-use editing applications once the picture is shot. It is then instantly posted for the world to see and like, in today’s culture of “visual connectedness” (Villi, 100). The ease and instantaneity with which photos can be shot and transmitted has led to their unprecedented multiplication in what has become a digital deluge of people’s endlessly streaming photographs.

In this new photographic genre, the medium, once again, overpowers the message as in McLuhan and Flusser, who predicted this multiplication of technic images in our era of endless reproduction, and considered the technological medium, performing such proliferation of images, the locus of cultural signification in our times. Events in themselves do not matter as much as it is filming them that counts hence the camera’s omnipotence in the hands of prod-users.

In short, portable digital cameras have tremendously changed the space they have penetrated as new technologies do when they enter our lives, especially what was formerly known as private space. They have also changed the body they are a literal extension of as will be further elaborated on in chapter three of this thesis.

1- Digital photo form and content

Photography as cultural form is today signifying in entirely different ways than it did in the past. The medium that is allowing it and the digital space of projection have completely altered former notions about photography and images connected to archiving and memory, and the rarefied domestic spaces they registered.

Today, people pose for pictures unburdened, since photographing is performed with a simple touch of the digital screen, bypassing former stages of fixing lighting, focusing and the time-consuming process of developing photos from negatives. Cameras, today, are certainly among those technologies that have incredibly advanced, and have become widely democratised, especially since their notorious combining with phones; a marriage much misunderstood and criticised when it first appeared.

In terms of its form, digital photography of people, like writing, has passed from tactile paper (what Flusser calls “concrete”, 1985, 21) to lit screens (“abstraction” in Flusser, 1985, 21) where transmission of pictures is done through keyboards and travels towards other users digitally to instantly reappear on their side of lit screens. The new form has entirely different cultural meanings when compared to traditional images, in times of speeded/ing machines, maximised high-definition visuality and the omnipresent, simultaneous, digital gaze of others. Digital screens also allow a novelty concerning form: the ability to magnify any human figure or object on the touch screen with two fingers performing the virtual act of widening or just double tapping the image on the screen.

The digital camera also allows what has become another of contemporary culture’s landmarks: the selfie picture, firmly entrenched in our modern lives. It is a revolution in the world of photography and especially self-portraiture. Cameras can change their direction as windows on the world, and turn towards their holders, like technological mirrors, allowing them to capture their self-image or auto-photo. They perform what mirrors did: objectify the self in cyberspace. The selfie is then posted on Facebook for the world to see, and is temporarily comparable to a comet in virtual skies: once posted it shines ephemerally, then disappears in the

virtual flow, down our Facebook feeds amongst other posted selfies. It is instantaneously auratic and mythical, yet short-lived content wise.

The content of personal photos and selfies will be the object of research of this thesis’ third chapter concerned with the body. Here it is the digital image form that interests us as a vehicle of cultural signification. The photos referred to here all contain people posing for a selfie or an informal photo shooting. It has become a common habit to find people accentuate their body posture and purposefully pose for the viral image whom they know they shoot for the gaze of others. These photos constitute the ever flowing social media content “made up of such little pieces, made up of quanta [...] an atomized, democratic universe, a jigsaw puzzle” (Flusser, 1983, 67), and we may add a book of faces.

2- The content of a medium is another medium

The act of photo-posing incorporates the self as medium within the complex nested media structuring Facebook formerly explained in the analysis of culinary posts and memes. One faces the camera, the image is shot, posted, then flows on sliding Facebook feeds. When seen, it is watched and can be enlarged with a double tap to examine its content in detail. Digital form and content are one indivisible structure. Media propel a form and a content inside one coherent assemblage diffusing meaning.

Digital photos are today highly pixelated (pixels are the content of media too) and can be easily edited and beautified in myriad ways in the interplay of multimedia features. The latter have completely altered the former significations of the form and content of personal photos and inaugurated new understandings that reveal how new technologies are designing us.

Photos are media located inside the mobile multi-media we manipulate. They travel instantly, ontologically narrate about the person or persons in them, capture lived instances, may be posted for leisure, contain selves and bodies as their main content, bespeak of the image culture they

are a product of, can be geared towards giving a desired message, transition the private sphere into public gaze erasing former secrecy about self.

3- Visuality / Visibility

Camera-phones, (literally) in the hands of people, has permitted each one to produce his/her own images of self or of others, and to its formulation as a piece of overt information travelling on Facebook feeds. “Since a human being stretched out his hand to confront the lifeworld, to make it pause, he has been trying to imprint information on his surroundings” (Flusser, 1985, 18). “People who press the keys of an apparatus to make it stop at an intentionally informative situation” (Flusser, 1985, 19). These are Flusser’s words on the traditional act of using a camera which he interpreted as a reaction against death, a desire for immortality. The same words apply to today’s new photographing reality in its much vaster scale of disseminating and broadcasting selves through self-production for self-affirming ends.

Contemporary portable cameras, like the cybernetic ideal, have aided in the progressive reversal of the social secrecy and alienation that obstructed conscious consumption as articulated by both Marcuse and Adorno in the sixties and seventies of last century. Their combining with internet and social media technologies has given this reversal new scopes of signification in terms materialising an unprecedented transparency and visibility of the self, in its dealing with an apparatus that has become its extension and which registers its day-to-day existence.

Photo-posing in Facebook pictures infinitely speaks of an internet culture centred around ceding chunks of ourselves in openness as the quintessence of a post-industrial rhetoric. At the other end of reception, image viewers are almost voyeuristic in the way they have come to cherish the virtual experience of seeing others and reciprocally being seen by them. Social media are today the site of this intriguing interplay of visualness and of visibility in virtual reflexive spaces.

Portable cameras, like technologies whose role is to transfigure boundaries and cause change, have made us image producers and consumers at once (Mirzoeff, 34), as well as self-image prosumers in the example of selfies uploaded on Facebook pages, what Flusser called the “dialogic, telematic society of image producers and images collectors” (Flusser, 1985, 4).

4- Prod-using the self

“The camera phone has afforded everyone in possession of such a device the possibility to make events, people and things visible which otherwise would have remained invisible” (Shroer, 209). Following this line of thought, prod-usage of this kind is treading new ontological grounds where dealing with imaging machines has become a normality and is evoking new significations about the self, its symbiotic relation with a mirroring device, a space of exposure that digital screens have become and the reversal of the subjective and private onto the social and the explicitly public.

5- Meta-coding other media forms

Photography, moved away from its “archetypal function” as family photography (Bourdieu, 1990, 36), is, in its contemporary ubiquity, a form where many aspects of post-modernity seem to come together such as media culture, advertising, pop and cinema culture, even modern politics that leaves its imprint on everything nowadays. Prod-usage in photo-posing pictures simulates the interrelated worlds of media. Portable cameras have dethroned the latter of their monopoly of the image and, in the process, image creators made themselves the content of what they produce, saturating the visual world even further in what seems to be a neutralisation of what dominated the visual scene.

Flusser had expressed this meaning in his theorising of technic images: “Images of our time are infected with texts; they visualise texts. Our

image makers' imaginations are infected with conceptual thinking, with trying to hold processes still" (Flusser, 1985, 13).

6- The medium is the message prod-user

The portable digital camera is today one of the most intriguing apparatuses that has further interlaced technology with culture, merging them into one intricately woven realm and generating paradigmatic fusions of roles for the former consumers of technology turned prod-users of meaning and of content. It has given McLuhan's concept new significations due to the medium's multi-functionality in the hands of the people, who are selecting the signifying material they produce and consume.

A platform like Facebook made available on portable camera-phones tangibly crystallised McLuhan's vision of the entity that medium and message came to constitute in electric technology. This notion today involves a synergetic triad rather than the bipolar structure of media and message. The prod-user is vital in this triangular meaning-making formula inaugurating new times of user/machine co-working in digital cross-fertilisation.

On the other hand, the medium in this example of digital photos is a tangible extension of the self. Like a mirror, users hold their portable cameras to reflect and project themselves onto cyberspace. This photographing mirror frames and sends a multitude of images to networks of friends and also beyond one's circle of real life acquaintances whom Facebook signals with activities like tagging someone or liking their photo-pose. This facet of social media as a visual technology and of cameras as imaging machines has fuelled the McLuhanesque postulation with meaning in times when the latter is always codified within cultural texts and interstitially contained in medium-within-medium.

Conclusion

The analysis of the innovative digital form and content of Facebook culinary posts, memes and photo-posing has tangibly demonstrated the epistemological turn virtual machines have been designed to effect, namely, the blocking of the Cartesian worldview represented in cause leading to effect. The latter has been the object of reversal in the entire cybernetic project. It has, in its computerised handling of the world, placed effect before cause and form prior to content since it stressed knowledge as travelling information and data circulating inside networks constantly re-working contingency. The research has woven McLuhan’s and Flusser’s views on the workings of modern virtual technologies and the image culture they foregrounded and has applied them to reading a selection of Facebook cultural forms and visual texts as denominators of our current culture.

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