

“My Newscast” Is No Longer Ours

Felisbela Lopes

University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

Luís M. Loureiro

University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

With this article we aim to propose an analytical alternative to what we could call the substitution and condemnation of the *spectator* as an element of the new technological apparatuses. Actually, what we see in many of the current reflections on new media is that while the spectator is being accused of ultimate passivity, he is also being mobilized to emancipated action as an *empowered user*. Through the critique of an online application available on Portuguese Radio Television (RTP)’s website, the state-owned television network, called *O Meu Telejornal*¹, we will try to demonstrate that we actually need to develop a spectator theory to critically understand the political position of the *citizen* within our changing contemporary media environment.

Keywords: TV newscast, online news, spectatorship, citizenship, technological determinism

Introduction

In March 2009, Portuguese public television network RTP debuted an internet application which allowed spectators to build their own rundown for their own newscast, based on the news stories the channel had previously broadcasted and that were made available on the network’s webpage. The service is called *O Meu Telejornal*, which means *My Newscast*, and initially was meant to represent a breakthrough from the current practice of disintegrating televised news shows into individual reports that were later uploaded onto the website. Using the application, the spectator could select and watch each news story separately or he could choose and sort the reports he was interested in and unify them into a user-generated newscast and could then view the entire selection in one sequence. Thus, the online spectator could create his own newscast.

What this means is that this application, that we will analyze as a device or apparatus, not only breaks the unity of the traditional newscast but also a myriad of new individualized “unities” may emerge from the fragmented pieces of the traditional newscast. It also consecrates a potentially increasingly detemporalized relationship between TV producers and receptors, between the mandatory synchronicity of traditional TV broadcasting and the individual asynchronic processes sponsored by such technological possibilities of fragmentation-recomposition. But it also means that each of the new “totalities”, built as personal sequences, can constitute a discourse in itself, not similar or even comparable to any other discourse built by random users elsewhere.

This technologically-driven apparatus sets some interesting questions: are these internet users able to share their own viewing experience as they are used to as TV news spectators? Are these viewing experiences even comparable? Are there any new types of shareable discourses emerging from this deconstruction of the old

Felisbela Lopes, Ph.D., Department of Communication Sciences, University of Minho.

Luís M. Loureiro, Master, Department of Communication Sciences, University of Minho.

¹ *O Meu Telejornal* is an online application available on RTP’s Internet page that allows the spectators to build their own newscast based on the news reports uploaded onto the website. The best translation for it is *My Newscast*.

unity? Is the traditional spectator drowning in a technological ocean of users, or has the user perhaps become an increasingly “hidden” spectator?

More than just finding the empirical answers to these questions, with this paper one of our aims is to propose a theoretical basis for a critical debate on what may very well be considered to be nothing more than a set of paradoxes emerging from a dominant way of conceiving technological applications such as O Meu Telejornal. Our hypothesis is that such applications can only come out of widely spread “technological determinism” inspired concepts that, on one hand, affirm technology as a decisive locomotive for social and individual emancipation but, on the other hand, tend to keep a dependant relationship between the user-spectator and the technology provider: actually, when the producer asks the receptor to do something, to take some action, even if that is presented as a “do-it-yourself” kind of thing, isn’t that a dissimulated way of the producer to stay in control over the whole production and viewing experience? There is also the paradox of the internet user who is instantly transformed, by means of the apparatus itself, into an immediate spectator of “his own” sequence. Our questioning will then revolve around the notion of the spectator and the place it occupies and/or is being mobilized to on a variety of old and new applications. Through what we will call a *spectator kinetics* analysis we think we may be in a better position to discuss how we, as citizens, relate to the changing media landscape.

The Perspectival Frame as an Apparatus: The Immobilized Spectator

While working on the concept of *frame* as a way of enclosing a *vision of the world*, and the concept of *window* as a metaphor that suits and delimits the contemporary visuality in regard to that world, the American researcher Anne Friedberg has come to realize how, with the technical reproduction of the image and the spectacle of the image, particularly since the 19th century, illustration, lithography and photography have extended the *visible field* (2001, p. 253). The French philosopher Paul Virilio had already explained it, however, as a *battle field* that had been socially established, progressively reducing the visual field “to the line of a sighting device” (1994, p. 13). With the technical reproduction of images “in multiplying ‘proofs’ of reality, photography exhausted it” (Virilio, 1994, p. 22).

In between the formulation of a visual field that extends itself and another that tightens itself as if it were a battlefield, we will perhaps be in the face of a paradox. However, here we should consider separate aspects, both related to what we will henceforth designate as the spectator kinetics. On one hand, the idea of sociotechnical reproducibility of the spectacle that is to be produced as imagery interposition *wherever the spectator is* (Debord, 1992, pp. 15-16), i.e., the reproducibility as inducer of an apparent movement of images, eluding the immobilization of a spectator who, in that kinetic appearance of images, seems to be permanently set up in motion. On the other hand, a *virtual mobility* of the motionless spectator, along with the technical evolution of the reproduction, has been placed into action since the first modern spectacles of urban gaze requisition. Both are decisive analytical objects, and it will be between either one or the other that we will find a kinetic critique of the contemporary spectator, better understanding his real position in the midst of production and spectacle reproduction devices.

Regarding this last consideration, Anne Friedberg took a look at the panoramas and dioramas from the late 18th and early 19th centuries and analyzed the supply of a set of vision technologies that, based on the *effective immobilization of the spectator*, offered “a visual excursion and a virtual release from the confinements of everyday space and time” (2001, p. 261). A century later, this would be exactly what the cinema device would deepen.

Simultaneously, and still during the first half of the 19th century, after Nièpce and Daguerre, the photographic image would develop a different relationship with the spectator, progressively offering itself, through its own technical reproducibility and portability, to the spectator's *physical mobility*. As Roland Barthes recalls in *Camera Lucida*, photography meant a different kind of experience from the dioramas, the panoramas and, afterwards, the cinema: “I can barely stand the private screening of a film (there is not enough audience, nor enough anonymity), but I need to be alone in front of the photos I behold” (2006, p. 108). The contemplative immobilization required by photography thus opened an entirely new perspective over the immobilization of the spectator: it is now the spectacle that reaches the spectator *wherever he may find himself*. Photography promotes yet an *individualization of the experience*, describing, henceforth, a dance that the spectator of contemporaneity executes and choreographs daily. In truth, it is the very same optic inversion that Barthes suggests in the title of the last work he published in his lifetime, which turns out to be a metaphor of this extension of the radius of spectacular action and, by extension, of the physical mobility of the position of the spectator. If the *camera obscura* is the optical and mechanical principle in which the production of a photographic image is based, it's the emergence of photography to light, i.e., the possibility of its outside contemplation, *anywhere*, in a daily *camera lucida* (Barthes, 2006, p. 117), which transports it next to the spectator.

Anne Friedberg, however, proposes an analysis that attempts to understand the ideas of *mobility* and *immobility* of the spectator through the concept of frame. The American researcher deepens this analysis particularly in her recent book *The Virtual Window*, originally published in 2006. In it, Friedberg defends her thesis that the Renaissance window, that had instituted the notion of *perspective* in painting, was suggested as a metaphor by the Italian architect and theorist Leon Battista Alberti to mean not a transparent surface allowing the observation of something (as Leonardo da Vinci would explore later on), but a space that *delimits the vision of the beholder*. Thus, for Alberti “the frame was what mattered, not the view from a window” (Friedberg, 2009, p. 30), meaning that “in hiding, this ‘frame’, in reality, is what allows to see” (Godinho, 2004, p. 313). For Alberti, the surface of the window is not forcibly transparent but *translucent* (Friedberg, 2009, p. 32). The consequences of this assumption are immediate: on one hand, Alberti is defining a theoretical space that delimits eyesight and, for that reason, will imply a certain *framework of the visible*. Friedberg underlines the fact that Alberti leaves exclusively to the painter's free judgement the size of the frame and his relationship towards it: it is the painter who defines the *point of view* but, with that definition, the painter is also defining a position for himself that he will not be able to escape from. Hence, being either the painter or the future spectator, it is only possible for the *observer* to have the correct access to the image contained in the frame if he positions himself according to a geometry of perspective defined by the frame, i.e., if his position is actually *immobilized* regarding the frame (2009, p. 30). Thus, the introduction of the *perspectival window* in painting is related to the *immobilization of the spectator*, who is now detained and self-enclosed in this space defined by the frame.

Friedberg's analysis on the imposed *immobilization* of the spectator by the perspectival window cannot, however, be taken yet as definitive, particularly when we reflect on an evolutionary model of subjectivity based on the notion of spectator. We know that in the *Dioptrique* Descartes provides the *camera obscura* as an optical model for the formation of the images of the world, comparing its functional principles to those of the human eye. And it is also in the *camera obscura* that Isaac Newton's optical experiences and John Locke's reflections on the foundations of human understanding are based. Art historian Jonathan Crary recalls this and concludes

that “The camera obscura has become a model of both the observation of empirical phenomena and of introspective reflection and self-observation” (2001, p. 246), which for this author relates it to a *metaphysics of interiority*. Actually, besides inducing a clear separation between *subject* and *object*, as is the case in the perspectival window, the *camera obscura* operates a simultaneous observation and production of the image, albeit disguising the observer within the device. The observer, though located inside (or, at least, his view is) does not hold a defined position, he is “a more fluid inhabitant of darkness” (Crary, 2001, p. 246). If it is true that the image formed through the *camera obscura* apparatus is a perspectival image, Anne Friedberg (2009, p. 66) underlines that it is an image *in movement*, which makes it different from the *frozen* image, set by the Albertian frame. Hence, it is as image production devices that this researcher makes the distinction between them, considering that the *camera obscura* was more a simple model for the importation and projection of moving images (Friedberg, 2006, pp. 68-71) than a model of visibility in the subsequent centuries. This means that, according to the author, the *camera obscura* does not allow us to fully understand the relationship between a *perspectival vision* of the world and the *immobile position of the spectator*, starting from the Renaissance period. This would happen later, though, when within the cinema apparatus, both the *perspectival window* and the *camera obscura* models mingled, becoming paradigmatic and definitive as for the prevalence of a visibility model over an image projection model: “A key component of the spectator’s position in the cinematic century was to be immobile in front of the frame of the screen” (Friedberg, 2009, p. 87).

Anne Friedberg’s work on the mobility and immobility of the spectator will allow us to better understand the outcome of a *framed view of the world*: as a screen, the window is the definition of a given delimitation of the view of the world and implies at all times a *halt of the spectator* against the frame (of the window, the screen) that will define the space in which the image of the world is made visible.

If the perspectival window defines and provides a singular point of view it will relate with the metaphysical position of the Cartesian subject “centered and stable, autonomous and thinking, standing outside of the world” (Friedberg, 2009, p. 47). From the original formulation of French semiologist Christian Metz, American historian and sociologist Martin Jay analyzed and defined, in his widely cited 1988 essay *Scopic Regimes of Modernity*, the *Cartesian perspectivism* as the modern hegemonic *scopic regime* (1988, pp. 4-5). However, Jay explains that, although dominant, perspectivism was never alone. Moreover, it is significant that the perspectivist point of view implies a *singular eye* instead of the two from which human eyesight is composed, an eye understood as “static, unblinking, and fixated, rather than dynamic, moving with (...) saccadic jumps from one focal point to another” (Jay, 1988, p. 7). So, Cartesian perspectivism supplies an essentially theoretical visual regime and within it a rational separation between spectacle and spectator is consummated by creating an ever growing distance: “the moment of erotic projection in vision, what St. Augustine had anxiously condemned as “ocular desire”, was lost as the bodies of the painter and spectator were forgotten in the name of an allegedly disincarnated, absolute eye” (Jay, 1988, p. 8).

Let’s then focus on the consequences for the spectator of this framed view of the world that has been provided since the Renaissance by the rational perspectival regime. In fact, be it according to a singular, centered and unique perspective like the one provided since the 15th century by the Italian Renaissance perspective, be it the multiple contemporary perspectives that begin to become particularly clear on the movie screen, about which “The movement of the image and the mechanics of editing and montage contradict the idea of a consistent, positioned ‘single-point’ perspective frame” (Friedberg, 2009, p. 83), one cannot deny, from the visual frame provided by the window, the consequences that the theoretical notion of perspective has had on the

point of observation and, from there on, on the modeling of modern vision. As Anne Friedberg underlines, regardless of the questions we could ask concerning a perspectivist view of the world, “It is the consistency of the frame that performs the unity of space” (2009, p. 84).

The same will not happen with other modular aspects that have been questioned by the evolution of visuality. Actually, it is in alternative scopic regimes that Martin Jay analyzes certain aspects, such as the narrative, that have been questioned over the last few centuries. On this matter, Jay refers the way the 17th century *descriptive art* of Northern Europe, particularly in the Netherlands in the work of such artists as Johannes Vermeer—who Jay believes to have created the first alternative scopic regime from Cartesian perspectivism, promoted a greater *de-narrativization* and loss of textual reference in favor of description and visual surface (Jay, 1988, p. 12). A direct consequence of this understanding may have been the rejection of a “privileged, constitutive role of the monocular subject” emphasizing “the prior existence of a world of objects depicted on the flat canvas” (idem). It all comes down to an alternative that dispenses the theoretical observer: from focused and singular, the point of view shifted to “the fragmentary, detailed, and richly articulated surface of a world it is content to describe rather than explain” (1988, p. 13). As Martin Jays writes, we are closer to an empirical visual experience than to the theoretical model provided by the Cartesian perspectivism, hence the author’s consideration that the Flemish and Dutch *descriptive art* would anticipate future visual models (idem). One of the main directions we are aiming at is, precisely, this one: the contemporary introduction of an ever greater speed in the human relation with the optical visible sends us, inevitably, to the notion of an increasingly clear pellicular surface, a sensorial friction on a fast *interface* that crushes distances and essentially develops an accelerated *scanning* through a lateral kinetic gaze. If the kinetic effect of the perspectivist rationalism was a visual strategy that allowed “our culture to hold the world in space and analyze it in time” (Kerchhove, 1997, p. 67), meaning, *stopping the world* by separating it as an object, we must otherwise deal with a *motion optics* in our empirical experience of everyday life. Our lateral visuality becomes then more *descriptive* than *narrative*.

The loss of the singular point of view or, in other words, the theoretical exemption of a fixed observer, detained by the spatial definition of the perspectivist cone, will mean the empirical release of the physical body: in fact, the spectator is only *physically immobilized* in the theoretical device of perspectival observation. With this, we could suggest that the spectator’s everyday experience of modernity, albeit still dominated by a theoretical model that immobilizes him to a distanced and rational contemplation, may have confirmed, due to his daily experience of a fully enlightened world, a natural tendency for an *induced mobility*. The hypothesis we are exploring implies then an analysis of this opposition: on one hand, a theoretical model for the elaboration of the modern spectator that, by bringing the light from the divine to the optical field, resulted in the confinement and immobilization of the spectator defining for him a single point of view and, on the other hand, the mobilization effect that the dissemination of optical light had in the empirical position and kinetics of the spectator. However, this is a confrontation that cannot be fully understood without the diagnosis of a paradox: we know that the mobility acquired and conquered by the modern spectator is immediately and constantly contradicted when we dive into the snare of the contemporary apparatuses of spectacular image. That is one of the consequences of Anne Friedberg’s diagnosis that it is important to retain: the contemporary generation of an *imagery interface* that finds its spectator *wherever he may be*, is intimately related with his constant *framing* by reproduction devices. The spectator is still contained in observation frames. Thus, the contemporary mobilization of the spectator will continue to be dominated and contained. As Paul Virilio would conclude, we are then dealing with a *false mobilization*:

There, where the motorization of transports and information has caused a general mobilization of populations dragged in the exodus of labor, and after that of leisure, the means of instant transmission are inversely causing a growing inertia, mostly television and tele-action no longer require the mobility of people, just their mobility while standing in the same place. (Virilio, 2000, p. 43).

Actually, in spite of being questioned by alternative empirical visibility regimes, the notion of frame, or framing, developed under the Renaissance perspective, would remain dominant over the spectator's position until contemporaneity. Regardless of the persistence of the perspectivist model, of a greater or lesser prominence of narratives contained in the framework or the media that were used for creation, presentation or projection of images, the *immobilized* spectator in the theater, the cinema, in front of television or computer screens, even the *allegedly mobile spectator* of the spectacle of photographic image or of the socially broader kinetic imagery interposition of contemporaneity, all are more or less contained in an *access to the visible* model orientated by the concept of the frame.

Several authors, like Anne Friedberg, believe though that not all contemporary screens should be read from this theoretical perspectivist regime standpoint. The author argues that the computer screen fostered a fundamental change regarding its predecessors: in spite of demanding a vertical permanence of an observer (*immovable* in front of the screen) whose gaze is still directed towards a relatively perpendicular surface, much like in cinema or television, the windows overlapping on the computer screen *cancel the perspective* (2009, p. 28). Thus, we would be placed before an important theoretical shift considering Leon Battista Alberti's window concept that was based on the observation, from a fixed position, of a virtual image elaborated according to the geometric principles of perspective. Hence, for the Italian architect and humanist, the metaphor of the picture and of its frame as a window: what we observe, through physical windows, is the *world* that extends itself beyond that interposed glass surface thus giving continuity to a perspectival view. So, if the *world* outlined and defined by the frame was what mattered most to Alberti, Friedberg proposes an analysis that is held on *what is actually seen* inside of that frame. When observed this way, the successive and overlapping *windows* opened on the computer screen may have new implications on the spectator's position that are important to understand: the computer screen would now operate according to a visual regime that would place the spectator kinetics in a new analytical *post-perspectival* region, when opposed to previous screens and surfaces of imagery reproduction. In this new region, the spectator would make way for the *user*.

In an identical train of thought follow the arguments of University of Minho communicologist Zara Pinto-Coelho. On one of the chapters of the collective work *Ecrã, Paisagem e Corpo* (published in 2010), the Portuguese researcher observes, from authors like Lev Manovich, the existence of and opposition between cinema, video and television screens on one hand and, on the other, the interactive computer screens: concerning the former, a vision regime that remains stabilized manifests itself, continuing the screen to be the “border, the limit, the flat and rectangular table placed in the physical space of the spectator, ahead of him and at a certain distance” (Pinto-Coelho, 2010, p. 21), matching then the Renaissance frame; on the contrary, in the latter case the computer screen means a new instability of that old relation: “the screen is conceived as a welcoming space, mobile and malleable”, making the relationship with the represented world no longer “contemplative and of spectator” (2010, p. 22).

The Untold Story of the Empowered User

The very insistence on the idea of *empowerment* is symptomatic of an ongoing replacement of the spectator. While the spectator is conceptually labeled as passive and, therefore, unable to act, the new *agents* that suppletively arise in its aid will be those who, emerging from everyday effectuality, anchor their empowerment in daily acquired capacities and skills (inevitably promoted by technologies) and, consequently, show their autonomous ability to individually intervene in the ordinary world. It is all about achieving the modern promise of the seizure of the *power to act*, by the empowered individual, through the consummation of a *technical erotica* in which the *will to control* becomes the “political problem par excellence” (Miranda, 2007, p.151). So, *empowerment* bears the promise of the realization of what the German philosopher Hannah Arendt designates the *popular myth of the strong man* who, “isolated from others, owes his own strength to the fact that he’s alone” (2001, p. 238). One should look out for the way this myth states and reveals itself, for example, in the disentanglements proposed by MIT technologist and *convergence culture* theorist Henry Jenkins when he defines the relationships that oppose an everyday variation of the *empowered user*, the *empowered consumer*, to the old version of the consumer that gave rise to it:

If old consumers were assumed to be passive, the new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them to stay, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to networks or media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are now noisy and public. (Jenkins, 2008, pp. 18-19)

Concerning this promised seizure of the power of action by contemporary *consumers* and *users*, we should stress the way widely cited authors such as Manuel Castells or Pierre Lévy totally discard the political notion of the spectator from their reflections on the so-called new virtual *agoras*. In *Internet Galaxy* (originally published in 2001), the *network society* theorist distinguishes only between *producers-users*, responsible for feeding and refeeding the network, and *users-consumers*, who are placed on the side of reception (Castells, 2004, p. 55). To both sides, Castells presents “the control of that public agora” as the “most important political challenge the Internet presents” (2004, p. 197). In what he’s been calling *achievable utopias* Lévy goes even further, writing in *Cyberdemocracy* (2002) that *cybercitizens*, the internet *users* capable of action in the virtual *agora*, “have much to say” (Lévy, 2003, p. 57) and that “*the Internet is an extraordinary vector for the liberation of speech*” (Lévy, 2003, p. 64). Invested, by technology, with this new power of global discourse, *cybercitizens* would then create the perfect *action* conditions to materialize the predictions of the French philosopher: “*dictatorships will fall at the rhythm of the expansion of cyberculture*” (Lévy, 2004, p. 65).² Therefore, under these formulations we are able to confirm that, while conceptually neglecting the spectator, what is presented to us is, invariably, the promise of *enhancement* of the contemporary *user* and *consumer* through technology, with the resulting elevation of their ability to *act* as *citizens*. What emerges here is, conceptually, a *user-actor* or a *user-consumer*, presented under the *empowerment* of the *user* or of the *consumer* mode.

We, on the contrary, think that it is in this precise negligence of the spectator that resides the analytic

² One could argue that the revolutionary processes triggered, in the beginning of 2011, in several Muslim countries, side-by-side with persistent news about the importance the internet social networks have played in the popular mobilization, will prove Pierre Lévy right, validating his prediction. However, we believe that any analysis that neglects the full scrutiny of the respective public spaces, under the guise of technological determinism, will get caught up in an analytical precipitation, slipping into a dangerously simplistic empiricism. The quickness of the contemporary mobilization processes, surely enabled by communication technologies, will not mean that their origins shouldn’t be researched in depth. Although we cannot do that in the scope of this article, that is the path we defend for the investigation of these phenomena.

persistence of an error that is producing a degradation of *citizenship* and political *action* to its current *spectacular* status—the emerging citizen of contemporaneity is the one made possible, allowed and contained by *consumerism* and *usability*. See, for example, the recurring accusations of increasing *spectacularization* made against activities that are traditionally perceived as being part of the sphere of citizenship such as politics or journalism, both constantly drained by an intense scan of light (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 55; Martins, 2003, p. 8). In fact, when we oppose to this, thoughts such as the ones proposed, e.g., in Arendt’s theses concerning the *public and private spheres*, we shall take notice of how such operative formulas suffer from a mortal paradox: only the *object of use* is shareable and never the *use* or the *consumption* itself, meaning that *all* types of *usage*, even if performed in the public sphere (in what Arendt designates as the exchange market), will have the effect of *isolating the user*, which will result in his effective *impotence*, rendering any condition for political *action* impossible (Arendt, 2001, pp. 237, 252). These growing fears of growing isolation and closure for political action are, moreover, present in other contemporary reflections, such as those proposed by Ethics expert Christine Rosen in 2005, by minting the age of individualized media uses and consumption we live in as the *age of egocasting* (2005, pp. 51-72).

In the empirical substitutes proposed for the spectator we, therefore, subsume a *user* of the *things of the world* who, supposedly, acquired such a grasp over them that he begins to *act* autonomously. In other words, the *empowered user* or the *empowered consumer* we encounter in the contemporary wordings of a new emancipated spectator, instigated and installed by the new information and communication technologies, crossed the once immovable borderline of the greek *theatron*, leapt into the inside of the *proscenium* (diving into the screen’s window?) becoming a *user-actor*: a hybrid concept that, in reality, never existed in the *polis*. The fact is that, by embracing these formulas, we would fatally find ourselves in the analytical domains of a new paradigm. But, we have good reason to believe that, instead of promoting an *active* alternative to the spectator, these considerations will let themselves be sweetly tamed by the siren song of spectacular determinist domination, enabling it. Namely, they will do nothing more than dig a real, deeper and irreducible gap between the *spectacle* (and its true *actors*) and the spectator, referring him to a passive and dominated position, submitting him to the “*prison of global mobilization*” (López-Petit, 2010, p. 53).

One of the contemporary authors that support our analytical proposition is Maria-José Mondzain. In her argumentation, the French semiologist defends that “Every spectacle brings into play the freedom of the spectator depending on the position assigned to him in respect to the screen by the director or videomaker” (2009, p. 40). This is to be able to diagnose and unhide the domination it will be necessary for us to understand how, given their current configuration, the apparatuses elaborate the spectator’s (understood in all its contemporary extension, as consumer, user, spectator and actor) position particularly through its intrinsic kinetics and the way these kinetics interact with optics, promoting illusory perceptions as to the spectator’s real position within these devices.

The approach proposed in 2006 by American researcher Michele White, in her book *The Body and the Screen* resorts to these apparatus theories, among others, to develop a set of theses that allow the recovery of the notion of the spectator, analyzing it in the contemporary environments of interaction generated by the technological screen. In fact, White opposes the *need for a spectator* to the idea, generally accepted, that only a *user* should be considered when dealing with the characterization of the human relationship with the computer screen (2006, p. 8). The author notes that, in all fairness, when concepts such as *empowered user* (a user who is, allegedly, given absolute power over the choice of his paths and control over the screens’ contents) are privileged analytically, it is technology itself and the very hierarchy of control over the computer program that

are submerged and dissimulated in the representations created for and on the screen: in that respect, an inadvertent and dominated spectator is elaborated for that screen (White, 2006, pp. 30; 32). For White, this is the *empowered user*: a spectator that is mobilized to *enter*, to *surf*, to navigate, i.e., to *move* within a *space* created by the narrative the environment describes. On screen, attached to the movements of the spectator's hand, the cursor is represented by an arrow that points, a hand that clicks, grabs and shifts (White, 2006, pp. 22-23, 29). Besides *placing* the spectator in the environment, “the different images of the hand render an empowered user who can point, move, grasp and touch. The depictions of hands stand in for the whole body, suggest that the individual can enter the setting” (White, 2006, p. 14). And it is upon *entry* that this alleged plenipotentiary spectator is invited to explore a *living*, biological (2006, p. 20) world, filled with new possibilities, never seen landscapes, never lived experiences. Beyond the border of the screen will be, as Michele White points out, a *populated* world (2006, p. 21), where *seeing* and *being* are connected with the conceptualization of a “telepresence as an extension of the spectator's ‘reach’ and ‘means’ of visit” (2006, p. 30). So, “The window onto another world, which narratives about the computer promise, is becoming increasingly easy to breach” (2006, p. 32).

However, just like White's studies suggest, not always this relationship develops as is supposed. There are several moments of failure, frustration over the *empowerment* promised to the spectator. By highlighting the technology or media producer occultation paradox, those moments demonstrate that the *empowered user* is nothing but the result of spectatorial positions promoted by the representations on screen. A stripped, *disempowered* spectator emerges from this realization, ultimately placed in the position he truly holds. Therefore, these are moments that reinforce the *hierarchic power of the programmer over the spectator* (2006, p. 23), that expose an effective domination, exercised, now, in a clearly more euphemistic mode, concealed in the promise of offering the spectator total control over a device that, in fact, is controlled by the technology producer, the programmer. It is symptomatic that, for at least two decades, technological mobility theorists converged to the conclusion that “The most successful technologies are the ones that are embedded in the environment, used in the backstage, without making their presence known” (Ganito, 2009, p. 187). The contemporary mobilization of the spectator is then most effective when the technologies that promote it are *disguised* in the apparatuses. Aren't we actually finding here the very signs of domination that we alluded to earlier?

We reached this diagnosis by analyzing the user-spectator's dubious position in the O Meu Telejornal (*My Newscast*) application, available since March 2009 on Portugal's public television station's website, www.rtp.pt (Loureiro, 2009, pp. 163-172)³. This apparatus elaborates a poorly defined position for its spectator, having based, as we argued in the previously cited paper, its functional principles on the technological deterministic⁴ stream, meaning the predominance of technoscientific advances over social intrinsic dynamics. Actually, O Meu Telejornal makes the promise of *full control* to the *online* spectator: the idea that the newscast is a device that can be drawn out however the spectator sees fit is passed down. Emerged in the offer of a

³ We would go further in this analysis in co-authorship with Felisbela Lopes in a communication presented at the 2010 IAMCR conference, held at the University of Minho, in Portugal, between the 18th and 22nd of July.

⁴ One should take into account the reasoning of RTP's former News Director, José Alberto Carvalho, who published a news report (aired by the networks main newscast on March 2nd 2009) where he justifies *O Meu Telejornal* with the realization that “from now on, each spectator can build his own newscast”, meaning that thanks to the possibilities offered by technology the spectator can now “put the matters that don't interest him aside and watch those which are more important to him over and over again”. This means that from what technology allows and enhances, the user-spectator is invited to take on a role that, until then, was reserved to the networks' reporters, freely making their own decisions regarding news consumption and are even given the possibility to elaborate their own newscast. The entire speech is accompanied by a visual exemplification of the *usage* proposed.

producer that is lost in the background, the spectator is invited to choose, on the website, the news reports he wishes to see and define that order in which he will see them. This means that the true instance of news production for the newscast is, immediately, hidden: it does not show itself, nor does it reveal that, in all truthiness, those reports, which have been placed at the spectator's *command*, were thought, produced and aligned before, in the midst of the television programmer and producer's job and in which the spectator has no involvement. The computer screen spectator, whose online representation is now of an *empowered user*, is given a *power* that the spectator sitting on a couch and in front of a television screen could not have: supposedly, he can make his own newscast, where the temporal and hierarchical orders are irrelevant in *his* organization of the news as are the discursive logics that ingrained the newscast in its original televised format.

But there will come a moment where the dissimulation will abruptly stop its effect: by being invited to create his *own newscast*, the spectator will implicitly be also invited to hand over the power he had apparently been entrusted with, in the very moment he makes the transition from *choosing* and *ordering* to *seeing*. Following all the steps proposed by O Meu Telejornal, the spectator will end up building a single aggregate of television news, an aligned *individualized newscast*, where the sequential viewing of the reports will place them one after the other. Since they were chosen from a disconnected mosaic in which the reports are presented randomly comparatively to the original moment they were broadcasted, meaning that there is no relation whatsoever with the discursive and temporal hierarchy that defined them within the original televised device, the online spectator will be confronted simultaneously with two consequences: his own O Meu Telejornal became a sequential aggregator of reports with a total *duration* that is the sum of all the stories the spectator chose (it can be 3 or 30 minutes long) and the rundown may have more to do with the order of a random choice, based on the *now* (*I want to watch*) than with a previously defined hierarchical temporal order by the spectator. This means that when the time comes to watch it, his O Meu Telejornal may no longer be what the spectator *wants to watch*. So, in all these successive confrontations, a potential frustration with this relationship is generated, proving, after all, that the power given to the spectator fades away in the paradox of its own dubious position: in the end, all that is left is a spectator who has been stripped from his power and, to take it back, must give up on completing the invitation that had been addressed to him.

This analysis complements and, in certain aspects, materializes what we had already argued in 2009, when the O Meu Telejornal application was made available online. Actually, leaning exclusively on some of the theories we have developed regarding the application, the above mentioned article took a shot at a set of perplexities and paradoxes in which the then new application proposed by RTP's website was, *ab initio*, theoretically entangled. As we said at the time, "It would appear that, in its origin, O Meu Telejornal was formed according to the perspective of a service for users that will have the difficulty in dealing with the possibility of them becoming spectators" (Loureiro, 2009, p. 170). Bear in mind that although O Meu Telejornal is no longer a novelty, it is still a rare commodity on network websites, a fact that might be related to its near statistic irrelevance on RTP's website. According to data collected at RTP, and that we presented at a conference at the University of Porto entitled *Virtual Places: Spaces Created for the Spectator*, on April 30th 2010, during the year 2009 (from March to November) 1,000 rundowns were created on O Meu Telejornal, a number that when compared with the 5,413,288 viewings of reports online (from January to December 2009) demonstrates the near total alienation of spectators/users of the networks' website regarding the application that supposedly empowered them over the contents that were made available for online viewing: a daily average of about 14,831 viewings per report is met by a laughable average of 3.3 rundowns produced every day. Unlike

what usually happens with successful internet experiences, the online presence of television networks continues to do without applications such as O Meu Telejornal, preferring to keep a fragmented supply of its contents, where the viewing takes place immediately upon choice, i.e., retaining the *empowered user* as a representation of the *online* spectator and avoiding paradoxical situations as the one we have just encountered.

The concepts of *immobility* and *mobility* may be admirably considered at this instance: the computer screen spectator, drawn up as an *empowered user* by the technology and screen representations is built over the very ideas of *mobility* and *mobilization*, as we have already discussed. Online environments are arranged as *spaces* that appeal to the path, the journey towards discovery. All the promised spatial mobility will come from the supposed ability of the spectator to move, choose, click, enter and leave: his ability to autonomously *work*. By frustrating these representations of an autonomous and decision-making spectator, by requiring his effective *immobilization* towards the integral viewing of a *program*, the existence of which the *empowered user* only acknowledges the moment he completes his choices, an application such as O Meu Telejornal is not doing anything other than revealing the sudden *truth of the spectator*: he is only allegedly mobile, all the *usage power* is drained at the exact moment the spectator verifies the magnitude of his impotence, the domain of the production instance over the so-called *user*. It is the production instance that maintains control over *movement* and *distance*. It is in its inexorable *immobility* before the screen, suddenly *separated*, that the spectator finds himself: in spite of the covert modes of the spectacle, the spectator actually never left his seat, remaining detained by the screen, while his very glance is still directed to the light, just as his body is still commanded by it as it brightens and defines the profile of the *spectacle of the visible*, shining over him. It is, in this traumatic borderline of sudden revelation for which there would be a failure of representations, what, in Lacanian psychoanalytical terms, we could describe as the *shock of the Real*⁵.

The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, a Lacan reader, actually proposes an interesting inversion of the terms of the problem. For Žižek, it is *interactivity in a transitive sense*, i.e., a true *deprivation* of the passivity the machine operates, that is revealed in the *immobilization* shock of the cyberspatial spectator: “*the other is active for me, acts on my behalf; I act through him, making me increasingly dependent of my digital prosthesis and unable to act directly*” (2006, p. 15). The potential frustration lies perennially in the idea of *interactivity*: in this regard, while I’m deprived of inactivity by the other, I find myself, actually, stripped of true activity. In fact, I’m *motionless*, deeming myself interactive, ubiquitous and kinetic.

References

- Arendt, H. (2001). *A condição humana*. Lisbon: Relógio d’Água Editores.
 Barthes, R. (2006). *A Câmara Clara—Nota sobre a Fotografia*, Lisbon: Edições 70.

⁵ Lacan’s Real cannot be assumed from everyday reality, it is what is left “*outside of the reach of our representations*” (Žižek, 2006, p. 13). In other words, “the emptiness that makes reality incomplete and inconsistent” (Žižek, 2006, p. 84). Hence, Jacques Lacan places the Real beyond the opposition between the Symbolic (the structuring order of representations, of language) and the Imaginary (the order of imagination, illusion, fantasy). Therefore, and unlike these two orders, Lacan’s Real cannot be defined in the terms of an opposition between absence and presence, because it is always presence, although it should be understood that the appearance (the spectacle) involves a certain idea of daily life that will always be a result of representations, i.e., at all times it deals with the occultation of the Real. So, the Real only becomes accessible through magmatic manifestations, eruptions from the bowels of its absolute presence, revealing itself in a gross, traumatic way, with no admittance of any connection that structures it as a previous narrative (in *A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, Žižek cites the Holocaust as an example of the eruptions of this crude Real). Naturally, the *shock of the Real* we’re suggesting here cannot forget that, in the case of the spectator, it is the product of a long narrative. However, if we think of the *empowered user’s* representations as generative of a symbolic depiction of the *death of the spectator* maybe we can understand the possibility of a shock, traumatic enough that it prevents the repetition of the sudden resuscitation experience.

- Bourdieu, P. (1997). *Sobre a televisão*. Lisbon: Celta Editora.
- Castells, M. (2004). *A galáxia internet*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Crary, J. (2001). The camera obscura and its subject. In N. Mirzoeff (Ed.). *The Visual Culture Reader*, New York: Routledge.
- Debord, G. (1992). *La Société du Spectacle*, Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Friedberg, A. (2001). The mobilized and virtual gaze in modernity. In M. Nicholas (Ed.). *The Visual Culture Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Friedberg, A. (2009). *The virtual window—From Alberti to Microsoft* (paperback ed.). Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Ganito, C. (2009). O impacto da mobilidade na indústria de conteúdos portuguesa, in CARDOSO, Gustavo; CÁDIMA, Francisco Rui & CARDOSO, Luís Landercet, ed. *Media, Redes e Comunicação: Futuros Presentes*, Lisbon: Quimera Editores.
- Godinho, J. (2004). *Genealogia da Reportagem—Do conceito de reportagem ao caso Grande Reportagem, programa da RTP* (Ph.D. thesis in Communication Sciences). Lisbon: Universidade Nova.
- Jay, M. (1988). Scopic regimes of modernity. In H. Foster(Ed.). *Vision and Visuality (discussions in contemporary culture)*. Seattle: Bay Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence Culture—Where old and new media collide* (Updated paperback ed.). New York University Press.
- Kerckhove, D. (1997). *A Pele da Cultura—Uma Investigação Sobre a Nova Realidade Electrónica*. Lisbon: Relógio D'Água Editores
- Lévy, P. (2003). *Ciberdemocracia*, Lisbon: Instituto Piaget.
- López-Petit, S. (2010). *A mobilização global seguido de O Estado-Guerra e outros textos*. Porto: Deriva Editores.
- Loureiro, L. M. (2009). O meu telejornal já não é o nosso: Questões que o determinismo tecnológico coloca ao dispositivo televisivo. *Revista de Comunicação & Sociedade*, 15. CECS, Minho University, Ribeirão: Edições Húmus.
- Martins, M. L. (2003). *Por uma Democracia a Vir. A Televisão de serviço público e a Sociedade Civil*. In M. Pinto (Ed.). *Televisão e Cidadania—Contributos para o debate sobre o serviço public*. Porto: Campo das Letras.
- Miranda, J. A. (2007). *Teoria da Cultura*. Lisbon: Edições Século XXI.
- Mondzain, M. J. (2009). *An imagem pode matar?* Lisbon: Nova Vega.
- Pinto-Coelho, M. Z. (2010). *Da instabilidade do ecrã*. In M. Z. Pinto-Coelho, & J. P. Neves (Eds.). *Ecrã, Paisagem e Corpo*. CECS—Minho University. Coimbra: Grácio Editor.
- Rosen, C. (2005). The age of egocasting. *The New Atlantis—Journal of Technology and Society*, 7. Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center.
- Virilio, P. (1994). *The vision machine*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Virilio, P. (2000). *A velocidade de libertação*. Lisbon: Relógio D'Água Editores.
- White, M. (2006). *The body and the screen—Theories of internet spectatorship*. Cambridge M.A.: MIT Press.
- Žižek, S. (2006). *A subjectividade por vir*. Lisbon: Relógio D'Água.