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Philosophy in Digital Culture: Images and the Aestheticization of the Public Intellectual's Narratives

Abstract:

The present paper deals with the problem of the *digital-culture-public-philosophy* as a possible response of those philosophers who see the need to face the challenges of the Internet and the visual culture that constitutes an important part of the Internet cultural space. It claims that this type of philosophy would have to, among many other things, modify and broaden philosophers' traditional mode of communication. It would have to expand its textual, or mainly text-related, communication mode into the aesthetic and visual communication mode. More precisely, philosophers would have to learn how to aestheticize and visualize their ethical (epistemic, ontological, social) narratives by using some digital tools – YouTube clips for example.

Keywords:

philosophy, digital culture, Internet, narratives, aestheticization, ethics, stoic pragmatism

Henryk Elzenberg (1887–1967), one of the central figures of Polish philosophy of culture, understood *culture* as a value-creation activity or a set of efforts that aim at valuable states of affairs.[1] To explore his view he referred, among others, to ancient Stoics;[2] they understood philosophy as predominantly a practical attitude

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1) Skowroński, "Axiocentrism in Santayana and Elzenberg."

2) Elzenberg, *Marek Aureliusz. Z historii i psychologii etyki.*

whose importance is a profound reflection about the good life according to *dignitas* or priceless values.[3] I can see a somewhat similar attitude toward the practical and the meaningful in philosophy and culture in the works of American pragmatist John Lachs (1934–), especially in his idea of *stoic pragmatism*.[4] He reiterates that "Philosophy becomes marginalized only when it distances itself from the problems of life,"[5] and a lamentable separation between academia and the outer world deprives many ordinary people of access to what philosophical wisdom has to offer.

Lachs criticizes an overly theory-oriented pragmatism for the same reasons as Richard Rorty famously criticized analytic philosophers:[6] those problems that first-rate minds work so diligently to solve are hardly seen as problems to non-academics and, hence, are insignificant for culture at large. Such cultural insignificance of philosophers dangerously reduces their message to the academic audiences only.[7] Lachs hopes that "a pragmatism with a stoic correction"[8] would better meet the important questions for many people as to how practically ameliorate social life according to the standards and values of the good and meaningful lives of individual persons.

The approach that such different philosophers as Elzenberg and Lachs represent has at least three important features in common. First, they look back to the philosophical tradition as a whole and evoke the Stoics and other classic figures to show that a substantial part of philosophical reflection deals with universal questions independently of the historical context and intellectual tendencies of a given country. Second, they look to its practical aspects so as to show that philosophy, at any moment of history, has something important to tell many various audiences about the good life; employing a language that can be understood by many people – not just by an intellectual elite. Third, they stress the role of reflection on the quality and meaningfulness of individual lives along with universal values to which human life and culture, in general, should refer.

Philosophy and Digital Culture

I want to confront this philosophical attitude (and many similar philosophical attitudes) with something that these and similar thinkers did not refer to, which is the most recent challenges of digital culture (DC) – although, to be true, Lachs discusses some educational aspects of the Internet in a few texts, and his YouTube presentations have gained some popularity. I do not want to get into a methodological discussion about the status and character of DC in its whole complexity. I follow Charlie Gere who claims in his *Digital Culture* that "Digitality can be thought of as a marker of culture because it encompasses both the artefacts and the systems of signification and communication that most clearly demarcate our contemporary way of life from others,"[9] and I put this remark in the context of this text.

Although we can roughly define DC as *accessible cultural products generated by digital tools*, and use it as a general definition of DC, I will modify and make it more specific and normative when used in a philo-

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3) Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, LXXXIX.

4) Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism.*; Lachs, "Was Santayana a Stoic Pragmatist?"; Lachs, *Freedom and Limits.*; Skowroński, *John Lachs's Practical Philosophy.*

5) Lachs, *A Community of Individuals*, 11.

6) Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 129.

7) In this place and in some other places of this text I refer to my book on Rorty (Skowroński, *Values, Valuations, and Axiological Norms in Richard Rorty's Neopragmatism*).

8) Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism*, 56.

9) Gere, *Digital Culture*, 16.

sophical context, for the reasons I explain below, into the following formula: *DC is an array of practices that explore digital tools to make philosophical messages be recognized by wide audiences*. Since I cannot study the relation between these two definitions in this place, let me just state that this former definition embraces the latter so that we do not talk about two different types of digital cultures but only about the more general and the more specific ones that are used in philosophical contexts.

I evoke DC because a confrontation between philosophy and DC is more and more important in the era of rapid growth of cyberspace in all aspects of our life. Very briefly I want to think about the place of philosophers similar to Elzenberg and Lachs (and their followers) who want to define their role as philosophers as well as the role of philosophy and the humanities in the contemporary world. Let me add that I am not talking about institutions, such as universities and research institutes, which employ philosophers and have their IT departments, their PR centers, and their own strategies as to how to perform specific projects in sundry segments of the cyberspace. Nor do I think, at least in this place, about Digital Humanities – a fast growing area of highly institutionalized and computationally engaged research.

Perhaps to better explain my intention I could propose an alternative title for the present text: "Should Philosophers Become Digital-Culture-Public-Philosophers? If so, Should They Aestheticize/Visualize Their Work?" Maybe this long title would show more clearly that I want to reflect upon the contemporary generation of philosophers, who see *culture* in a way that Elzenberg and Lachs saw it; yet, who unlike them have happened to face the big-scale technological changes and, especially, their dynamics and their omnipresence. One of the most visible aspects of this dynamics is the newest generation of students who, hardly ever having their hands Smartphone-free, are already deeply affected by the technological transformations in what they think and what they do.

I suggest that one of the ways of coping with these challenges would be becoming a *digital-culture-public-philosopher*. Such a philosopher would have to, among many other things, modify and broaden philosophers' traditional mode of communication. I mean, such a philosopher would have to expand his or her textual or mainly text-related communication mode into the aesthetic and visual communication mode. More precisely, he or she would have to learn how to visualize his or her ethical (epistemic, ontological, social) message by using some digital tools, YouTube clips for example. Why aestheticization and/or visualization of the philosopher's ethical message is an important dimension of DC will be explained later on in this text.

DC's 90-9-1 Rule and Philosophers as Superusers

Whether philosophers should stay in university classrooms and congress conference-rooms *or* move their activity into the Internet does not seem a yes-no dilemma nowadays. There are many educational contexts that already require using digital tools in the traditional mode of teaching students, e-teaching for instance. At the same time, university education has been losing its privileged status, if not monopoly, as an exceptional institution that is responsible for the cultivation and transmission of knowledge and wisdom to the next generations. The Internet, independently of any university curricula, also stores and transmits knowledge and wisdom of whatever area the learner would want to choose. The Internet does it on a much bigger and much more accessible scale than institutions of higher education, and this makes a huge difference.

Nearly all major attributes of the traditional university – professors, students, libraries, classrooms, diplomas, conferences, social recognition, academic publishers, books, job offerings, an ethos of work in education and culture, and others – have already become a part of cyberspace. Many professors teach online and give private classes by Skype, offering courses in coaching (life coaching for instance), or they teach as university professors or as members of numerous educational institutions, (offering diplomas too) – *Coursera*, with its 33

million registered learners being perhaps the biggest.[10] Students are free to choose innumerable lectures and courses, for example on YouTube, very often for free. Libraries, another important attribute of the university, evolve spectacularly: millions of pdfs, e-books, blog-posts, and so on, are accessible from laptops, Kindles, or Smartphones at any moment and for free. On the other hand, professors do not need to wait years to publish their paper books or journal articles as has frequently been the case. Instead, they can publish digital versions of their texts, of whatever length, overnight in their blogs and personal websites or simply distribute these texts by emails to their colleagues, students, and anybody interested. College classrooms can easily be exchanged for home or cafeteria in the e-teaching/e-learning system that uses Skype, Zoom or other modes. Conferences can be easily converted into Webinars or online seminars, making these meetings free from any concern about money, travel, hotels, time, and geographical location of the participants. Similarly, social recognition, job offerings, publishing houses, ethos, and others are more and more becoming a strong part of DC. Now what, in this new context, should be the role of philosophers – most of whom have been loyal to the traditional text-based and classroom-based intellectual activity?

The first question is whether philosophers should creatively use available digital tools to be actively present in cyberspace so as to *shape* its content in some of its segments so that we could talk about a culture-related activity? Or, at least should they want to try to do it and have an intention to make a slight difference in the character of the thoughts and ideas to be had in DC? If so they would have to learn, among other things, some new ways of communication and to be able to use basic technological tools that would enable them to evoke and promote their messages. It would involve, say, the ability to record a clip, make a podcast, write a blog-post, and similar. Many of our colleague-philosophers perform this or that form already with a various spectrum of tools.

The crucial issue here is, and this is my main idea for the present text, that learning how to use these tools and, indeed, using them would supposedly modify the textual culture in which most of the philosophers have been saturated so deeply till now. By the term "textual culture" I understand the culture whose primary way of communication and basic reference source for everybody involved, is a written text (or rather hundreds of written texts). However, many parts of the Internet that impact communication have a visual character, not textual, and therefore the philosophers willing to participate in the virtual world more actively should embrace the visual dimension of their communication too. Before I explain the visual character of DC communication, let me discuss a no less important feature of using the Internet, the so-called *90-9-1 rule*.

According to the *90-9-1 rule*, approximately 90% of the users of the Internet are passive lurkers who make no contribution to the cultural context of what they see on the Internet. Next, approximately 9% of the participants sparingly contribute to the content, mainly by occasionally commenting on some issues on a forum, posting a blog-post, sending a photo on FB, recording a clip on YouTube, and/or doing other minor activities or not doing anything else. It is only approximately 1% of all the Internet participants, sometimes called *super-rusers*, who create the cultural content and it is thanks to them that we see what we see on the screen of our computer, laptop, or Smartphone as far as the cultural impact is concerned.[11] In many more specific segments of the virtual world, the rate is even lower; Wikipedia, which in 2018 was the fifth most visited webpage in the world with over 18 billion page views per month,[12] is co-created (according to data from 2006) by much less than 1% of participants, namely by 0.003% of participants.[13] This type of rating needs discussion. On the one

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10) High, "From Founding CEO."

11) van Mierlo, "The 1% Rule."

12) Otechworld, "Top 15 Most Popular Websites."

13) Nielsen, "The 90-9-1 Rule."

hand, cyberspace is very democratic; everybody can have access to any segment of the Internet content, to get at any platform, to do it at any time and almost for free.

On the other hand, however, cyberspace is highly undemocratic because only more or less 1% of creator-superusers practically decide what 99% of other participants can see, listen, think, dream of, discuss, and refer to: "Superusers generate the vast majority of traffic and create value, so their recruitment and retention is imperative for long-term success. Although Lurkers may benefit from observing interactions between Superusers and Contributors, they generate limited or no network value."[14] Practically speaking, the superusers have a monopoly in shaping the cultural content of cyberspace. This may suggest to most of the participants (that is, to Lurkers and Contributors) that the world being depicted on the Internet by those superusers has a representative character and presents reality as it is. This graphic inequality of participation in this seemingly open and free form of culture causes concerns of various sorts. Also, it is a challenge and philosophers (and others) who are concerned about values in DC should want to co-create its content, its values, and its points of reference when possible. I do not have any illusions as to the role of philosophers, especially since there are many other superusers, and the strongest – like international corporations, such as Google or China's government, which makes the Chinese state itself a superuser of some sort – will make a much bigger impact. Yet philosophy and the humanities, at least in Western culture, have always had something important to say and this should be cultivated in new conditions. These new technological conditions require modified modes of communication.

I think that it is vital that philosophers, and more broadly, humanists – at least some of them – should be among those superusers rather than among passive participants that only use and/or share the already existing digital materials – be it pdfs or YT clips or whatever else. And I am not talking about the technological or software sort of activity that requires a sort of technological training. I am talking exclusively about the philosopher, a stoic pragmatist-type of philosopher for example, whose activity includes philosophy, self-development, culture, education, humanities, and socio-political issues. It is for this reason that I propose to use a modified definition of DC, already mentioned: I repeat – *an array of practices that explore digital tools to make philosophical messages be recognized by wide audiences.* This definition stresses a couple of things. First, it stresses the role of *practices* that will enable the philosophers-superusers to produce material and introduce it into cyberspace. It refers not only to the technical or technological dimension of the DC-related activities but also, even more importantly, it refers to the social practice that is essential to such philosophical traditions as pragmatism (and possibly some others) with its focus on practical action of a given individual for the sake of social amelioration. Namely, among the new practices that philosopher *should* want to execute are those that intend to shape DC according to some standards of values.

Second, this definition stresses the role of *recognition* of the message by the target audience. Just putting the material into cyberspace can hardly make any difference since we have an ocean of materials already existing. Publishing a text on a personal website may result in nothing more than a short-time action and even shorter-time reaction of the viewers; the very text and its ideas remaining unseen by a larger public and having no impact whatsoever on any segment of DC. The same problem arises with putting a video-recording of a lecture performed in a classroom or an interview made at a conference. And these are mutually related because the recognition of the philosophical message is related to the philosopher's recognition of the public to which the message is directed and the way of communication in which this message is performed. If a philosopher writes a text to a very specific audience (usually his or her students and colleagues), even about the most important social affairs, most probably this text will have a very limited circulation and will not make any difference to

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14) van Mierlo, "The 1% Rule."

other audiences. This is because, among many other reasons, this very target audience has a limited impact on culture in general. This has a close connection with the final point.

Finally, the proposed definition stresses the role of *target audiences,* which are various and specific groups of receivers of the material: receivers having various types of imagination, different communication skills, as well as sundry expectations and needs that ought to be addressed. Pragmatists should be especially predisposed to recognize the communication needs and expectations of various audiences given pragmatists' focus on anti-essentialism, pluralism, toleration, and contextualization. The biggest challenge here is that there are many target audiences and the modes of communication differ from target audience to target audience. Many non-academic audiences are non-textual-culture oriented and they understand communication best when visual elements of certain sorts play the central role. This happens in the case of a massive audience and, in my view, philosophers have to take it into consideration.

Images, Visual Culture, and the Aestheticization of the Ethical Message

The growing role of omnipresent images in commercials, films, and TV, is not something new. The cinema and TV have had a tremendous role in promoting pictorial communication globally in the twentieth century. After all, many deep socio-political changes in the US in the late 1960s took place when American massive viewers could see on American TV American soldiers being killed in Vietnam. One can wonder if these socio-political changes would have been possible without television images of what was going on with young American boys in the battle arena far away from home.

DC develops this pictorial tendency and many examples of public discussions on the Internet show the role of images on many occasions. These occasions sometimes embrace ethical and philosophical themes like abortion, the dignity of refugees, patriotism versus nationalism, and many others. Given a particular context one can ask: "Does not the anti-abortion discourse, frequently referring to 'evil' and 'negative value/s,' gain so much among so many audiences when its proponents use X-ray images of the fetus as a part of their story?" And, on the other hand, are their pro-abortion opponents much more persuasive when their narratives (frequently referring to "freedom," "non-suffering," and other "positive values") use the images of deformed newborns with terrible-looking physical birth defects and expect a sort of a shock effect at least in some audiences? Do TV scenes not play a big role in the discussion about the refugees and do not these scenes (for example, a dead baby boy on a beach for one party and, for the other, terrorist attacks by Muslim immigrants) rather than mere arguments matter in public life – the political elections included? Are not the discourses on nationalisms and anti-nationalisms strengthened by symbols and well-arranged visual images that appeal to the senses and the imagination of many audiences in a strong way? Is it not the case that even when the disputants themselves avoid using images a growing majority of the public have them already in their minds and very often react to these images no less than to the argumentation that they hear – if they hear it at all?

So, if we agree with Nicholas Rescher, that the cardinal rule of pragmatic rationality is to "Proceed in a manner that is optimally efficient and effective in realizing the purposes at hand,"[15] my question then becomes as follows: do not more *attractive*, *clearer* and more *inspirational* discourses make for more "efficient and effective" realizations of "the purposes at hand" in communication with some types of target audiences, especially non-academic and non-intellectual? Those contemporary pragmatists who want to use the legacy of the great classical pragmatists, while also looking for future challenges with the help of their ideas, should try to respond to this.

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15) Rescher, *Value Matters*, 95.

There are many studies of Internet content that analyze the role of images in promoting texts and textual messages. For example, people following directions with text and illustrations do 323% better than people following directions without illustrations; tweets with images receive 150% more retweets than tweets without images; in an analysis of over 1 million articles, BuzzSumo found that articles with an image once every 75–100 words received double the social media shares as articles with fewer images.[16] The challenge for philosophers that emerges out of such studies, in my view, is the need to link *the message on ethical values* with *the aesthetic values of the narratives within them*. If philosophers want to have a say on the important issues of the day – and this includes values, culture, and education – they should pay much more attention to the aesthetic dimension of their message, which is directed to various audiences with their various sensitivities to pictorial communication. I do not want the reader to think that I want to promote psychological impact on the viewers or the superficial effects that can be acceptable for the massive audience. At stake is the rational means by which the debate concerning values should be conducted.

The Main Thesis of the Present Paper

Having said all this, my main claim here is: *in order to face the challenges of digital culture more effectively it is quite necessary to refer to aesthetic values* (e.g. clarity, simplicity, style, attractiveness, excellence, uniqueness, originality, stimulation, inspiration, provocation/shock, or elegance/gentleness, and many others) *by means of aesthetic modes of expression* (textual, oral, pictorial, visual, cinematic, combined) *in the narratives that deal with ethical values, be they social or individual.*

Many philosophical narratives about ethics already involve some aesthetic and visual (and rhetorical) factors; Plato's Allegory of the Cave is one of the best examples. By using and evoking such visual factors the author of narratives pregnant with those pictorial factors can modify the whole communication about a given ethical issue to a given target audience. I would even dare to ask if merely talking about Plato's ideas, that is, without visualizing them at the same time, does not deprive Plato's message of its hidden visual dimension – and if sticking to a merely textual (and/or oral) message is not incomplete. The same refers to many other thinkers and their style of philosophical narrative; for example, George Santayana's works have been described as impressionistic[17] as if full of photographic images taken from a certain perspective yet rendered by textual modes of expression.

Selected Practices for Philosophers' Visual Presence in the Digital World

The Internet offers a tremendous amount of various possibilities of practices for individual philosophers (apart from institutions with their IT experts, as mentioned above) and the number of modes is rapidly growing. It is impossible to discuss all of them in one place. Below, I propose some selected visual-presence-oriented practices that explore digital tools to make philosophical narratives recognizable and seen as attractive by various target audiences. Each of these practices can be done and developed separately, yet some, and even all of them can be combined and practiced altogether. Let me repeat: this is not a full list of such practices; rather, I want to indicate the most popular and, at the same time, the easiest for a philosophically (not technically) trained humanist. The judgment as to the ease and popularity is exclusively mine although there are some objective criteria, for example the number of entries and commentaries. While collecting this material I relied, to some

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16) Mawhinney, "45 Visual Content Marketing Statistics."

17) Beltrán, *Celebrar el mundo,* 28, 143; Skowroński, *Beyond Aesthetics and Politics*, 25–27.

degree, on my personal experience as a blogger, online speaker, online life-coach, video-clip maker, Zoom webinar-maker, podcaster, e-teaching instructor, and regular university professor who extensively uses digital tools in the process of teaching. Needless to say, there can surely be other viewpoints of other philosophers who practice such types of activity.

One more remark: I follow John Lachs's stoic pragmatist claim to abandon "the research/discovery paradigm of philosophy,"[18] at least at this place, and do not present these practices as methodologically efficient ways to accumulate knowledge, although this is not excluded. In the first place, however, these practices form modes of communication for philosophers with various audiences so as to be able to have an impact upon the content of DC and on its participants. Not only this.

The growing role of algorithms and other forms of "mechanical" and "a-human" ways of communication on the Internet and elsewhere needs, even more, the growing role of human communication if not a face-to-face interaction. I do not want to deny that "No object or algorithm is ever either good or evil in itself. It's how they're used that matters. GPS was invented to launch nuclear missiles and now helps deliver pizzas."[19] Yet, personal, individual, and human practices must be promoted in DC, and the humanization of this highly mechanical ambience is one of the serious reasons. This is why I do not analyze collective impact on DC, and by this I mean such institutions as universities and colleges (with their own IT centers), NEH-like institutions, Academia. edu-like institutions, foundations, research centers, philosophical societies, political parties, groups, and initiatives, NGO's, and many others. Here are the selected practices.

1. *Video-Image of a Good Speaker in Action*. A philosopher himself or herself is presenting a philosophical message in a video-clip, as being interviewed, lecturing, or presenting the material to a particular audience on a particular occasion. The living image of his or her figure, along with gesticulation, facial expressions, voice modulation, and some attributes that can be used (books in the background, fragments of texts visible on the screen, etc.) are important parts of the show. At the same time, good oral skills would be necessary along with such aesthetic qualities as the clarity of speech, attractiveness of the topic to a given audience, and the inspirational character of the talk. The living image of the speaker strengthens his or her reliability, and therefore, the image of a philosopher in action is the main issue here. The most popular platform to do it would probably be YouTube, the second most visited website in the world.[20] Successful examples of professional philosophers exercising this form of practice are, among many others: Bogusław Wolniewicz (Elzenberg's former student) in Poland, Cornel West (pragmatist) in the US, Slavoy Žižek (Slovenian yet recognized globally), Fernando Savater in Spain (especially his series *Aventura del pensamiento*), and Darío Sztanjnszrajber in Argentina. The first, despite the fact that his audience is much more limited than the others' for his use of a language that does not have a global range (Polish), some of his numerous, half-an-hour-long clips have gained much popularity among wider audiences, reaching eighty thousand plus entries and thousands of comments, and this despite not abandoning a philosophical, ethical, rational, and intellectual character in his video messages.

2. *Images Showing Authorship of Ideas, Texts, Books, Projects, Debates, and Attitudes*. A philosopher himself or herself can visualize his or her work by showing its many aspects at various stages of its creation and in various contexts. Such an approach toward the process of creation of philosophical work would be against the

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18) Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism*, 21.
19) Fry, *Hello World*, 3.
20) Otechworld, "Top 15 Most Popular Websites."

traditional way of doing philosophy, wherein only the final result – namely, an officially published text (book) – has a meaning that deserves discussion, criticism, review, and references. Here, a website, a blog, a vlog, a FB page, Instagram, YT channel, and similar could be appropriate places to offer pieces of texts, along with some photos, videos, graphs, webinars, exchange of discussions and comments, and so on. What can be achieved by this form of presentation is a better and more direct insight into the authorship of the project, particular people and places that are relevant to the project, its expected impact on a given community, a possible debate about some fragments of the text, the controversies around the particular stages of its development, a talk about an attitude toward particular ideas that seem crucial, an explication of its historical background, explanation of the significance of the work to particular audiences, and much more. The main idea here is to complement the work (a text and the ideas behind it) by the images that help the audience have a (better) sense of the meaning of the philosophical work and its possible impact upon social and/or individual life.

3. *Commoning Visualized by Webinar, Video-interviews, Conference-recording, and so forth.* The term *commoning* refers to cooperative activities of various people aiming at producing common good to be accessed and used for free. Here, using the term *commoning* stresses the continuity of the process of creation of a common good by a group of people. Although the term was popularized by a book dedicated to history (Linebaugh's *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*) it has recently gained significance in the digital context and can be, I think, applied to DC. For example, *Wikipedia*, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* are seen as results of this type of activity: they are being prepared by a host of people and the present editions are (the future editions will be) a common good to be used by those who are/will be interested without any financial cost. This collective process of preparing something that can serve the public (both specific audiences and general audiences) is to be shown on the video, photos, images, and so forth; and would include the work of the agents (philosophers), their relations, interactions during the whole process and many other aspects. All this effort is to present the work of philosophers and the way they achieve results that are important to the public rather than keeping this whole process hidden in a closed circle of insiders – as it has usually been till nowadays.

4. *Visualized Story-telling (e.g. in Film) about Ideas, Issues, (Your) Texts, and Thinkers.* Story-telling is originally a part of the oral culture, yet its visualization can assume a very distinct character. The main ability of story-telling is to create and perform stories (plots) that have some common characteristics with novels, screenplays, movies, and the like. Various stages of sophistication can be had here starting with a philosopher who is telling us a story about a given idea or a figure through a group of philosophers that tell us – as it was the case of Phillip McReynold's *American Philosopher* (2013) that can be seen on YT – a story about American pragmatism, ending with more elaborate productions. As already mentioned, such story-telling about philosophical issues, ideas, lifestyles, meaning, and so forth, resembles, at some points, the ability to create literary works, cinematic works, fairy tales, and the narrative arts in general – and can become a very useful tool in biographical narratives that describe philosophers' lives in an especially attractive way. Story-telling offers many possibilities for using various rhetorical devices and persuasive techniques which can be instrumental in reaching wider audiences: a specific type of words, figures of speech, comparisons, metaphors, references, and so forth.

5. *Text Decorated with Related Images, Graphs, and so forth.* As already mentioned, a text that includes relevant illustrations gains more readability than the very same text without relevant illustrations. By a "relevant illustration" I mean one that has a direct connection with the text, not an accidental one. It seems necessary for

an author to have a good recognition of what is a relevant illustration and what is not relevant. For example, a photo of a discussed philosopher is definitely a relevant illustration, and a photo of a man or a group of people unrelated to the text is not relevant. A graph that visualizes the issue discussed in the text and, in fact, explaining or showing a part of its content, is relevant; a graph that explains hardly anything is not relevant. Visual rhetoric would be the area of competence that has to be consulted by the author wanting to obtain good results. A popular example for using relevant images of various sorts can be entries of Wikipedia, where the photos and graphs illustrate the content in an explanatory way and must have contributed to its popularity as the fifth most popular website of the world.[21]

6. *Simplification of the Written Text Used to Make It More Attractive to Wider Audiences.* A text written to the academic, high-literary-culture audience must have a very different form than a text written to other audiences – for example on a blog that popularly discusses philosophical topics. The length of the sentence, the use of words, phrases, metaphors, and similar things must vary considerably. This difference can be dealt with when we use, for example, Hemingway Editor application (in English). This free online editing tool will check any part of a written text for its readability by this type of general audience, who tend to read bestsellers. Indeed, the creation of the Editor was based on the analysis of the language and phrases in recently best-selling novels. The Editor will indicate which parts of the pasted text are unacceptable or difficult to read and understand by wider audiences and suggests corrections. Thanks to this digital tool we can see which parts of the text need simplification or modification and make the text more attractive to broader audiences yet without distorting the meaning of the message.

7. *Visualization as Creating an Image to Communicate a Message.* There have been very many attempts to visualize philosophical concepts and many of these attempts were performed by painters long before computers appeared. Some vanguard artists of the early twentieth century commonly referred to philosophical ideas as if to express clearly a substantial correspondence between the textual language of philosophy and the visual language of the fine arts. For example, a Polish philosopher-logician and painter, Leon Chwistek (1884–1944) intended to philosophically argue and, at the same time, artistically demonstrate his idea of the multiplicity of realities. Contemporary computer graphics offer more complex, faster, and more shareable possibilities in linking textual ideas and their visual representations. There are interesting examples already: Maria Popova's *Visual Dictionary of Philosophy* or the *Philographics Project* that can be reached at Studiocarreras.com. These and similar visualizations can help philosophers render their ideas through pictorial discourse or help them better explain their textual message.

8. *Showing a More Practical Approach rather than Theoretical.* Showing a practical approach toward philosophical issues is one of the main differences in communication between academic and scientific audiences in philosophy (which are theory-oriented) and other types of audiences. Philosophical modes of communication, especially in the time of positivism's and later analytic philosophy's domination, have dramatically separated themselves from wider audiences as already mentioned. Despite some notable theoretical achievements of these movements, the impracticality of philosophical deliberations has continued to be proverbial and the hiatus between philosophy departments and the outer world has become even bigger. This is one of the most serious obstacles that philosophers have to deal with now, and the Internet, with approximately two billion users, is a great opportunity that should be taken on.

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21) Ibid.

9. *Looking for Inspiration in Religious Painting.* According to some interpretations, Richard Rorty's criticism of ecclesiastical institutions was based upon an assumption that "religion is *essentially* a conversation-stopper."[22] Rorty thought about difficult conversation between a religious dogmatist and a liberal democrat (and he was right at this point, I think), yet he did not think about a highly elaborate set of pictorial discourses including visual language of religious art that religion (and theology) has produced throughout the ages – at least in the West. Why has philosophy not been able, with some exceptions, to produce similar effects? I mean, why has philosophical wisdom not been so effectively demonstrated by plastic arts (although it has been very successfully rendered by literature)? One possible answer would be that the textual and intellectual character of philosophical reflection reduces the possibility of converting it into a visual language. Since this answer is not convincing to me, because the Allegory of the Cave and other examples clearly show that some philosophical ideas can be visualized perfectly well, I propose another answer. Religion had a sense of mission directed to all audiences, even the illiterate (*Biblia pauperum*), and it was necessary for religious authors of whatever sort to invent and promote the way of communication that would be understood by all recipients of a religious and theological message. Whereas philosophy, most of its time, has been directed either to academic, high-culture, intellectualist, or elitist audiences and did not have to be rendered or interpreted by artistic images. To put it more simply, because philosophers, with some notable exceptions, tended to direct their message to the elite and not to wider audiences, they used the language of the elite. If my answer has some sense, the main obstacle for philosophers to communicate well with non-philosophers would be their (philosophers') effort, or rather a lack of effort, to reach given target audiences rather than the intellectual and speculative character of the philosophical message and its inconvertibility into a pictorial discourse.

10. *Some Examples of Ineffective Visualizations.* The present paper does not suggest that each and every philosophical or ethical message can be successfully converted into an image or a visualization; nor does it suggest that all those messages that have been successfully visualized for a given target audience, will be equally recognized successfully or adequately understood by another target audience. Similarly, putting a philosophically sophisticated paper into a blog does not mean at all that it will gain popularity and/or that it will have any impact upon anything other than just evoking some attention among the blog readers. Therefore, if a given philosopher video-records his or her lecture and puts it on YouTube, it does not mean that this recording will be seen by anybody except his or her target audience. A proper recognition of the target audience as well as the possibility of reaching a wider audiences must be assisted by additional yet essential factors, such as a systematic way of presenting material, ability to position the material in Google (SEO) – the most visited website in the world[23] – and many other factors.

Side-Effects: Methodological Reliability of the Aestheticization and Visualization in Question

There are possible side-effects of the implementation of these practices that must be discussed here, very briefly though. The visualization and aestheticization as such do not result in methodological reliability in presenting a given idea or message, although their potential to do so is significant. There were many attempts in the history of philosophy to literary aestheticize philosophical ideas to make them clearer without risking the distortion of their substantial contents. For example, one hundred years ago Wilhelm Windelband put a strong emphasis on what he "considered the truth," namely that, "it is not so much the difficulty of philosophy as the poor literary

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22) Stout, "Rorty on Religion and Politics," 536.
23) Otechworld, "Top 15 Most Popular Websites."

standard of philosophical writers which perplexes the student." Hence, he continues, philosophers ought to, among other things, pay more attention to "the finer quality of the artistic expression"[24] of their works and ideas to make these works and ideas more pronounced. The pictorial dimension of philosophical texts has been discussed on the occasion of so-called *cinematic philosophy*. Here, Stanley Cavell articulated his view in a definite way: "My question is not why film should or could be of interest and service to humanists or to intellectuals at large, but how it comes to pass that it is *not* generally found inescapably interesting, a necessary subject of speculation, to any humanist writer and scholar to whom art and America and his or her past is of interest."[25]

The Internet, however, offers many more various modes of presenting material than a film, novel, or painting, and doubts about the coherence of those modes seem to be justified. For example, it is not so clear if presenting visual material (for example a photo) on, say, Instagram or by means of, say, memes, or by a clip on YouTube can correspond to each other and to the *basic* textual message that a given philosopher wants to expand by those other modes of communication. There can be methodological concerns if these all complement each other at all. Specifically, we do not have a clear and systematic methodology of traditional aesthetic and/or artistic performance; nor do we have a specific methodology for each particular mode of communication, say, Instagram. This doubt may lead to a claim that a lack of universal modes of aesthetic expression prevents us from offering the audience an objective message which refers to universal moral values. In other words, the incommensurability of discourses that are expressible by various virtual modes and platforms will make a given idea or ethical message vulnerable to misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and abuse. Even more, the growing pluralism of modes and platforms may cause multiplication of world versions presented as real so that the viewers will have a sense of cognitive disorientation as to what is factually being communicated to them.

My comment on this is the following. Philosophy has always been strong by asking universal questions – about the human condition in the first place – yet, the answers proposed have been local, temporary, and changing. We can evoke Lachs once again, this time claiming that philosophical deliberations as such are predominantly inconclusive: "There is not a single proposition of philosophical substance on which professional thinkers agree, and it is highly unlikely that such a proposition will surface anytime soon."[26] The types of philosophy to which I am referring in the present text are not science-oriented; hence accumulation of knowledge is not the main concern here nor is methodological rigor and argumentative coherence. The main concern, instead, is the efficiency of the communication about the quality of life, the meaningfulness of life, and satisfaction with it. It may appear, however, that the cost of the effectiveness of communication which is reaching given target audiences, will be the ineffectiveness of transmitting a coherent message by various platforms.

Conclusion

I would be more concerned about another possible criticism of the practices of visualization and aestheticization, and that is the danger of tabloidization of a philosophical message and the banalization of ideas. Nevertheless, I think this danger is unavoidable and it takes place all the time. Philosophical ideas have been used and abused – religiously, economically, and politically – independently of the historical epoch and of the type of media: textual, oral, visual, or digital. On the other hand, what looks banal to professional philosopher may look fresh, inspirational, and encouraging to regular people who do not have much access to philosophical discussion. The commercial success of coaching (life coaching for instance) lies at least partially in transferring

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24) Windelband, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 15–16.

25) Cavell, "What (Good) Is a Film Museum?" 107.

26) Lachs, *Freedom and Limits*, 289.

complex ideas discussed in closed circles of professional philosophers at universities into "trivial" yet practical and basic forms of ordinary experience. From this viewpoint, simplification and clarification of philosophical ideas may have positive results. Having said that, I do claim at the same time that philosophers should try to do all that is possible to become the 1% group of superusers that would be able to propose quality content in DC by establishing some visible points of reference that would be attractive to a wider spectrum of participants in cyberspace. Let me conclude by evoking my hope, and I will do it using Lachs's words, taken from his *Stoic Pragmatism*: "There is a large public waiting anxiously for what philosophy can offer – for careful thinking, clear vision, and the intelligent examination of our values. That is where the future of philosophy lies."[27]

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27) Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism*, 193.

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