

Multimedia approach to social research

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- **Statements**

“The most logical of the aesthetes of the nineteenth century, Mallarmé, used to say that everything exists to finish in a book. Today everything exists to finish in a photograph” (S. Sontag, 1978).

Today the production of images and of everything related to them (machines, technological development, professional skills and strategies of communication) is, without any doubt, an extremely wide and spread, and I would say “inflated”, activity. Susan Sontag, not a long ago, said on this situation that today we photograph everything, without sparing or worrying too much. Actually we can affirm that we live in the Age of Image.

“The X-rays, the photos of the star radiations taken by Hubble, the electronic microscope, the images coming from the artificial satellites, the optical-fibres, the fiber optical microcameras in the human body, the radar, the echography- are just some of the possibilities offered by new technologies, that allow us, says this author, to make the invisible visible- ...one of the firsts to pay attention to these developments has been Heidegger, who speaks about the birth of the image-world: “ *the image of the world (...) so doesn't mean a representation of the world, but the world devised as an image (...) it's not that the image of the world of the Middle Ages becomes modern; but it's the constitution of the world as an image that distinguishes and characterizes the modern world*”.

(Luigi Ciorciolini on <http://www.lacritica.net/ciorciolini2.htm>)

One of the consequences of this situation, in sociological terms, is that the language is going through a radical change, the frequency of young people with a low dialectic ability or, even more frequent, difficulties in writing, can be reasonably considered an index of this “revolution” .

I cite Ciorciolini again:

“Everybody who takes a car ride in any city, can perfectly understand this passage: his advancing in the traffic jam depends on a series of visual and audible judgements concerning the speed of the other vehicles, the mood of the drivers following him, the capacity of calculating the trajectories of scooters and pedestrians, the new limits of human cynicism represented by taxi-drivers.

At the same moment our driver is reached by other information: traffic-lights, water temperature, oil and gas gauges, other signals, light and sonorous, on the state of the direction indicator, road signs giving precepts, exhortative, obsolete, advertising, indications of the price of fuel, shops signs, local time and temperature, mobile phones...since this process of decoding and learning it's considered boring, it is usually added a soundtrack managed by light signals indicating the transmitting station or the selected passage.

It becomes difficult to propose to our driver colleague western culture which has always privileged the spoken and written language as the highest form of the intellectual work, relegating the visual representations to the role of low, literally second hand, explanations of the world of ideas. But, on the other hand, I can't not privilege the daily experience of thinking. Let's come to the facts: in an vision of the world more illustrated than written, our being here derives from the different ways in which we can realize our *being spectators* (watching, fixed view, rapid view, practices of observation, surveillance and level of the critical limit, visual pleasure, staying still or moving, having or not having the possibility to interact and intervene in the world-show”.

(Luigi Ciorciolini on <http://www.lacritica.net/ciorciolini2.htm>)

The world and its representation, made by common people, is quickly sliding, towards a linguistic of images that often underrates the problems that iconography brings, especially when it is not studied and developed properly, as an alternative technique of communication, different, both for the one who has the role of the issuer and for the one who

receives the information.

In this brief essay, after a short thought on the general consequences of this cultural trend, I would like to focus the discussion on the advantages we can obtain in adopting a methodology of research, and of teaching, that makes a wide use of audio-visual applications and multimedial technologies. Then I would dwell upon the development of the visual sociology in the last years, and upon my personal experience in this field. The attempt is to outline a sort of summary in order to expose, on one hand, the advantages already reached and, on the other, the problems that still have to be solved in the relation between individual interations, ways of communication and developing and diffusion of knowledge.