

## **Critical Literacies, Meaning Making and New Epistemological Perspectives**

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This article presents a research analysis in which Brazilian university students were the subjects of research in regard to their reading of cinema images. The analysis discusses the way the meanings are constructed by these students and reflects on interpretation and meaning construction in accordance with new epistemological perspectives that have been postulated recently (Morin, 1998; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). It, thus, considers the present needs of the multimodal and hypertextual communication approached in the multiliteracy studies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), and the university preparation for a critical and participative cultural and social practice (Castells, 1999).

**Key words:** Meaning making, critical literacy, digital epistemologies

Este artículo presenta un análisis investigativo en el cual alumnos de una universidad brasileña fueron entrevistados sobre sus lecturas de imágenes de cine. El análisis discute la manera en que los significados son construidos por estos alumnos y reflexiona sobre la interpretación y la construcción de los mismos, según la nueva perspectiva epistemológica que ha sido postulada recientemente (Morin 1998; Lankshear & Knobel 2003). Considera las necesidades presentes de la comunicación multimodal e hipertextual imbuída en los estudios de multiletramento (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), como así también la preparación universitaria para una práctica social crítica y participativa (Castels, 1999).

**Palabras Clave:** Creación de significados, lecto-escritura crítica, epistemologías digitales

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## **Introduction**

This article presents an investigation that is part of a broader exploratory research project<sup>i</sup> that aims at knowing about the impact of digital language on Brazilian university students. The research is related to interpretation and epistemology, considering that it proposes 1) to investigate students' ability to make meaning in digital environments (Internet and movies) and 2) to observe their knowledge construction in these environments. For such intent, a series of qualitative investigations of ethnographic characteristics, has been designed for accomplishing systematic research of university classroom practices that could show the researcher (and her group of researchers) traces about Brazilian university students' learnings and familiarity with critical literacy, according to the new literacies and multiliteracies theories. The researcher of this investigation is also the article's author who expects that the article may generate discussion towards the adequacy or the necessary changes in university curriculum, considering that this research outcome complements the analysis of two other related investigations that have already been published.<sup>ii</sup>

## **Research Methodology**

The investigation presented in this paper follows an exploratory and qualitative research orientation in accordance with research methodologies described by André (1995), a Brazilian methodologist who emphasizes the need for ethnographic perspective in the analysis of local studies about environments, participants and cultures. It is an exploratory investigation considering that it plans to allow the exploration of data that would not conventionally compose the same research *corpus*, in this case, chat-room users that would then be categorized as actors of earlier forms of social networking (letter-writing; book clubs; telephoning) and movie viewers that would be in the same category of computer game players, for instance, in an attempt to know the intertwining of a new assembly of practices and knowledge, epistemologically thinking. The investigation is also qualitative, considering that its analysis represents the researcher's theoretical reference, values and view of the world, conferring a qualitative dimension to the investigation itself, as claimed by André.

The investigation required that participants be chat-room users, planning to count on their perceptions about the elements (participants, nicknames, encounters, disruptions, treatments) and play of structures (committed / uncommitted relationships, entertaining / misleading / committed conversation, veiled / unveiled feelings, constructed / deconstructed / reconstructed narratives, plural identities) that build chat-room discourse. Thirty-four university-level students participated in the investigation: aged 21-25 years old, all of them coincidentally being female (it was not a requirement for being part of the investigated group). They were explained that the process consisted of seeing a movie, writing the description of their views on certain aspects of the film, and taking part of a collective interview. The option for the two research tools—the written description and the collective interview—lies in the fact that the former should provide written individual reports of the students' perspectives about the movie that they would be shown; the latter should clarify and complement information that could be necessary for data analysis. In the sequence, the participants were shown a movie and then described the aspects to which they were guided. The collective interview sought for more clarifications about some of the written descriptions that showed relevance to the research itself. The choice for adopting these research instruments is due to the concern that new knowledge—such as the one that has been generated by digital language—naturally raises new epistemological studies. In these studies, the research methodologies were expected to show congruence with the theories of the focused knowledge.

It should be noted that the new literacies studies as well as researches on this theme are in a starting phase in Brazil, demanding a wide range of surveys and researches about a broad spectrum of issues related to the topic, different from other countries that may already count on available research and analysis of their literacy education. It should also be observed that despite using the theoretical reference that is shared by researchers in various countries, this investigation evidences its social and cultural construction, as one would probably expect. That means, it may show Brazilian characteristics in which participants (university students that are chat room users), environments and processes reveal their own social and cultural construction.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The outcome shown in the present paper focuses on an epistemological concern: understanding the relationship between the *network mind* and the *typographic mind* (Castells, 1999), considering that the interlocutors' perception may benefit from the enhancement that is likely to be promoted by their dealing with the internet. Castells notes a difference between the “typographic mind” and the “network mind” produced in different social and historic moments of societies, being the first the one that resembles the typographic-produced text, the result of a linear and conventional education, and the second the result of a non-linear and networklike reasoning and epistemology that is observed in the digital societies. This investigation, therefore, observes whether an “ability”, which is developed with the aid of this new medium, is transferred to another environment that does not necessarily or apparently require *mind networking*. This proposal searches for expanding views on “digital epistemologies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) under the premise that the *stability in the rules of the game as the norm* represents conventional epistemology built on *propositional knowledge of what already exists*, which sounds inadequate to explain language and discourse in contemporary society, as it is adverted by the cited authors. They assert: *Rethinking epistemology in a digital age might involve thinking of it as practices of knowing that reflect a range of strategies for assembling, editing, processing, receiving, sending, and working on information and data to transform diverse resources of 'digitalia' into 'things that work* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 173).

With such concern in mind, this investigation is interested in describing university-level students' *meaning making in terms of a 'performance epistemology'*, when the investigated are both chat-room users and movie viewers, verifying the interweaving of experiences between the two media. Lankshear & Knobel (2003) see the notion of 'performance epistemology' as central in an *increasingly intensely digitized world* considering that it is related to *knowing how to proceed in the absence of existing models and exemplars* (p. 173), or knowing how to proceed in a quest for new meanings, a practice that may permit breaking rules and innovating. Besides the cited authors, this preoccupation about a renovated epistemology is shared by several other researchers, as seen in Cope & Kalantzis's acknowledgement of the inadequacy of conventional knowledge for the

practices and needs of a digital society: *The role of pedagogy is to develop an epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities. This has to be the basis of a new norm* (2000, p. 18). The authors acknowledge that a new view of society is emerging, that a view of mind, meaning, and society converges on a language of awareness of the socioculturally and sociohistorically workings that go beyond fixed patterns or standardizations and adopt plural values and perspectives.

The idea of pluralism is brought to the interpretation of data in this article under the premise that the new literacies studies allow and expect that knowledges that have conventionally and paradigmatically belonged to their proper and specific areas may now have a dialogical treatment in the analyses weaving. The theoretical frame in this article comes from critical literacy and digital epistemologies, both in the new literacies or multiliteracies studies, besides critical hermeneutics, in an attempt to go beyond a possible *cultural imprinting* that patterns or models the structures of people's cultural and social reading of their environments, as Morin (1998) critiques when alluding to conventional epistemologies. To this author, culture is imprinted when education provides each person with principles, rules and instruments of knowledge through language. Therefore, culture works on the spirit and mind, modeling their cognitive structures that co-produce knowledge. Understanding how culture and knowledge are constructed in the technologically influenced language of the digital societies gains relevance in the new literacies and multiliteracies studies, then.

### ***Critical Literacies, Images and Meaning Making***

The critical literacies studies have evidenced the relevance of an education that is engaged in “social change, cultural diversity, economic equity, and political enfranchisement”, as stated by Luke & Freebody (1997, p. 1), through “the technologies of writing and other modes of inscription”. The authors acknowledge that literacy education has made a difference in people's lives. Yet, they advocate that the traditional teaching of reading and writing does not cope with the contemporary needs of the digital societies. In addition, the authors report that over the last decades there has been great interest among

educators in critical literacy, although they have followed inadequate approaches in such a practice. This practice has shown itself to be connected to a traditional curricula as well as traditional educational approaches that would not favor the practice of a critical literacy, or critical literacies in the plural, considering the possibility of approaches and designs that respond to the local needs of educational projects. According to the perspective of critical education, the design of critical literacies projects should often address innovative proposals, such as cross-discipline ones, as a way to 1) respect the new ways of knowledge construction, as evidenced by researchers as Morin (1998; 2000), Lankshear & Knobel (2003) and 2) develop meaning making (Gee, 1997), a term that revisits the concept of reading and interpretation, reinforcing critique – according to which “meaning is not in the head, but in social practices; and that in acquiring social practices one gets 'deep' meanings 'free'” (Gee 1997, p. 274) – as a requisite of the reader to make meaning (or interpret) of the texts and contexts (in their various modalities of communication) with which they interact. For critical literacies then, meaning making becomes a fundamental ability to be considered in the new educational assumptions.

In this sense, the inclusion of movies for the purposes of meaning making seems to meet the objectives of a critical literacies project. The studies about images in academic research have received growing interest. Besides, images have undeniably had increasing participation in communication nowadays, thus acquiring high relevance in the language and discourse studies of schools and universities. The inclusion of movies in the critical literacies project allows the study and reading of images (meaning making) and, at the same time, allows the observation of the ways that this reading and knowledge are constructed (the epistemological focus of the study).

In terms of image, French movie director Carriere (1995) asserts that cinema has provided the greatest contribution to images development and its respective theories considering that as an art-form the image of cinema has developed more than that of any other media. Carriere explains that the images evolved from sequential, static takes to a process that allowed editing, assembling and the juxtaposition of scenes. Later, he adds, still points of view began to be introduced into the film image to guarantee particular

effects. The use of image effects evolved with the ever-growing availability of technical resources and became definitely independent or “mature” with the advent of video and computer-generated images. This assertion finds echoes in Manovich’s studies (2001, p. xiv-xxxix) of Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) in which Manovich recognizes the revolutionary seeds of digital cinema in Vertov’s avant-garde aesthetic strategies, since he claims: “The avant-garde strategy of collage reemerged as the ‘cut-and-paste’ command, the most basic operation one can perform on digital data. The idea of painting on film became embedded in paint functions of film-editing software. The avant-garde move to combine animation, printed texts, and live-action footage is repeated in the convergence of animation, title generation, paint, compositing, and editing systems into all-in-one packages”.

Manovich (2001, p. 9) then adds that computation “has redefined existing cultural forms, as photography and cinema”. As this author refers to cinema images, he emphasizes the role of special effects in the construction of the desired images by directors and producers. “Arranging physical reality to be filmed through the use of sets, models, art direction, cinematography, and so forth”, Manovich explains (op. cit., p. 303), has been replaced by “material that is manipulated on a computer, where the real construction of a scene will take place”. This author also affirms that there has been “a shift from rearranging reality to rearranging its images” (p. 303), which shows new ways of culture producing / knowledge generating and signals to new reflections in education.

Virillo's views on movie images (1994) corroborate the assertions developed by both Carriere and Manovich. Acknowledging the advent of technology as the responsible scaffold that has led to the paradigm shifts in the image-viewer interaction, Virillo uses the term *logics* when he describes the development of images. He identifies three logics in different socio-cultural periods in the Western history of man’s relationships with labor. Men’s imagination and the physical labor of their hands are embedded in the *formal logic* seen in the engravings, paintings and architecture of a period that ends in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the *dialectic logic* – stood by photography and cinema, arts that characterize the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the advent of industry, technology and machinery enables the production then, of

devices that capture images, extending human capacity by means of the camera lens in a dialectical, and thus intervening relationship between humans and the environment. In our present computerized society, the *logic of paradox* is the prevailing one and is represented in video, holography and computer-generated images, inventions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The last term alludes to the possibility provided by technology to merge the time in which the image is produced into the time that it is presented, destabilizing the certainties of ‘real time’ and ‘real space’ developed by the dialectic logic.

Although the way that Virillo describes his notions of logics may be seen as conventional classificatory knowledge, his perspective opportunizes expanding views about images within the epistemological perspective that is inherent in the socio-cultural development of images, which relates to hermeneutic studies as well. In Virillo's first notion of logics, engravings, paintings and architecture as artifacts required contemplation and elicited message or meaning *decoding*. In hermeneutic studies, *to decode* embedded a concept of interpretation in the early accounts of what *to interpret* signified, as Ricoeur (1977) explains. In dialectic logic, photography and video film disseminated the idea of factual evidence. Television and the printed press in their beginning stages used images as proof of the time and space of the reported occurrence. As television developed, it enhanced the credibility of the evidence that was desired to be conveyed by first diminishing the distance between image-capturing and image-releasing and later extinguishing this distance in live news reporting. The notion of evidence consolidated the principle of ‘seeing is believing’ that apparently dispensed interpretation. The meaning – of what was “true” or “false” – seemed to be anticipated by the spectator, considering that it followed a course of reasoning that would end up with the certainty about what was seen, raising recognition before the facts or identification with the narratives. In the logic of paradox of digital communication, however, image and discourse allow and require an active role in communication. Their interlocutor may as well be the *flâneur* that Manovich (2001) sees in an analogy to the present-day computer navigator, who is user and co-producer of his own discourse. The anonymous observer, as this author states, records and erases faces and figures of passersby as he meets a passing woman that raises more interest to his engaging in a virtual affair, until he meets the next interesting female passerby. It is



an allusion to the navigators' hypertext interactions in which they build their reading path according to their own interest. This apparent behavior of unfaithfulness, discontinuity, uncontrollability – attributes that would more likely match the parameters of, for instance, the *dialectic logic* user – actually characterizes the interaction of the navigator in the digital communication and environment, in which he makes choices and changes, intervenes and creates, for the sake of his participating and surviving in this new “milieu” or way of life, though in a society that is built differently from the one of the *flâneur* described by Manovich.

As for the hermeneutic perspective in meaning making, the hermeneutics theorized by Ricoeur (1977) provides the basis for the investigation analysis. Ricoeur identifies two major tendencies in the interpretations that permeate social discourse, and proposes a critical revision of the two tendencies that compose a socio-cultural interpretive cycle. The first tendency reflects the influence of religious values learned from biblical exegesis in which the interpretation of biblical passages was based on notions of analogy, allegory and symbolic meaning, which would connect the teachings of the sacred texts to everyday life. To Ricoeur, this interpretive practice went beyond the domain of religion, reaching other fields such as the reading of literature and even social living. The second tendency refers to the influence of traditions. The author observes that the hermeneutic practice based on the preservation of traditions from generation to generation has promoted effective teaching about the way that social occurrences, behaviors, thoughts, and discourses should be interpreted, creating interpretive patterns in society and helping to preserve values, morals, beliefs, and guide [as well as curb] social discourse and interpretation. Ricoeur sees limitations in both interpretive tendencies and explains that they confer authority to the writer of the text, as in religious influence, and do not consider the dynamic dialectics inherent in social living and discourse, as in traditional and fixed interpretive patterns, neglecting the reader, the locus of enunciation, besides social and cultural changes. Ricoeur, thus, proposes that a hermeneutics of suspicion may be more congruent with the exercise of interpretation, considering that it allows the interlocutors to question the meanings that are given by religious-oriented or tradition-oriented interpretive practices, and to build up their own contextualized and situated meanings. This is a practice that has

been identified as critical hermeneutics by academics due to the possibility that it raises for deconstructing and reconstructing meanings, a premise that is undertaken in the critical literacies projects. The above theoretical assumptions – critical literacies, the studies about images and meaning making – constitute the thread of analysis in the focused investigation.

### ***Performative Narratives and Performance Epistemology***

The phenomenon of online relationships through the use of chat-rooms and online dating—besides chat-rooms and chat lists with other characteristics—has been widely studied in its various aspects as discourse, narrative construction, psychological effects, cultural and social meanings. In Brazil a doctorate research project developed by Castro (2006) focuses on this type of chat-room for analyzing women’s narrative building in virtual relationships. The study identifies that this alternative choice of meeting people and making conversation virtually enables the emergence of “on-line personae” that search for virtual company and that allow themselves freedom of speech, imagination and narrative construction. The researcher uses the concept of *performativity* and states that it explains the female identity within the perspective of displacement, in which women allow leaving their own places / suspending their own identities (or *loci of identity*) for a while and wear any masks they wish in a way to interact with their virtual relationships, and by doing so, they construct their *performative narratives*. In this performance they play an identity of their own choice or creation to participate in the chat-rooms. In the environment of virtual intimacy, where the social masks are significantly reduced if compared to face-to-face communication, the on-line personae assume uncommitted and circumstantial existence, having freedom to act without the concerns and the expected sanctions of other conventional situations, as Castro depicts. Thus, the *mental representations* (or virtual images) in their narratives may be created infinitely. As can be observed, the participation in virtual dating involves a few elements of the following: participants’ initiative (*search for virtual company*, for instance) and certain rules for participation, such as the use of a nickname (to hide or ‘mask’ their identities, under which they “suspend their own identities for a while and wear any masks they wish”, and build up their performative narratives, as stated by Castro).

For the investigation about the movie viewers' meaning making, the selected film was *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrik, 2003), that focuses on the relationship of a couple. The movie narrative shows a long-standing, apparently successful relationship between a couple. Nevertheless, both spouses somewhat experience situations of relationships with other partners: Alice describes a fantasy she has but, mainly, Bill looks for a "secret community" (or a club) about which he becomes curious to know, thus, showing characteristics often found in chat-room users. Bill's experience, for instance, requires initiative, and the need of a password to integrate a "secret community" (or a club), literally wearing a mask and a disguise, a condition with which all the participants of that secret community must agree so that nobody could ever be identified. Besides, whatever happened inside that place (uncommitted, immediate, circumstantial, ephemeral relationships, freedom to act without the concerns and the expected sanctions of other conventional situations, as online relationships are portrayed) should not be seen or known by people that did not belong to the community itself. Both participations—in the secret community that is visually represented in the movie and in the chat-room that is mentally / virtually represented in chat-room users' narratives—describe similar rituals of relationships, however in their specific contexts of discourse. In this sense, an interest was raised in observing chat-room users making meaning to a movie in which they [chat-room users] could find some familiarity with the narratives that online relationships allow building.

From an epistemological perspective, the survey had an interest in investigating students' ability to transfer the perceptions they develop in the relationship with the modality of a text ('online dating'/'virtual relationships' in chat-rooms) to another modality (movies). That is, by promoting an interpretative activity through the use of a movie, the survey expected to see 1) the meanings made by the students for the movie plot; 2) meaning making in terms of a 'performance epistemology', being investigated both the chat-room users and movie viewers, verifying the interweaving of practices between the two media. The question related to meaning making in terms of a 'performance epistemology' conveyed the expectation of perceiving the meanings that are made by students when they meet themselves before a text that does not show linear sequence, or clear evidence of facts

or scenes, requiring from them that some meanings be made “in the absence of a model or exemplar” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p 173), expressing some traces of a practice of assemblage of elements (as in ‘bricolage’), of transferring materials (or knowledge) from one context to another (such as in ‘colage’), or of disseminating borrowings in a new setting (as in ‘montage’). These mental processes of creation have been observed in young people's creations as they communicate and interact on the Internet, by creating their specific multimodal communication (adding color to the fonts, emoticons, sound and image, for instance), by making short movies for the YouTube site, and by having active participation in the production of the discourse of their communities or societies. The present investigation counted on such premises in its design, data collecting and analysis.

### **Chat-Room Users and Movie Viewers: Interweaving Media Practices?**

#### **The Findings**

The investigation shows that students’ interpretations of the movie converge on the storyboard that could be found in IMDb.com<sup>iii</sup>. They evidence a couple’s relationship that is likely to be worn and its consequences, which can be summarized in the following sequence: Alice’s revealing that she had felt attracted to another man; Bill’s feeling bewildered by his wife’s revelation; Bill’s going to a kind of a private club, the surprising scenes that he happens to see (as well as the viewers) and the appalling experience that he has inside that club; Bill and Alice’s making up at the end. Other investigations about how students make meanings in Brazilian universities (see final note 3) have already shown the interpretive tendency that is identified in hermeneutics as ‘preservation of cultural traditions’, understood (and critiqued) as a conventional strand in the interpretative practices by Ricoeur (1977). As already presented in this article, the traditional-oriented interpretive practice supports, among others, a dualistic view of society, in which one may distinguish good from evil, true from untrue and other binarisms. This view would underlie a social learning in which standards or patterns should be apprehended or cultivated. For the students who responded to the request, the movie mainly focuses on the troubled waters that couples may find themselves in; however, the plot soothes the spectators by bringing the conflicts into a happy ending. Some of their most frequent depictions veil the maxim ‘real love overcomes the downfalls of a relationship’ in which one of the readings may be

that ‘the institution of marriage’ should be preserved and love may represent an ancillary idea towards it.

Still, in this part in which the investigated are expected to describe the meaning that they construed for *Eyes Wide Shut*, there is much reference to the rituals and experiences visualized in the fictional private club created by Kubrick. Nevertheless, the meanings are expressed through qualifications, being ‘shocking’, ‘threatening’ and ‘confusing’ the most frequent ones that portray the “secret community” that the character Bill once visits, conveying a certain difficulty that the students may have had to integrate the out-of-standards private club scenes into their narration of a couple’s standard relationship. Thus, the first finding in the investigation indicates that students practice a tradition-oriented hermeneutics highlighting the traditional values of a couple's relationship and rejecting the socially unacceptable ones, as the learnings of the traditional hermeneutics would lead one to interpret.

More meaning making can be observed in another session of the investigation, the one in which the investigated students are asked about the connection between the virtual relationships in chat-rooms and in the movie. Their response reveals that a hundred percent of the investigated students see no connection between online relationships in chat-room communication and the relationships plotted in the movie directed by Kubrick. They express being surprised and intrigued with the question in some of their written comments: *Should there be any relation between the two situations?* writes one of the viewers; *No, the chat-room narratives are more natural and real, they are constructed on-line in accordance with the ideas and interests of the users, whereas the movie narratives are built in a film script before the movie, and are fictional*, defines one more surveyed student, showing her understanding and beliefs about the fictional/non-fictional aspect of narratives on the internet and on the movie screen. It should be recalled that within an exploratory purpose the interest in this question relates to the observation of the practice of transferring materials [or knowledge] from one context to another or using borrowings in a new setting, as expected in a performance epistemology, although the connection may sound unusual. Another finding is registered in this focus of analysis: the ability the students have to make

meaning within a certain context or environment is not naturally or spontaneously transferred to another modality of communication, as observed in the chatroom and movie ones, and it would require stimulated practice as the subsequent description suggests.

In a later collective interview that had been planned for data expansion or clarification, the intrigued students wondered about the ‘connection between online relationships and the couple’s relationship in the movie’ that they had been asked about. They were explained the possibility that the students would associate the virtual relationships in chat-rooms with the fictional-but-representative relationships in *Eyes Wide Shut* due to the fact that both types count on similar elements: the participants’ initiatives, a reserved place (online chat-room or a private club) that requires a password or a nickname to be in, displacement of identities, masks, some level of permissiveness. Most of the students, then, found the comparison coherent, though added that it would be very hard to come to this perception on their own, and some claimed they would need more time to think about the comparison and demonstrated indecision about the presented possibility of interpretation.

In this session, they added that although they had achieved identification of the movie content with social situations of their own knowledge, they felt surprised (as some described) or shocked (as most stated) with the images that portrayed the relationships inside the private club shown in *Eyes Wide Shut*. When interrogated about the analogy between the environments in chat-rooms and in the club visualized in the movie, they agreed that some chat-room narratives, if turned into visual representations, could be visualized as some of the scenes shown in the club, or scenes that show one’s search for a mate/another mate. Nevertheless, their most shared comment was “I would never take part in a club like that”. They explained that in spite of the connection between the two exposed situations [chat-rooms and the club in *Eyes Wide Shut*], mental representations of relationships in chat-rooms are private and bring no constraint or restriction to the user. One student added that she would never tell her partner about her chat-room experiences if he did not belong in the same environment. She referred to the film character Bill’s feeling insecure about his wife’s revelation of a fantasy, explaining her belief that people who do

not practice the language/discourse of a certain community may find it hard to understand its communication and conventions.

According to the critical literacies studies, meaning making involves interference, making choices and changes, breaking down pre-established meanings and creating others, initiatives that would allow the interpreter to transfer the virtual or non-virtual images from one environment to another and a play with the conventions of “real time”. However, it was observed from the viewers’ responses that before the movie screen that shows a narrative that is conventionally thought to be “complete” or “finished” by the spectator, the interlocutor that allows intervention in digital communication does not necessarily transfer the logic learned and developed in that environment to the relationship with the image-language of the movie. The relationships seem to be built in accordance with what is conventionalized and “dictated” by the modalities of environments. Thus, if on the one hand this session outcome may seem disappointing, on the other it may provide indications for the design of future changes in university curricula (considering digital epistemologies), which is one of the aims of the ongoing research.

A reading that can be reached from this analysis, which nevertheless should still be further expanded, is that the students’ response may reflect an education that is inadequate in face of the necessities of a network society, as Castells (1999) describes our present-day society. The contemporary society individuals, citizens, workers, lives are no longer required to limit themselves to a “typographic mind”, and should, additionally, have a “network mind” developed; that is to say, they are supposed to transfer learnings, to make connections between discourses, to make new meanings of images and image-language whenever needed, and to review communication conventions and relationships.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the investigation data indicate that conventional standard epistemology predominates in this university group, and that the network mind within a digital epistemology notion is still more frequently seen in the net environment where digital language is evident. Likewise, in the reading of movies and image there has been a

predominance of the conventional interpretative process that is defined by Ricoeur (1977) as a traditional hermeneutic strand considering that it strengthens the apprehension of a given meaning rather than on meaning making by the interlocutor. As for the image perceptions by the viewer, the medium or the modality seems to dictate the expected relationships allowing no or very few traces of *networking* (Castells, 1999) among different environments. In face of the investigation outcome, in this article it is claimed that due to the new technological influences, the images demand a new way of being understood, that *network interaction* – in the logic of paradox described by Virillo (1994) – should still be broadly promoted so that more practice about the transfer of reasonings may occur across discourses in their various modalities and contexts, as expected from the participants of a network society. It, therefore, leads to the need for changes in education in regard to what concerns literacies.

The epistemological studies have emphasized that the standard conventional “models” of knowledge construction, based on dividing the whole into as many parcels as necessary so that it becomes possible to be studied and understood and on organizing reasoning in terms of degrees of pre-established complexity (from *easy* to *difficult*), may not be adequate or sufficient for reason in the contemporary society, as defended by Morin (2000). Similarly, Lankshear & Snyder (2000, p. 39) call attention to the necessity of enhancing awareness in relation to technology and education. They remark that the rapid changes which everyone may witness in our societies, which asks people *to re-imagine and re-invent themselves in their institutions*, concomitantly ask for *new ways of thinking, coming to terms with re-imagined and re-invented forms of literacy, subject matter and learning*.

Much more about digital language and the knower of the digitized society may be learned for the purposes of understanding and making adequate choices about which literacies should be designed, planned or promoted to reflect the undeniable new needs of the vastly described *new* societies. Finally, this investigation signals what should be enhanced to meet the purposes of the critical literacies that are expected to be practiced in the surveyed environment.



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## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> A research that involves groups of two Brazilian state universities, University of São Paulo (USP) and the University of Campinas (UNICAMP), in a literacy project to investigate cross-cultural studies of young people's engagement with digital technologies and the implications for education. Different school-level students have been under investigations by the various researchers; the participants under my investigation are university-level, and considering that the objective of research includes knowing (and intervening, if necessary) the critical education of eventual future teachers.

<sup>ii</sup> Monte Mór, W. 2006. Reading *Dogville* in Brazil: Image, Language and Critical Literacy, *Language and Intercultural Communication*. London: Multilingual Matters.

Monte Mór, W. 2007. Investigating Critical Literacy at the University in Brazil, *Critical Literacy*. Menezes de Souza, L. M. T. & Andreotti, V. (eds) [www.criticalliteracy.org.uk](http://www.criticalliteracy.org.uk)

<sup>iii</sup> A New York City doctor (William/Bill), who is married to an art curator (Alice), pushes himself on a harrowing and dangerous night-long odyssey of sexual and moral discovery after his wife admits that she once almost cheated on him (IMDb.com)