

Editorial

Pier Cesare Rivoltella ^a, editor

^aCatholic University of Milan, Italy, piercesare.rivoltella@unicatt.it

Byung-Chul-Han is a Korean philosopher. He is scholar in Berlin and works on contemporary culture. One of his essays reflects on Plato Cave Myth, giving an original interpretation to it (Byung-Chul-Han, 2012).

1. Myth readings

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To highlight text portions or foreign words, *italic* should be used, never bold or underscored. Cave Myth opens the seventh book of *The Republic*, the dialogue into which Plato explains his political vision. Some prisoners lie in a cave in chains, watching the bottom of the cave itself in front of them where shadows move. These shadows are projected by the light of the fire on the objects that some puppeteers hold. The puppeteers move along a wall that leads to the mouth of the cave and then, outside, in the sunlight. A prisoner frees himself, goes out into the light of the sun, then comes back to free the other ones.

In this myth the Platonic critique finds the synthesis of the Philosopher's thinking: his ontology (the things we know are only images of the truth), his epistemology (true knowledge is the scientific one – *episthème* - not that of the senses - *dòxa*), but also ethics and politics (freeing themselves and freeing the other ones). But the myth has had many other readings. Saramago dedicated to it a novel (*A caverna*) in which a large shopping center under construction becomes the contemporary version of the platonic cave, in a close criticism of the consumer society. Others found in this myth the first intuition of the cinematographic situation: after all the spectators, in the cinema hall, are nothing but prisoners fascinated by the magic of the shadows moving on the screen. Recently, Vittorio Gallese and Michele Guerra (2012) let us come back to Plato's myth applying the theory of mirror neurons to understand how cinema can make sense for us through the process of embodied simulation. Finally, the cave is also the emblematic situation of what virtual reality represents from the point of view of our perception: and indeed when the University of Illinois researchers in 1992 patented one of the first VR devices they named it *Cave*.

2. Knowledge and storytelling

According to Byung-Chul-Han, Plato's cave is a theatrical metaphor. The Korean philosopher reverses the traditional meaning of the myth. This meaning must be sought in the relationship between knowledge and narration, between the enchanted world of myth and that of scientific evidence. In fact, Plato, in the *Jone*, states that he had to put aside the myth to make room for science: in the Platonic State there is no space for art, there is no room for poetry; they would be harmful, because "talking" to emotions would end up hindering the work of reason.

Han (2012; 38-39) thinks different and tries to show what is lost if we sacrifice everything to knowledge: «Plato's cave is a narrative world. No causal link joins the things that are there. A kind of dramaturgy or scenography connects the things (or signs) with each other by narrative means. The light of truth denarrativizes the world. The sun annihilates mere appearance. The play of mimesis and metamorphosis yields to working at truth [Arbeit an Wahrheit] (...) Likewise, the society of transparency is a society without poets, without seduction or metamorphosis. After all, it is the poet who produces scenic illusions, forms of appearance, and ritual and ceremonial signs; he sets artifacts and antifacts against hyperreal, naked evidence».

3. The enchanted world

The provocation of the Korean philosopher could be reformulated: today, in our type of society, “made of” information and devoted to the facts, does it make sense to leave the cave? Or rather, thinking about the school and its tasks: is it right to encourage the disenchantment of the youngsters, to vote them exclusively to the evidence of science and technology? Do they have to be freed from fairy tales and fantasy, or would it not be necessary to do the opposite? Here we have two worlds and two logics.

On the one hand there is the additive logic of information and of the processor: its goal is to add data to other data, collect them, process them. This logic responds to acceleration needs: in our society everything must be quick, even instantaneous. Its outcome is efficiency, result, transparency. The idea is that everything must become transparent, that is: known, positive, evident.

On the other hand we have the narrative logic of representation and procession: the procession spreads out over time, describes a path, crosses the urban spaces. Here there is no acceleration but rhythm, cadenced steps enabling thought and reflection. The result of the representation is not the transparency but the appearance: the transparent image is too near to what it shows and leaves no room for imagination; on the contrary, when image represent something, it says and doesn't say, activating our imagination. If everything is clear, there is no more room for any interpretation; if the world, on the other hand, is the space of a representation, what remains covered raises interest, activates the imagination.

A completely disenchanted world is a world without poetry, without heroes, without fables, without illusions, without hope. It is a world without childhood, without imagination. This world generates small adults who will grow up without learning how to look at things through the eyes of myth. Pasolini understood that well, in the first sequence of his movie *Medea*. In this sequence he shows the education that little Giasone had received from the centaur Chiron: "Everything is holy. Everything is holy. Everything is holy, my dear (...). But when everything will seem normal to you in nature, everything will be finished!"

Perhaps today, school should be thought of as a cave in which to tell and make possible that imagination grow, teach wonder and make poetry live. Maybe the real chains are not those of fairy tales, but of technoscience and the market. Rather than understanding how to get out of the cave, perhaps we need to try to stay there.

References

Byung-Chul, H. (2012). *Transparency Society*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Gallese, V., Guerra, M. (2012). *Embodying movies: Embodied simulation and film studies*. [Cinema](#), 3:183-210.