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MALWARE DIGITELLING: FAKENEWS, OR MYTHMAKING 2.0?

Chapter 1 – Environmental Awareness

> ***The present is always invisible because it is environmental. No environment is perceptible, simply because it saturates the whole field of attention.***
> **(Marshall McLuhan)[1]**

In the 1960s, at a time of profound cultural change, literature played a major role in the establishment of the broad area of study that today we call MEDIA ECOLOGY.[2] By so doing, literature played a major role in making the present *perceptible in its making*, acting as a counter-environment reshaping the balance between the invisible ground (the new cultural and technological forces then at work) and the more visible figures (traditional and canonical knowledge).

At the Centre for Culture and Technology, established in 1963 at the University of Toronto, literature escaped its ontological boundaries, transcended its status as a school or university *subject* and became 'a *function* inseparable from our communal experience'. An idea first conceived and then developed by a Canadian Professor of Literature, Marshall McLuhan.[3] Noticing that new media do not replace each other, but complicate each other, McLuhan started by approaching media (including literature and new technologies of communication) as the extensions of men; later, he postulated the study of media as environment – which is, in fact, the focus of media ecology today.

Certainly, the digital was not part of McLuhan's reality (he passed away at the end of December 1980); however, his form of writing, the mosaic, was conceived as a 'trans-medium', bridging the gap between a variety of forms of expressions, technologies, performative strategies and cultures. The spirit and the essence of that form of writing was somehow *digital*: the mosaic is a discontinuous form, developed through discrete

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[1] Marshall McLuhan, *Mademoiselle: The Magazine For Smart Young Women, Volume 64 (p. 114), 1966.*

[2] On Media Ecology see: C.M.K. Lung (ed), *Perspectives on Culture, Technology and Communication: The Media Ecology Tradition*, Cresskill, Jampton Press, 2006; L. Strate, *Echoes ad Reflections: On Media Ecology as a Field of Study*, Cresskill, Hampton Press, 2006; P.. Granata, Ecologa dei media. Protagonisti, scuole, concetti chiave, Milano FrancoAngeli, 2016; L. Strate, *Media Ecology: An Approach to Understand the Human Condition*, New York-Berlin, Peter Lang, 2017.

[3] 'Literature is not a subject but *a function* – a function inseparable from communal existence.' Marshall McLuhan, Letter to Walter J. Ong, 18 May 1946, in *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*. Selected and edited by Matie >Molinaro, Corinne McLuhan, and William Toye, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1987.

components that are contrasted with linear discourses following a creatively conceived pattern.[4] The goal was to make words resonate as complex systems:

> Words are complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience into our uttered or outered senses. They are a technology of explicitness. By means of translation of immediate sense experience into vocal symbols, the entire world can be evoked and retrieved at any instant.[5]

McLuhan's original and immersive storytelling became a probing tool for all his environmental explorations applying the method of art and literary analysis to the critical evaluation of society. In fact, it is a sort of 'thinking through the digital in literature' before its time, a strategy that proved particularly useful to foresee long term implications of the evolving mediascape, intensifying what McLuhan called 'the global village'. As he wrote in his classic *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, "*The electronic interdependence recreates the world in the **IMAGE** of a global village.*"[6] (and you can apply the method of art analysis to think through it).

However, what happens when the digital is no longer the **imagined** future but is, instead, environmental, saturating the whole field of attention? What happens when digital media are so pervasive and persuasive that we take them for granted? What happens when **digitelling** (that is **interfaced storytelling**) is, in fact, no longer a futuristic counter-environment, but a widely shared form of communication more and more ordinary and fashionable across media, universities and societies?

To engage with these questions, we can try to apply the method of art and literary analysis to the critical evaluation of the augmented digital societies, considered through some of the overwhelming and pervasive digital narratives that are shaping our environment, which is, in fact, the transnational digi-novel we now inhabit. As a case study, I will focus specifically on a malevolent (but trendy) form of digitelling (fake news) for then exploring how they rely on a cognitive pollution that is, in fact, induced and preserved also through a more or less conscious recycling of literary language.

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[4] See: Elena Lamberti, *Marshall McLuhan's Mosaic: Probing the Literary Origins of Media Studies*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2012.

[5] Marshall McLuhan, *Understand Media: The Extensions of Man*, (1964), Ed. W. Terrence Gordon, Corte Madera, CA: Gingko P., 2003, p. 85.

[6] Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man, (1962), Centennial edn., Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2011, p. 36.

It is not too farfetched to think of our globalized and hyper tech reality as of an uncanny narrative gone environmental. Already in the mid-1970s, New Sci-Fi writer J. G. Ballard stated that, in our mass-mediated societies, 'The balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly':

> Increasingly their role are reversed. We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind – mass-merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the pre-empting of any original response to experience by the television screen…. We live inside an enormous novel. It is now less and less necessary for the writer to invent fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality.[7]

Today the blurring of more traditional boundaries between reality and fiction is further complicated by new, digital and immersive technologies that, being environmental, are not always visible. Especially for younger people, it is increasingly difficult to define inner and outer landscapes, actuality and fiction overlap constantly. Not surprisingly, within such a habitat fake news have become not only a trendy issue, but also a trans-national form of narrative that relies on old and new media and that shapes the enormous novel we live inside; as well as *us*. Within our digitally interdependent environment, fake news cannot be framed simply as bad journalism; instead, they must be investigated also as a more complex form of collective or group narrative precisely because mobile and social media have turned each of us not only into a writer, but also into a witness and a critic in real time. This is why they can be compared to a new form of mythmaking, which I call mythmaking 2.0. However, where Ezra Pound wrote that *Literature is news that STAYS news*,[8] we could say that, instead, *fakenews are literature that obsolete in an instant of time*. The life expectation is, in fact, something that differentiates ancient mythmaking and mythmaking 2.0: the narrative has shift from eternity to ephemerality. This is a crucial change, which can enlighten on some fragilities of our digitalized world-novel.

Chapter 2 – Case Study. Fakenews, or Mythmaking 2.0

Every year, in mid-spring, the beautiful Italian city of Perugia, hosts the International Journalism Festival (IJF); each year, this festival focuses on so called hot topics which are determined by those news that translate into the overwhelming narrative created by the

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[7] J. G. Ballard, "Intoduction", *Crash*, (1973), London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 4.
[8] Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Reading*, (1934), London-Boston, Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 29.

internationally shared headlines. There are no doubts that the hot topic of the 2017 edition of this festival was but one: FAKE NEWS, a concept introduced as an underpinning leitmotif, in fact a *discourse*, affecting all other themes (war, refugees, power and politics). The point is that, it was discussed not simply as a transversal topic, but also as a **narrative** questioning the ontological (and the ethical) status of both journalism and storytelling in the so-called post-truth age.

Among the various talks and presentations of this year edition, I was particularly taken by the one given by the journalist and author Claire Prentice, who spoke about "Fake News: Nothing New". She pointed out that the very idea of fake news originated with the idea of journalism itself, in the XVIII century, and that the problem of trustable accounts and fact checking has always been part of the journalistic scenarios world-wide. She gave a variety of examples, including one that has led her to write an interesting book on *The Lost Tribe of Coney Island. Headhunters, Luna Park, and the Man Who Pulled Off the Spectacle of the Century*, an Amazon best book of October 2014. That book "unearths the incredible true story of the Igorrotes, a group of 'headhunting, dog-eating savages' from the Philippines, who were taken to New York in 1905 by the charming, opportunistic doctor-turned-showman Truman K. Hunt. […] There they appeared as 'human exhibits' alongside the freaks and curiosities at Coney Island's Luna Park."[9] Prentice's volume turns that story into an example of how to manipulate reality for a purpose: the Igorrotes were portrayed as primitive and savages (of course, they were not), they became a "national sensation – they were written up in newspaper headlines, portrayed in cartoons, and even featured in advertising jingles…".[10] Not surprisingly, the false accounts, the alternative facts elaborated at the expenses of the Igorrotes, - that is the fake narrative translating diversity into an inferior civilization - was, in fact, instrumental to the Philippine-American War as it supported the USA military colonization of that nation, which was presented as an action needed to *civilize* an area of the world still inhabited by "cruel savages".

While learning about the old story of The Lost Tribe of Coney Island, you couldn't but agree with Claire Prentice: there is nothing new, and fake news are but a form of storytelling, based on a precise grammar and rhetoric that uses both hyperboles and understatements; a storytelling that is usually unethical, and which is used not only to entertain people but

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[9] Quoted from Amazon online promo for this book.
[10] Ibidem.

also to manipulate their mind. Fake news are a carefully conceived form of storytelling that distracts people while acting on their minds and consciousness in a more pernicious way; as T.S. Eliot (or even John Lennon) would say,[11] they act on you while you are distracted by their content. So much so, that we can venture farther than Claire Prentice, and state that, as a form of narrative, fake news are much older than journalism and have been part of human history forever, or, at least, since when we started to remember as a group, as civilizations, and in a variety of forms. They date back to mythology, and especially to the mythmaking that consolidates the building of a civilization, or that marks the passage from a certain form of *civilization* to the next one. I use the term civilization in a very broad sense, that is in a 'media ecology' way; in fact, I should use the term *environment*, meaning the complex relation between individuals and their habitats, which are, as you know, a combination of natural and artificial components, that is of natural and cultural elements also including different technologies of communication.

Myth is an ancient Greek word (Mythos) that means 'word', 'discourse', 'story'. **Mythology** is the set of myths that are created and transmitted within a given community to preserve the collective identity. **Mythmaking** is the conscious act of creating stories that are meant to play a role within a given community (that is confirming or questioning the collective identity of that very community). The very idea of **storytelling** is, therefore, something that nurtures myth, mythology and mythmaking. In turn, within storytelling the ideas of true and false are in constant dialogue and determine the genre of a specific storytelling: mythology, fiction, chronicles, historiography, journalistic account, and so on. The taxonomy is vast, and *it is further complicated by the very form of communication (oral, literate, visual, digital, etc.), also affecting storytelling* because, as we all know, the medium is at once the *message*, the *massage*, as well as the *mess-age* and the *mass-age*.

Provocatively, we could say that fake news is a genre within storytelling that originates with the first telling of stories, and which postulates both an ontological and ethical/unethical relation between the teller (author) and the audience (listener), also depending on cultural and technological factors, that is on the environment in which storytelling takes place. The Classic myths are there to prove it. For instance, how you interpret the story of Ulysses depends on how (and when) you look at it; today, the

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11 See. T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, London, Faber and Faber, 1955; John Lennon, "Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy)", 1981.

dominant interpretation is the one who introduces him as a modern (for the time), though chauvinist, hero. He first uses his wit to try to avoid fighting, and pretends to be crazy; once discovered, he uses his wit to defeat his enemy, and stages a visible/invisible trick. In fact, in both cases he is the author of pristine fake news that are related by Homer as a witty though tricky strategy, adopted to achieve a major goal: the unethical communicative gesture (to tell a lie, to deceive the enemies instead than openly face them, as it was expected at the time) is justified by what is framed as a higher moral aim (avoid war/preserve peace; restore peace/return home). There is a price to pay, as Ulysses has consciously broken a social pact (tell the truth, respect the fighting rules); yet, Ulysses will finally reach home and his Ithaca.

That story has been preserved through a literate form of communication, paralleling the shift into a new form of civilization: from oral to literate age. As per Media Ecology, the passage from orality to literacy changes the way human beings perceive themselves, leads to the dominance of the individual (the self) over the group and, in time, favors vertical and hierarchical societies over horizontal and tribal ones. In fact, in the official narrative Ulysses becomes a modern leader who triggers change through actions that can be understood as unethical (he cheats) or ethical (he is a hero) depending on the civilization who interprets his story.

Once turned into a *literate artefact*, Homer's oral narrative can no longer be read simply as the mere account of episodes of the past; it shifts from chronicle (a sort of *ante-litteram* journalism) into epic, in fact mythmaking, as it bears witness to a cultural passage (from orality to literacy, from a certain tribal order to a new one) that is clearly situated, both historically and technologically. From that moment onward, we could imagine all later reading of Homer's once oral then literate epic poem, as literate or post-literate fact checking that aims to prove or disprove how the original text (or source) relates to a variety of evolving cultural and technological contexts and audiences. In other words, the telling of new stories enlightens on different historical realities.

Following a similar reasoning, we could postulate that fake news and fact checking are two structural elements of all typologies of storytelling, in fact relating to the shifting and challenging dichotomy of true/false accounts of a given situation. Depending on the typology of storytelling, the reader knows where to set the bar and when to protest the story untrue or unethical; or untrue but ethical, or unethical but true. For instance, we know

that fairy-tales are not true but can be ethical, and we know that propaganda (as well as commercials) can be unethical but can rely on some truth, and so on. We also know that it is not always possible for the audience to protest explicitly the unethical rendering of a story because of diverse reasons. The most obvious one relates to those realities where free speech is not possible, that is those realities where censorship conditions all forms of communication, including fictional ones - a situation still present today in too many countries, and even expanding. As George Orwell taught us: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." However, that is true also within societies where free speech is possible, but where communication takes place within a complex media system affecting – if not numbing – people's awareness and sensibilities. In fact, this is where most of the Western world stands today, where media and digital interfaces are the environment saturating our consciousness.

Back in 1920s/1930s, Edward Bernays (Freud's nephew and one of the first Austrian-American spin-doctors) studied the conscious and witty manipulation of people's habits and ideas as an important component of democratic societies. That is something that you can achieve with a democratic use of democratic but pervasive forms of communication whose goal is, in fact, to "create consent without consent", (as Noam Chomsky put it in his famous volume *Profit over People*).[12] Storytelling is instrumental to that creation. In short, **people believe what they want to believe, and the trick is to give them something they are ready to accept**. Just like the Italians with Mr. Berlusconi, who was elected on the basis of a fantastic (literally so) storytelling: "vote for me and I will give you 1 million jobs"; "vote for me and I will make you all as rich as I am" (It is a storytelling which is being repeated also in the present. Already in his 80s, after a sentence for fiscal Fraud, and with some of the other accusations moved against him statute-barred, Berlusconi is back; this time, he is promising not only money to the Italians, but also eternal youth!). At the time (1994), there were fact-checkers, but Italians favored a mythical narrative (and the recent elections in the island of Sicily indicate that they might be enchanted again). In 2016, Americans, too, favored mythmaking over fact checking, that is mythical slogans over reality (make America great again; the manifest destiny; the American dream; America first) and elected Mr. Trump as their new President. Trojans, too, acted in the same way with Ulysses, as they *saw* what they *desired most*, therefore believing in a fantastic story: the horse they

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[12] Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*, New York, Seven Stories Press, 1999.

found and at the dawn of a new day stood for the enemy surrender, for their victory with no need for a final battle. It is interesting that, today, we blame the Trojans and not Ulysses (who literally shaped an alternative fact) for what happened; *Trojan* is, in fact, a word translating a malicious computer program, invisible but pervasive, a word that has entered into our collective imagination as a complex system, as a symbol evoking a situated experience. It is called the Trojan and not the Trojan Horse; the victim of the ancient fake news has become the villain in a new, hyper-real but interconnected world habitat.

Why is it that people believe what they want to believe? Why is it that millions of people across diverse realities prefer an illusory narrative to a narrative showing them were they truly are? Certainly, escapism is a possibility, but that would be a too simplistic answer. To win consent without consent is a better explanation. Nothing new, here too. But what is new is the pervasiveness of the digital, as it is not only a way to translate old narratives into new ones, nor it is only a form used to conceptualize new literary and artistic discourses. The digital is much more than a technology: it is **our present** and it is **environmental**.

Chapter 3 – Literature, Cognitive Pollution, Storytelling

The novel we inhabit today is shaped through and by the digital and the writer's task is to try to create counter-environments within a situation that is, in fact, oversaturated and technologically imploded. Even Ballard's statement sounds obsolete these days because it is difficult for a writer to invent reality in a world that has invented and delivered the concept of *augmented realities*. Because there is no outside, the writer's and the critic's must play *from within*; they act to preserve the individual's free will and consciousness, counterbalancing all attempts to induce cultural homologation and passive citizenship. Writers and critics have become viruses or hackers, trying to crack the saturated systemic loop somehow, they fight to make us see, hear and, above all, feel what lays under the opalescent surface. This, too, is nothing new: we have seen it conceptualized before and even happening, in literary and cultural studies, as well as in fiction and fictionalized discourses. Perhaps, this **literary déjà vu** is part of the problem, if not **THE problem**.

The fact is that today the world we see or, better, the world we are encouraged to see comes after fictional models **for real**, turning us into unconsciously ironic characters, in fact into unconsciously passive spectators of déjà vu stories whose narratology is part of our shared cultural memories. The digitally saturated environment is therefore a cognitively

polluted habitat within which mythmaking 2.0 is instrumental to the preservation of that pollution. As a malware digitelling, fake news are instrumental to keep our minds in "the helpless state engendered by prolonged mental rutting".[13] We contribute to the plot of a world narrative that casts us too as characters; we are encouraged to become either fact-checkers or trolls, either heroes or villains, (and the ideas of heroes and villains depend on the situated context). We both inhabit and contribute to consolidate mythmaking 2.0, playing a role in the accelerated writing of stories and counter-stories that become obsolete from dusk to dawn. What matters, in fact, is no longer the specificity of the story, but the process of making and unmaking stories: fake news lead to fact checking that leads to fake news that leads to fact checking, and so on and so forth. We act in a loop that makes me think of us as hamsters in a wheel.

As a literary critic, I regret to say that part of the cognitive pollution that makes us passive producers of these forms of hyper-accelerated, unethical pseudo-communication is reinforced also by a more or less conscious recycling of established literary jargons. Because our technologically interdependent societies come after fiction for real, fiction risks to be no longer useful to explore change; it risks to be consciously employed to keep us warm and comfort us. In fact, if we perceive our new, digitally saturated environment through the rear view mirror of fiction, we cannot but see *what we want to see*; we cannot but believe *what we want to believe*. We inhabit a fictional déjà vu that comforts us even when the plot looks uncanny simply because we already know and share the narratology of the given genre.

Think about it. To outline our world today, critics and journalists alike tend to borrow a taxonomy from the very popular literary genre of Science Fiction, as well as from all its ontological variables (fantasy, dystopia or utopia). In many real accounts of today, we have become post-humans living in cyberspace and smart cities, surrounded by robots and intelligent machines, including intelligent bombs. Not by chance, most of the uncanny fake news that travel trans-nationally as a narrative tie to science fiction plots: the earth is flat, vaccines triggers uncanny psycho-pathologies, alien settlements have appeared on the moon (photographs provided); fake news itself is, for many, science fiction. Of course, we can blame the Russians and their will to invade and control our Western societies through a pervasive malware digitelling shaped through fake news. However: what if, instead, as

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[13] Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of the Industrial Man*, 81951), Corte Madera, CA, Gingko Press, 2002, p. v.

literary critics we make some attempts to shift the focus from an ideologically guided moral indignation to a rationally guided investigation of what is, in fact, happening? Or, as McLuhan wrote as early as 1951, "Why not assist the public to observe consciously the drama which is intended to operate upon us unconsciously"?[14] In short: instead than following the given plot, why don't we reverse or reconsider it?

For instance, literary critics could easily show how obsolete the language now being used to frame the *new* within our societies is. The science fiction taxonomy now used to explain our world today was no longer in fashion within science fiction itself well before the 20th century was over. Future locations, robots and other amenities belong to what has been defined as the golden age of science fiction; already from the late 1960s, the new science fiction was more interested to explore the inner space of the individuals inhabiting an increasingly interdependent Planet Earth. The new Science Fiction triggered awareness of environmental change through narratives focusing on uncanny social rebellions often translated as new psychopathologies. The paradox of today is that science fiction has gone beyond literature to provide a shared semantic explaining (meaning *confirming*) a mainstream (meaning *given*) perception of reality, and not to explore change for real.

Today, literary expressions and anecdotes from that very popular genre are being used to narrate our realities, not to creatively travel through new situations (as it was in origin for Science Fiction), but to confirm shared cognitive patterns that reassure us. So conceived, the science fiction jargon, too, is fake news, as it contributes to the pervasive semantic of *media as environment*, to preserve a saturated whole field of attention.

While the digital goes environmental, and while we get lost in environmental science-fiction and fake stories, many literary critics lose time taking side pro or against the digital, as if there was an option; they lose time in the hopeless battle opposing paper printed books and digital texts. Instead, they should focus on how the two interface, overlap, change each other and affect our cognitive and emotional identities. They should focus on the epistemological consequences of what happens when the balance between fiction and reality shifts well beyond what Ballard saw happening only a few decades ago. They, we, should focus on what happens when figure and ground look the same and when literary discourses are used not to critically evaluate society but, instead, to confirm mainstream interpretations.

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[14] Ibidem.

As Media Ecology is teaching us, we become what we behold and, most important, we shape our tools and our tools shape us. We started to shape the world through language, we saw, heard and felt our realities in fictional modes, we constructed narratives to navigate change but we have now reached a point when clarity of diction creates a comfort zone that contribute to us giving consent without consent. As per Media Ecology, each medium pushed to its extreme, flips into its reverse: literature explores the present but literature can also frame it when it shifts from avant-garde to mannerism. Today, literary clichés are being used to frame us, to induce cognitive pollution, to prevent us from seeing the present, saturating our field of attention.

Recycling is good for the environment, but I think that language recycling is not necessarily good for our free will when the environment is changing. Language recycling enacted through the transmedia repetition of popular literary cliché contributes to cognitive pollution and numbs our integral awareness. To look at reality through the rear-view mirror of fiction flips creativity into numbness, and spreads the Narcissus Narcosis:

> The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended repeated image. […] He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system.[15]

We are the new Narcissuses, and our digital environment is the pond extending our own self-referential reflections. Fake news, as well as literary clichés are the updated versions of the Trojan horse. They are are but the reflection of digitally framed and imploded narratives that comfort and numb us; they turn us into servomechanisms of closed systems that, ironically, rely on open sources technologies and transmedia storytelling.

Before panicking, let me say that I am convinced that storytelling can still contribute to deconstruct mainstream environmental narratives imposed on us by the "best trained individual minds" that have "made it a fulltime job to get inside the collective public mind … to manipulate, exploit, control" not to generate light but heat.[16] The point, though, is to understand what literature is, what literary studies are today; certainly, we must go beyond them as subjects and make them truly resonate and function as purifiers against the environmental cognitive pollution. How to do that is a shared and open challenge, which I

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[15] Marshall McLuhan, *Understand Media: The Extensions of Man*, (1964), Ed. W. Terrence Gordon, Corte Madera, CA: Gingko P., 2003, p. 63.

[16] Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of the Industrial Man*, 81951), Corte Madera, CA, Gingko Press, 2002, p. v.

am pursuing together with many colleagues, in Italy, in Europe and in North America. Recently, we have established an international group of research and we have just received a grant to work on new theories and practices of Performative Storytelling to trigger civic engagement and awareness of complex cultural processes, also working on the technicalities of communication, as well as on modes of fruition. The first edition of a new Summer School on these issues was successfully hosted in Bologna, in June 2018 and more activities are being planned to create civic awareness through a conscious approach to storytelling.

For the moment, we have not clear-cut solutions, nor assessed answered as we have just begun our explorations into our digitally augmented realities through storytelling and literary studies. However, we are convinced of at least one thing: no matter our future, until there are human beings we will continue to tell stories, because storytelling is a never-ending identity process. However, we must be very cautious when we are brought to unconsciously inhabit stories through the rag and bone of literary clichés, no matter the technology employed to convey those cliché; the risk is to remain ideological believers experiencing a reality built on fiction that frames truth (and us) unethically and ephemerally. Once, Caliban disempowered Prospero's language to find a way out of the dominant self-referential, environmental grammar. Similarly, jesters and fools looked like idiots but were free to speak the truth the next way. Perhaps and simply, we can start by acknowledging that we are in between phases and that we cannot but sail in sight precisely because we are not robots yet; we might share our world with robots, but we are still human. We have not become post-human yet. At the most, we are trans-human: still human, but different from before because our environment is different and we are changing with it and through it. Yes, we shape our tools and our tools shape us. However, that is not science fiction, nor post-truth. It is called evolution: we change, we shape, we adapt and we relate in different ways through the ages. Also Storytelling (which is not just *literature*) changes, shapes, adapts. That's why it remains the perfect barometer to keep while, as Fitzgerald once said, our "boats beat on against the current, and we are borne back ceaselessly into the past".[17]

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[17] Francis Scott Fitgerald, *The Great Gastby*. London, Penguin Books, 2000.