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# Seeking a Philosophy of Assessment: Rethinking and Reconceptualizing Assessment for Today's Education and Society

En busca de una filosofía de la evaluación: repensar y reconceptualizar la  
evaluación para la educación y la sociedad de hoy

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## ABSTRACT

The idea of assessment, while prevalent in education, needs rethinking. This paper reflects on the notion of assessment in today's society, proposing an alternative for what it could (and should) be. By critically analyzing the role of assessment in today's education, we conducted a hermeneutic examination of its original concept's influence on the potential shift away from subject taxation and its current pornification. Through a discussion of assessment's role in contemporary society and its true nature, the authors propose a shift from viewing assessment as a mere curriculum add-on to envisioning how a *philosophy of assessment* could profoundly transform education and society.

**Keywords:** assessment; philosophy; contemporary society; education; critical literacies; organic assessment; reconceptualizing education

## RESUMEN

La evaluación es un aspecto que predomina en la educación, pero que necesita ser repensada. Este artículo reflexiona sobre la noción de evaluación en la sociedad actual y propone una alternativa a lo que ella podría y

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debería ser. Como resultado de un estudio crítico del papel de la evaluación en la educación actual, decidimos llevar a cabo un análisis hermenéutico de la influencia del concepto original de evaluación en la posibilidad de alejarse de la tributación del sujeto y su actual pornificación. A través de una discusión sobre el papel de la evaluación en la sociedad contemporánea y su verdadera naturaleza, los autores proponen un cambio de mirada sobre la evaluación como un mero complemento al plan de estudios a otra que considere cómo una *filosofía de la evaluación* podría transformar profundamente la educación y la sociedad.

**Palabras clave:** evaluación; filosofía; sociedad contemporánea; educación; literacidades críticas; evaluación orgánica; reconceptualización de la educación

## Introduction

The search for the right question that can lead to finding an appropriate answer has hurled humanity to explore a swarm of simulations, seeking to discover the fundamental roots of knowledge and its potential contributions to advancing the language game. In the pursuit of understanding the role of language as a framework for assessing functional literacy, scholars, theorists, researchers, and practitioners have reconceptualized and recontextualized the subject over the years, striving to create a more adaptable system. However, the basis for today's trending assessment processes lies in the premise of a positivist communication model that tries to interpret organic beings.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, we view assessment as the means to rupture conventional perceptions of cultural texts and technology to garner critical consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

This article intends to start a conversation about a necessary rethinking of assessment as an umbrella term.<sup>5</sup> Ergo, the journey initiates with the entire P-20<sup>6</sup> spectrum, as assessment is inherently connected to all levels of education (basic education, higher education, and continuing education), and it is the fabric that holds everything together. Then, we delve into the philosophical implications of assessment, opening the door to an emancipating philosophy of assessment. The focal point of our discussion is that of transitioning from purely instrumental and mechanical views into what we call a *philosophy of assessment* that places assessment as a dedicated space for reflexivity and change.

We will engage in a critical discussion via hermeneutic analysis, a method that allows researchers to isomorphically study cultural text and language ecologies, revealing deeper insights through fractal assessment. In this analysis, we introduce three key ideas and then challenge the nature of assessment, urging the need to transcend the instrumental/functional perspectives. Following this, we will outline the foundations of a philosophy of assessment, including the framework of an *Organic Method of Assessment* as a way to recontextualize and reconceptualize assessment in years to come.

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3 Les Tickle, *The Organic Intellectual Educator* (Cambridge: Cambridge Journal of Education, 2001), 474-475. Les Tickle alludes to Gramsci's ideas of an organic individual.

4 Tickle, *The Organic Intellectual Educator*, 474-475. Les Tickle alludes to Gramsci's ideas.

5 Xiaoping Huang and Zhongfeng Hu. *On the Validity of Educational Evaluation and its Construction* (Toronto: Higher Education Studies, 2015).

6 Philip Piety. *Components, Infrastructures, And Capacity: The Quest For The Impact Of Actionable Data Use On P-20 Educator Practice* (Washington, D.C., *Review of Research in Education*, 394-421

Before we continue, a caveat: While we agree that the concept of organic assessment is not new, we find it appropriate to discuss it in further detail, as it serves as the precursor to a more extensive concept developed by the lead author in his dissertation, *Fractal Symbiotic Dialectism (FSD)*. We understand FSD as an *organic* form of assessment that can be attributed to the 21st century agential individual. In that sense, this article sets the groundwork for a more innovative approach to assessment.

## Three Key Ideas

We find it fitting to introduce three key concepts that will later guide our argument: An opening definition of *assessment*, followed by Han's idea of the *swarm*, and the idea of *hypercommunication* as two features that add to problematizing assessment today.

### Assessment

Assessment is a nonbinary dialectical singularity that is fractal. It is innate to our existence; we have an ongoing need (*besoin*) for it as part of our choices (freedom). For example, we require it for minor tasks, such as deciding to wake up when the alarm clock sounds, or the hardest of tasks, like making a life decision to start over in another country. Assessment is not a concept exclusive to education or the workforce; it is multidimensional.

The *besoin* is an inherent trait that characterizes an organic being. It is a cyclical process that continually questions how we make sense of ourselves and our world. We commence as a *tabula rasa* (being-in-itself), and the alterity of another human (or by being-for-itself) gradually molds us. The negation of the negation is the essence of human action.<sup>7</sup> In Sartre's perspective, the individual organizes the *en-soi* (being-in-itself) by intermingling with the world, oneself, and otherness through constant negation to transcend human emptiness. Moreover, we also require venturing into the inorganic aspects of the world to return to ourselves and satisfy our needs. To placate our *besoin*, we must turn to praxis. This structured activity combines the being and alterity to address our questions regarding the possible or the immediate, which, thanks to praxis, may enable an organic being to become a project.<sup>8</sup> As a result, this organism will have ontological meaning.

Freedom is a by-product of our organic condition. There is a point in our lives when we must choose between options, and as we downsize our choices to one, the incongruity of our actions makes a presence.<sup>9</sup> The scarcity of freedom in our decision-making makes knowing how to measure the weight of selection imperative. This is an act of negation, which leads us to a state of anguish, as we negate organic freedom of choice and inertia.<sup>10</sup> As a result, self-alienation and reciprocal input by the Other regulate the spectrum of our praxis. Yet, this triggers the emergence of free individuality to act based on one's judgments.

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7 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), xix.

8 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, xx.

9 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, xxi.

10 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 586.

In this sense, assessment is a method to analyze organic-related engagements with both animate and inanimate beings. It's a means to understand the potential floor and ceiling of human capacity to conjure coherent ideas based on language knowledge, so as to express thought through speech. This process is called assessment. We must possess social skills, technical knowledge, and a specialized skill set to function within society. Therefore, to ensure this happens, educators must develop an assessment method that permits tracing knowledge from its initial state to its final state. It is at the absolute state of knowledge where students can demonstrate what they were able to garner throughout the course via a traditional or an alternative test construct.

## The Swarm

Han uses the idea of the *swarm* to explain how the normative partakes in hyperreality, especially in hyperphotography, a copy that must surpass the authenticity of the original.<sup>11</sup> Hyperphotography promotes the hyperreal and the loss of the referent because the images allow the individual to express and share what they have in their functional conscience and, in turn, be alienated by a mirror presentation of reality. For Baudrillard, reality is dead and never existed<sup>12</sup>; it is a temporary simulation we accept as part of our daily praxis.<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, cyberspace provides the digital means for the socialization of the overflow of productions while preserving the original value of the object. For example, the widespread use of Facebook allows unlimited uploading of images, leading to domestication. The *homo digitalis* has taken the picture and hijacked the multimodal semantic message by converting it into a consumable. As a consumable, an image loses its ability to represent the original, prompting questions about its authenticity. This transfigures into hyperphotography, and it becomes vulgar in that the referent no longer requires contact with the individual to exist outside the imaginary.

Consequently, hyperreality instills Frankenstein's syndrome in the organic individual by creating an obscene imaginary of reality. This imaginary will forge in the individual's conscience a world of simulacrum where everything seems to be, yet nothing is what it is. Introna quotes Baudrillard in that the distinction becomes fragile or plastic by self-referentiality.<sup>14</sup> The individual abandons their existence in the material world to participate in a digital system that isolates them from themselves and the alterity of the other as temporal ideologies vanish due to the absence of humanity and a grounding referent.

Indistinctly, hyperreality usurps humanity's essence and turns it into nothingness. However, this nothingness differs from Sartre's (1960) view, where the Being and Nothingness are about how the language game betokens an extension of the referent over a simulation. This praxis enacts freedom of election that describes the *homo digitalis* and the digital swarm.<sup>15</sup> Today's project makes us transgressors

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11 Byung-Chul Han. In the Swarm Digital Prospects (Barcelona: Herder Editorial, 2014), 1 - 5.

12 Jean Baudrillard. Simulacra and simulation (Chicago: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1 - 3.

13 Lucas Introna, On Cyberspace and Being: Identity, Self and Hyperreality (London: Department of Information Systems, London School of Economics & Political Science, 2010), 2. Introna cites Baudrillard.

14 Introna, On Cyberspace and Being: Identity, Self and Hyperreality, 2.

15 Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, xvi.

to the point that we alienate ourselves, the other, alterity, society, and the present. The transparency of positivity is intrinsic to the digital, as it eliminates humanity's project.<sup>16</sup>

The *homo digitalis* seeks hyperreality to forget the source of their anger and fears of the other, thus shunning reflexivity. Fears of incorrect choices can detain the creation of an imaginary and the image they set as their project. Ergo, digitized communication enables numerous thoughtless simulations conditioned to one's desire, which causes satisfaction and simultaneous frustration. A person's interaction with the image and virtual communities empowers them to disregard the other. However, they will never be able to know the other's gaze. To see the other is to see the being-in-itself, which then leads to the for-itself and the awareness that it is something beyond our control, which in turn entails the for-another. There is a big problem with the being-in-itself, for-itself, and for-another because we alienate it. In other words, when we acknowledge the alterity of the other, the other recognizes what mine is.

### Hypercommunication

The digital realm influences choice today, permitting each individual to participate in the symmetry of information and knowledge. Under the same line of thought, Han describes the effects of positivism in his work on digital swarm; its communication revolves around the notion of the related mentality to facilitate the decoding and conscious interaction of the digital norms of the digital community.<sup>17</sup> We can identify networks under three traits: (a) the discovery of knowledge or the exploration of existing information; (b) social interaction to improve the quality of life through interventions; and (c) self-analysis, or individuals exhaustively seeking a collective that shares similar needs and problems.

Camarero-Cano's quote from Rizo complements the hypercommunication described in the digital swarm. The five types are as follows: (1) personal networks provide a sense of belonging; (2) categorical networks are those where the individual searches for similarity in performance objectives to participate in the language game; (3) structural networks are those that facilitate interaction with the workplace; (4) associative networks surge when organizations recognize that they have a link; and finally, (5) inter-systemic networks are those that produce multiple relationships of reciprocity between institutional, associative and informal networks.<sup>18</sup> These communication simulations stop us from desiring face-to-face interaction with other humans. Why bother engaging in conversations with countless individuals, risking rejection and the negation of our alterity caused by the lack of recognition of the other?

Digital platforms minimize negativity or eliminate the reflexive conscience.<sup>19</sup> Individuals develop Frankenstein syndrome, an unreflective and firm believer in positivism and transparency. Actions become

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16 Byung-Chul Han. *The Transparency Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) 2014, 19 – 20.

17 Han, *In the Swarm Digital Prospects*, 14.

18 Lucía Camarero-Cano. *Comunidades tecnosociales. Evolución de la comunicación analógica hacia la interacción analógico-digital* (Madrid: Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación, 2015), 189 - 190.

19 Han, *In the Swarm Digital Prospects*, 19.

operational due to hypercommunication promoting noise and maintaining that level.<sup>20</sup> Everything is melded together within a great melting pot.<sup>21</sup>

This world of hypercommunication excessively produces opinions, images, texts, videos, and anger, forging a world of simulation. All productions are accepted as truths most of the time, regardless of the quality of the content. For instance, platforms such as Twitter —categorized as academic— lose their essence once we use them for other purposes. The strength of these truths resides in the fact that a singular opinion can trap the attention of millions of users. If these individuals believe in what is published, it will likely be retweeted and put into practice. This propagation of ideas can make the unreal real and vice versa. The recipient seldom questions the original.

Likewise, hypercommunication designates the obstruction of the reflective conscience and leads to inhabiting the functional consciousness. Actions trap and occupy spaces and individuals. There is neither space nor time to reflect on our praxis. Nevertheless, the individual could assess this situation as immediate contact with the immaterial world, a temporal space for human experience. There is an interest in interacting with inanimate objects; through them, the individual can project onto them and establish the norm.

## Problematizing Assessment as An Educational Affair

It is worth noting that today's society shows little interest in assessing the irrelevant or unfamiliar<sup>22</sup>, possibly due to emerging discontinuities in assessing and categorizing our priorities. From our experiences with assessment practices<sup>23</sup>, practical actions may have become rigid due to the conception of a performance-based system that discards what does not comply with a vision of uniformity.<sup>24</sup> This perspective uses assessment to disregard dissenting voices, thus fostering a standardization of actions and mindsets.

### Education's Relationship with Assessment

Modern educational systems subtract the singular from critical consciousness<sup>25</sup>, potentially jeopardizing the quality of knowledge development due to the pressure imposed by a unifying price tag<sup>26</sup>. In other words, educational institutions are supposed to constantly validate assessment processes by employing comparable international standards that establish the competencies as the medium to guide the individual

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20 Han, *In the Swarm Digital Prospects*, 16.

21 Han, *In the Swarm Digital Prospects*, 16.

22 Byung-Chul Han, *The Agony of Eros* (Barcelona: Herder Editorial, 2014), 17.

23 H. Douglas Brown and Priyanvada Abeywickrama. *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices* (New York: Longman, 2004).

24 Noelia Alcaraz, *Aproximación Histórica a la Evaluación Educativa: De la Generación de la Medición a la Generación Ecléctica* (Cádiz: Revista Iberoamericana de Evaluación Educativa, 2015).

25 Tickle, *The Organic Intellectual Educator*, 5.

26 Han, *The Transparency Society*, 12.

to manifest their highest achieved reasoning.<sup>27</sup> There is an incessant need to rush to quantify knowledge, process outcomes, and control the purpose of the product.

By streamlining assessment processes, contemporary society has placed knowledge and reasoning on the sidelines. This streamlining may lead to individuals having difficulty interpreting cultural text and acting based on the assessment of the situation. A problem emerges when social agents are unaware of the importance of interacting with the negative to discover informational gaps. Once identified, this may trigger a yearning to discover new routes to face alterity.

The lack of difference in thought eliminates the need for individuals to interact to reach a consensus on the evolution of literacy. Positivist responses negate questioning, comparison, interpretation, and analysis of the lived experiences, hindering the register of a new historical moment. Moreover, society is content with the current register of written and oral information in books, magazines, blogs, or social networks. Cyberspace has granted access to vast amounts of information in a dimension that is challenging to assess for determining knowledge construct validity.

For instance, let us consider primary education, which aims to produce functional agents for non-critical and non-transformative work environments. The implied mastery of literacy from the previous sentence expresses what the industrial sector demands from the workforce, making functional literacy the base competence an individual must master to perform servile tasks. The education system focuses on these types of elementary skills and competencies since standardized tests tend to favor the assessment of topical knowledge to fit the vision of the World Bank regarding what a workforce should be.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Commercialization of Assessment**

A prime example of standardized tests commonly used in our educational systems includes the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Graduate Record Examinations (GRE), and International English Language Testing System (IELTS), to name a few. Their implementation costs an average of \$1.7 billion annually.<sup>29</sup> Spending this amount on assessment finances seems to ensure an organic process demonstrating the depth of knowledge development. In other words, this cannot hold when all *transparent*<sup>30</sup> things signify the loss of singularity via a price tag.<sup>31</sup>

Netflix could be another example of the commercialization of assessment, now in the digital realm. The company determines the continuation of a series based on the number of likes and views, since it cannot afford to produce without generating revenue. The question is whether these criteria honestly

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27 Terence J. Crooks, *The Impact of Classroom Evaluation Practices on Students* (Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1988).

28 World Bank, *Learning for All Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development* (Washington DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2011), 3.

29 "The Price of Standardized Testing – Education." Accessed November 19, 2021. <https://sites.psu.edu/tota19edu/2019/02/07/the-price-of-standardized-testing/>.

30 David Brin, *The Transparent Society* (New York: Perseus Books, 1998).

31 Han, *The Transparency Society*, 26.

and ethically represent the quality of the storytelling, script, or acting. Could this translate to 100 million views as the marker of a “good or great” production?

Examples like PISA or Netflix are not distant from the realm of education. If the notion of luxury conditions assessment, the concept would become a selfish act controlled by “individual arbitration” or “self-judgment.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, there is no foundation or criteria for the assessment process to draw from, and the individual’s subjective contemplation of what they define as a successful product may ultimately skew it.

Assessment today heavily relies on the trivialization of knowledge measured via *analytic* rubrics (i.e., rating scales) or *holistic* rubrics (i.e., checklists). Considering this is the case, how can these instruments account for life’s randomness? It would suffice to say that we would not be able to comprehend assessment and language as “reflexive,” in the sense that these are not abstract autonomous entities, but rather tools used to engage and address the fundamental interests of the partakers.<sup>33</sup>

To access the nature of assessment, we must sever our ties to its current monetized version, while avoiding its conversion into a buzzword.<sup>34</sup> Assessment must act as a temporal space that creates an environment that helps forge integral and knowledgeable human beings. We firmly believe that assessment must trigger our innate aptitude to observe and determine in this precise moment. Let us dialectically push ourselves to solve possible scenarios that advocate the use of the imaginary to compare and contrast the case with things that pertain to the same category leading to understand the condition of the subject or object.

## Reconceptualizing a Philosophy of Assessment: Defying the Instrumentality of Assessment

The notion of assessment concerning an organic intellectual necessitates a humanistic line of ethics.<sup>35</sup> It ought to be a school of thought that centers its attention on phenomenological ontology. Sartre’s ideas about organic existence, freedom of choice, alterity, and rational reason provide the foundation for a philosophy of assessment. The following section will describe all four lines of thought, their philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, and their fitting together within the idea of organic assessment.

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32 Gilles Lipovetsky and Elyette Roux, *El Lujo eterno de la era de lo sagrado al tiempo de las marcas* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2014), 46 - 56.

33 Kees De Bot, K., Wander Lowie, and Marjolijn Verspoor, *Second Language Acquisition* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 143.

34 Jan McArthur. *Rethinking authentic assessment: work, well-being, and society* (Oxfordshire: Higher Education, 2023), 86.

35 Sechaba Mahlomaholo and Vhonani Netshandama, *Sustainable empowering learning environments: Conversations with Gramsci’s organic intellectual*. In *the Intellectual: A Phenomenon in Multidimensional Perspectives* (Lieden: Brill, 2010).



## Society's Take on Assessment

Han describes the communication model in the transparency society as the negation of interrogation of our convictions, beliefs, prejudices, and reasoning through the acceptance that our whole being is nothing but a collective thought of voices throughout our lives.<sup>36</sup> It neither deals with the unknown nor assesses outside the established. The standardization of knowledge, of being and knowing how to do must be accountable in a system that does not analyze alterity but is interested in a singular vision of what a social agent should be, often proposed as the benchmark. The philosophy of evaluation compels us to examine not only the thoughts of others but also our own, delving into the depth of our minds, with a primary focus on the *areté* of our reasoning.

The digital swarm society is heavily conditioning today's rationale, placing organic individuals in some sort of cage that promotes a lackluster narrative. Its participants are distracted by the plethora of variants of social media that greedily occupy the mind and ultimately hinder metacognitive reflection and inquiry. These platforms entice users to focus solely on personal growth and transient happiness. Digital zones distance their users from the message to the point that human presence is no longer required. It is feasible to state that digital communication allows each subject to participate in the symmetry of information and knowledge.

Suppose we define knowledge as the ability to apply reason in consideration of the performance of the subject's autonomous engagement with cultural text experiences as a way to transform.<sup>37</sup> Does our knowledge help find a plausible answer to the problems that arise? These ideological harmonies belong to an individual's autonomy and hold significance for those who are participants of a contemporary society that interacts with progressive models, transferable skills, and communicative competence.

## Refocalizing Assessment

Our focus on assessment should align with the concept of "*homo bona vitae*," prioritizing the development of competencies and skill sets. This path minimizes the stress of failure and opens more possibilities of multiplicity to answer and solve.<sup>38</sup> In return, this might prompt a social agent to become personally invested in the task or discussion, activating willpower to learn.

When identifying the goal, assessing which solution best fits the case triggers a yearning to explore new avenues and acts as a catalyst to reach new thresholds. At this stage, we can perform a metacognitive exercise to question the limits of ancient knowledge, making room for the emergence of the new. At this moment, assessment must shift from the abstract to the reality of multimodal language ecology.<sup>39</sup> In other words, assessment is inseparable from language; thus, we should envision this series of co-regulated interactions as a dance, a seamless sympathetic relation between partners mutually attuned in

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36 Han, *The Transparency Society*, 13.

37 Inmanuel Kant, *Crítica de la razón pura* (Madrid: Luarna Ediciones, 2010), 12.

38 Dylan Wiliam, *What is assessment for learning?* (London: Studies in educational evaluation, 2011), 11.

39 Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope. *Multiliteracies: Life of an idea* (Illinois: *The International Journal of Literacies*, 2023), 17-89.

a multimodal interactional process.<sup>40</sup> Life plays out like this daily, an endless waltz, so to speak, where we formulate our thoughts via multimodal channels.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, the cogs of the moral compass of assessment ought to synchronously tick towards co-regulated interactions involving confrontation with alterity, aiming to reach a consensus on possible newfound meaning. It is the aftermath of a series of cognitive, affective, and experiential states employed to reason by social agents that challenges the world via multidimensional guiding questions. A process education should allow us to step away from the “framing” of operationalized beings and advocate a boundless fractal grid that promotes exploration.

## **Recontextualizing a Philosophy of Assessment: The Organic Method of Assessment**

We can no longer conceive the standardization of human knowledge through the original lens of assessment-as-taxation. When we talk about assessment, we must also transcend its etymological roots from Latin (i.e., *assessare*), so it can blossom into a notion that considers language as a method. In other words, it ought to be about studying the approach taken or applied linguistic principle to express an idea to a given cultural text and dialectically questioning the coherence of the employed language.

While it is true that morphologically speaking, humans are similar, our essence differs significantly. Hence, we are isomorphs. As isomorphic creatures, our education and assessment systems must reflect this truth, one embedded within the core of an organic model that accounts for a tripartite arranged language expressed through multimodal nodes.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, assessing human knowledge means understanding interpretation as the return to the familiar and its application, that is, the participation in communication that is inherent to all.<sup>43</sup>

### **Dialectical Reasoning**

Dialectical reasoning is the aperture to deciphering the alienation of ourselves and the disregard for alterity, including making sense of the anguish felt by having to decide between devoting to an earthly or to a cyberspace praxis. Hence, engaging in discussion with another may lead to the discovery of assessment tools. Thus, we might perceive a mirrored reflection of the referent that is indistinguishable, as the image originates from its source of misfortune, driven by the desire to be the object it can never fully represent. This discrepancy, if not discovered, would establish a norm where hyperreality is the current crisis of representation. It would create a vicious and permissive cycle, where the simulacrum is the simulation.<sup>44</sup>

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40 Sue Savage-Rumbaugh; Jeannine Murphy; Rose Sevick; Karen Brakke; Shelly Williams; Duane Rumbaugh; and Elizabeth Bates, *Language Comprehension in Ape and Child* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 26 - 27.

41 Gunther Kress, *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication* (London: Routledge, 2010).

42 Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis. “Multiliteracies”: New literacies, new learning (Illinois: *Pedagogies: An international journal*, 2009), 164-195.

43 Antonio Gómez Ramos, Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Estética y hermenéutica* (Madrid: TECNOS, 2016), 16.

44 Introna, *On Cyberspace and Being: Identity, Self and Hyperreality*, 6.

Should the individual reason and establish a normative that seeks to develop an organic praxis, they will be attracted to becoming a social agent. An actor interprets world truths not through imaginary commitments but through normative ones. Tickle refers to Gramsci's idea of an empowered individual as a policy maker who consistently transmutes perpetual models<sup>45</sup> to defend the call to satisfy our constant need to give life to the sea of singular and collective voices. This idea is further reinforced by Kant's proposition of rational nature, whereby the individual can implement a double use of reason that derives from the development of the body and the mind. This requires the individual to transform and think in terms of their autonomy, culture, and collective experience.<sup>46</sup>

## A Needed Shift

We believe it is necessary to rethink the spectrum of assessment.<sup>47</sup> We must establish a new decentralized method from a critical stance and design an organic systematization willing to pierce through current principles, techniques, resources, and assessment systems. Consequently, the reasoning behind such a method should be prone to cultivating knowledge via qualitative and authentic means, where we may infer intentions delimited to a context that implores engagement, abstraction, and generalization. This method would necessitate a transformation of the concept of assessment. The processes entailed by each one is of utmost relevance and coherence in usage, as they have a pivotal role in the interpretation of messages.

Today's *homo digitalis*<sup>48</sup> find themselves wound up in their exploitation of production and performance within a system that constantly evaluates, assesses, and quantifies everything. Exploitation without control leads to a crisis in the face of success. Its consequential anguish limits the individual to choose only one option, despite living in a positivist society that operates under the assumption that everything is possible. The individual recognizes society's impositions of tracing a project and becoming its owner, which makes them the project's victim. The same individual oversees their actions as an actor who proposes the path and simultaneously performs to meet their conditions and demands, which creates present-day exploitation.

The disparity of individuals today is possibly a direct outcome of the lack of a proper assessment skill set that we should have learned in school. As the world embraces a new spectrum of meanings beyond traditional textual forms, a pedagogy of multiliteracies becomes necessary.<sup>49</sup> Multiliteracies propose new organic ways to conceive and develop evaluation, assessment, and knowledge.<sup>50</sup> We discuss *organic* here using Gramsci's notion of relentless tension and interaction amongst each social agent's willpower, where world truths are not abstract.<sup>51</sup> Here, participants possess the tools to transform paradigms through

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45 Tickle, *The Organic Intellectual Educator*, 474 - 475.

46 Kant, *Crítica de la razón pura*, 35 - 36.

47 Juan Ordóñez Álvarez, *Un modelo de evaluación aplicable a la Filosofía ya las Ciencias Sociales* (Oviedo: Aula Abierta, 1991), 125-138.

48 Han, *In the Swarm Digital Prospects*, 12.

49 Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, *From literacy to "multiliteracies": Learning to mean in the new communications environment*. *English Studies in Africa* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 23-45.

50 New London Group, *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1996), 60 - 92.

51 Andrew Robinson, *Towards an intellectual reformation: The critique of common sense and the forgotten revolutionary project of Gramscian theory* (London: Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 2005), 469 - 481.

precise and coherent aims that can ultimately materialize the potential of personal and collective mass voices.<sup>52</sup>

### Ending the Instrumentality of Assessment

Focusing on assessment from an instrumental standpoint is no longer viable. This implies that we must also rethink what we mean by *goals*. Moving past instrumentality means that goals would act as the common ground that individuals would work towards, rendering multiple possibilities to reach them. Their singularity assesses the fractal approach employed by those striving to answer the question to express a plurality of thought through a well-developed discourse. Based on this premise, the philosophy of assessment would be concerned with the *why* and *how* of assessment. We return to the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies ideas to frame the *why* and *how* as possibilities to transform education by profoundly rethinking our pedagogical practices. We use this same framework to discuss the reasons and methods of the assessment philosophy.

Thinking about *why* we assess should revolve around an emancipatory principle that liberates the individual to use language as a method to interpret the cultural text. In this way, assessment becomes:

- A method to advance human knowledge
- A means to ensure humanity as a species continues
- An act of liberation, a space to demonstrate accomplished levels of skill or competency

In this sense, assessment embraces social justice<sup>53</sup>, aesthetics, historical events, political views, and natural transformations to propose dialectical encounters that allow meaningful interpretation. Ergo, rethinking schools and schooling<sup>54</sup> must transform the norms, values, beliefs, rituals, and traditions instilled in the entire structure. Nevertheless, we must point out that we cannot downright remove the current stimuli events that generate interest among students and teachers in the learning and assessment processes. This phenomenon has been going on for many years. Still, as creatures of conduct that we are, we can, in time, modify this act of behaviorism and, accordingly, learn to approach this idea differently.

The following are some potential modifications:

- Assessment practices must supersede grading.
- Learning progress checkpoints cannot be limited to prescribed responses devoid of multiplicity.
- Assessment constructs should be hermeneutic to fit specific demographic realities. In short, assessment should be at the service of its constituencies.

Changing *how* we assess entails a significant shift from the one-dimensional tradition of implementing selected-response, constructed-response, and personal-response questions. This includes the commercialized version of critical thinking commonly found in textbooks. Rethinking the *how* of

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52 Tickle, *The Organic Intellectual Educator*, 474 - 475.

53 Jan McArthur. *Assessment for social justice: Achievement, uncertainty, and recognition (Changing Higher Education for a Changing World*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 144-156.

54 Ivan Illich, *Deschooling society* (Manhattan: Harper & Row, 1971).

assessment means we need to pique student interest and advocate for student agency. We offer an example from a task implemented in an undergraduate seminar on language teaching methods and approaches as an illustration. The goal of the task was to analogically link methods and approaches to simple machines. Students had to demonstrate how these concepts function as a Rube Goldberg Machine, combining different machines to perform and accomplish an objective.

This task posed the challenge of weaving a fractal grid that mixes multimodality, alterity, and creative multiplicity. The first step was to provide students with guiding questions to facilitate comprehension and alleviate taxation. The second was to advocate their freedom to propose original opinions. The final step was to create a sense of surprise and excitement, since engaging with the new stimulates curiosity and eliminates boredom.

### Isomorphic Perspective

If test constructs are designed under the same principles of reliability, practicality, and validity, and they are accompanied by a rubric (holistic or analytic)<sup>55</sup>, will they always be subject to looking alike? We should replace the idea of test constructs with this new sense of assessment. We can then design tests to account for isomorphic beings like ourselves, using polymorphism as a method to analyze the potential floor and ceiling of the human capacity to conjure coherent ideas based on their language knowledge for expressing a thought.

To make this isomorphic perspective a reality, we need to keep a record that follows the shifts from the initial state to the final state of knowledge. This tracing process would allow context-sensitive construction of an assessment. It would disregard humanity's attachment to the numerical quantification of the being. It would focus on in-class "developed knowledge" and the required engagement scenario to perform a proper objective analysis.

## From Organic Assessment to Fractal Semiotic Dialectism: An Introduction

As we mentioned in the introduction, unpacking the need and importance for organic assessment is part of a larger endgame in deploying a larger construct coined *Fractal Semiotic Dialectism* (FSD) as an extension and departure from organic assessment. FSD features three components in its framework: *Fragments*, *Symbolology*, and *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*. We detail each component below.

The first component, *Fragments*, refers to empirical experiences, causality, and cultural texts. For an individual to commence their ontological-phenomenological praxis, they must first have contact with themselves, others, the imaginary, and the outside world. Only through experimentation and the recognition of our existence by others, along with the validation of our experiences, can we determine

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55 Lyle Bachman and Adrian Palmer. *Language Testing in Practice: Designing and Developing Useful Language Tests* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 133-143.

the anguish of having to decide and applying certain criteria to make our choice. At this point, we start to reflect on the causality of our actions and develop more profound levels of consciousness.

We start to comprehend the cause and effect of what we think and how our actions bring about a consequence. It is possible to step into dialectical reasoning as the aperture to deciphering the alienation of ourselves and the disregard for alterity, including making sense of the anguish felt by having to decide between an earthly or a cyberspace praxis. This choice is influenced by our ability to interpret cultural texts. We do not experience the world as a whole but rather in small doses, and based on those moments, we assess, then we act.

Discerning our role and competence to perform within the language game allows us to think of the scenarios that we believe benefit us the most, others or both. FSD equips the individual with the necessary tools to dive into a fragmented world composed of real-life and virtual realities, including hyperreality.

The second component, *Symbology*, describes the analysis of analogical and core meanings. The framework exposes the individual to analogical and core meanings. It prompts individuals to question the deeper meaning of those meanings and consider how they fit within the bigger picture. By comprehending these symbolic meanings, it is possible to engage in a culture and participate in other cultures as we would be able to negotiate the reasoning behind specific behavioral and cognitive patterns conducted by organic agents.

The final component, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, is concerned with ontological processes, performance within the language game and language ecologies. It is the actual process of piecing together all of the input we receive to be able to interpret and make an informed decision. This is about being able to lay out our ontological praxis, assess the 'what' and 'why' of things we engage with and the ideas we pan out to materialize our life project. It also has to do with language ecologies in the sense that it studies the dynamics of language by proposing dialectic interactions that are coherent with the ecosystem of the individuals interrelating.

FSD is a framework that enacts individuals by guiding them towards the observation of the world and word to engage with both of them dialectically. This allows us to determine the symbolic value of the object and subject via rational, existential, and empirical evaluation and assessment processes.

### **FSD as Transcending Formative and Summative Assessment**

Fractal Semiotic Dialectism (FSD) is a philosophical framework that questions the coherence of the hegemonic models of formative and summative assessment that have been actively leading evaluation and assessment practices since the late 1930s. To date, professors and teachers prepare curriculums, pedagogical models, and assessment based on the following definitions: (1) Formative assessment is about analyzing the learning process from beginning to end with the provision of constant feedback. (2) Summative assessment is applied to determine whether an individual can be promoted from level to level. Both forms of assessment are subjugated to holistic and analytical rubrics.

A holistic rubric's function is to analyze communicative competence through checklists, be a rating scale and task specific. It does so through general descriptors that entail everything within the criteria, which also serve the purpose of guiding the learner. Its key advantages include simplicity, versatility, ease of scoring, and reliability as a source for measuring performance. An analytic rubric's purpose is to measure

communicative competence using a rating scale and/or combination of rubrics. This serves as a tool to provide explicit data on the performance achieved on each standard and provides feedback on strengths and weaknesses.

As an assessment framework, FSD considers the learning process of the individual found within formative assessment but at a larger scale. It is not the basic conceptualization of learning ranging from day one to the last day with how much the student learned up to that point. FSD is the observation of how the individual is able to make sense of cultural texts and perform within the language game with that information and discussion of the outcomes.

FSD will have moments separated specifically to assess an individual's dialectical cognition growth as it has been done before with summative assessment. However, the construct is not criterion-based or course content-based. FSD uses these ruptures in time as spaces of reflection to perform a check-up on an individual's dialectic cognition by questioning to get the test taker to the limits of their knowledge. The quality of this discourse is what is analyzed and commented later on. FSD advocates the recognition of the organic condition and alterity within institutional pedagogical models. The focus will be rethinking and recontextualizing knowledge development.

## Coda

We must forge a new form of thought to distance ourselves from the Transparency Society. Such new form could perhaps be one that can make sense of the world's random and chaotic nature and enable comprehension of the different cultural texts we encounter. It is a deliberate act of opposition to the trending pornification of assessment which does not consider an organic and diversified perception of the world we construct through phonemes and morphophonemes.

In education, we develop critical consciousness to reflect on assessment literacies, aiming to attain a politically reflexive consciousness. A consciousness analyzes our praxis and actions to determine the best possible "verb" (from past, present, and future causality) to obtain an outcome closest to the ideal scenario. We can accomplish this by employing critical assessment literacies to tackle contemporary language ecologies that demand an organic study of language.

We must consider a wide array of multiliteracy practices to advocate for creative and cognitive encounters so as to stimulate the negotiation of meaning. Such encounters guide individual and collective states, prompting social agents to take a step back to observe their praxis in juxtaposition to the choice taken, contrasting it with what was available.

Assessment is the method to make sense of the fractal nature of life, a space devoid of prescriptive formulas that we employ to analyze the cultural texts with which we engage. This virus disrupts the stagnating miasma of a positivist society. We may do this by embracing the core concept of philosophy: to question. Carl Jung once said, "To ask the right question is already half the solution of a problem."<sup>56</sup> Raising the

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56 Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 23.

right questions is the first step to transcending the techne of thinking and tapping into reflective thinking as a metacognitive exercise to approach the aesthetics of life ontologically.

For instance, creating an aperture for thoughts to flow fluidly on subject of interest may light a spark. This little fire might ignite the fuse, which could start a bonfire. If we nurture this moment, our students may feel the drive to propose new analogical meanings.

We would like to reference some tasks our students have developed. We carefully designed the tasks to advocate for finding and defining their voice. We have observed that when students have a chance to develop this sense of individuality, it liberates the individual from fear of the negative.

- Using games like Minecraft as a multimodal strategy promotes language development and creative problem-solving.
- Conceptualizing individuals as agentic fuels the yearning to develop specific skills or competencies.
- Reconceptualizing a dated literary canon to match today's ideologies becomes an act of linguistic analysis.

Assessment can be emancipatory if we use these ideas as the foundation. From this perspective, assessment constructs would be hermeneutic<sup>57</sup> and built to fit specific demographic realities to match the cultural texts that the individuals engage with daily. Ergo, it is our duty as teachers (pre-service or in-service) to be constantly reflective on our practices. A step in that direction is to think about and discuss questions such as:

- If the concept of assessment is subjective, could we each have our own philosophy of assessment?
- If so, would this mean that each proposed ontological-phenomenological praxis is valid?
- Could the trending sensation of burnout be eliminated or mitigated by new forms of knowledge construction and assessment practices?

To conclude, the classroom ought to be re-envisioned as a mirror image of the causality of the world that we engage with daily, a language lab that advocates non-prescriptive interactions. This reflection would work in tandem with the incessant need to ontologically maintain and sustain an organic framework that encourages students to assume responsibility for their agency. We argue that a careful weaving of moments for creation and application of assessment may guide individuals into identifying with the topic via plausible articulations the person can hermeneutically link to past, present, and future experiences. In short, a multimodal assessment of information nodes is always accessible if we know how to use them.

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57 Mikel Arteta, *La hermenéutica crítica de Habermas: una «profundización» de la hermenéutica gadameriana* (Málaga: Contrastes. Revista Internacional de Filosofía, 2016).



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