

POSTMODERNISM REVISITED: FROM CULTURE TO CULTURAL INDUSTRIES IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY¹

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Abstract.- Several decades have passed since the start of the debate about so-called postmodernism. The emergence of the Information Society and globalisation shed new light on this phenomenon and places it historically as an initial and anticipatory reflection of culture and processes which later culminated in the global information society. What we defend here, retrospectively, is that postmodernism was only the announcement of what we now call cultural or information based capitalism in which cultural industries progress hand-in-hand with the new technologies within an expansion process of a new universal and dominant culture, supported by the net.

Keywords.- culture, globalization, cultural industries, postmodernism, information society, new information technologies, network society

Culture in the Age of Globalisation

Etymologically speaking, it is known that the term 'culture' mainly comes from the Latin word *colere* in most Western languages, referring to crops and preferably to land cultivation. Later, this expression was similarly applied to the so-called *soul*, resulting in the adjective 'cultivated' to define that person who had cultivated his soul. In part, this is the reason for which the term in its current sense is related to those human activities involving the cultivation of the arts and literature or with intellectual activity in general, it being assumed that the latter allow cultivation of the soul. This is also the sense reached in the XVIIIth century and from which the tendency to relate culture with certain expressions considered to be superior. Traditionally, the latter was developed by the elite, opposed to others of a more popular and extensive character. In the enlightened France and Germany, the term took on some nuances, becoming more extensive and eventually generally defining all those manifestations related to human creation, contrary to those related to nature, something that could be found in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*. Soon afterwards *Kultur* (culture) was spoken about rather than *Natur* (nature). From then onwards, the term developed until it defined not only individual cultivation,

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which nowadays is associated to cultivated people or what we call a *cultivated* manifestation of art (cultivated music, for example, as compared with popular music), but was extended to all those human activities that could be distinguished from natural ones, including not only art or literature but also religion, ethics, customs and of course, what was known as popular culture.

In this way, the term culture began to be used in the Age of Romanticism, even as a collective term, defining a set of those expressions related to a specific people, hence endowing them with their own identity. Herder spoke of cultures in plural to define these realities which were specific and distinctive of a people. Thus, he affirmed that the “culture of a people is the flourishing of their existence”. To a large extent this is the sense adopted thereafter by anthropologists to refer to different cultures, no longer between different European nations but also what was then considered as peoples or primitive cultures. Social sciences of the XIXth century and especially, the XXth century extended the idea of culture to refer to systems or ways of living, which in certain cases made it possible to be also extended to animals (Waal, F.B. M. and Tyack, P. L., 2003) to define the set of characteristics permitting the relation with the environment beyond simple instinctive stimuli, one of the fields of study of the so-called Ethology.

The term as such, its expressions and its way of being understood is the object of intense debates within the different social sciences. However, there seems to be a minimum consensus in considering that its essential facets are related to a set of characteristics. The Spanish philosopher, Gustavo Bueno remembers it in this way, although from a specific critical view which is not our aim at present, when citing the definition given by Tylor: “Culture or civilisation, in a wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole including knowledge, beliefs, art [including technology], ethics, law, customs and any other habits and talents acquired by mankind as far as members of society are concerned” (Bueno, 1978: 64-67).

Beyond the criticism that Gustavo Bueno himself makes of this concept, it is certain that he seems to assume that its core lies in the distinction between nature and culture. And this aspect is especially interesting when speaking about the Information Society (hereinafter, IS). One of the characteristics of the IS is that technology is more important than nature in an especially powerful way, since it has permitted a new technological leap in which even such apparently natural concepts like space and time have been modified according to a technology whose purpose and basic tool is information. The latter is relevant if we consider that many definitions of culture in its widest sense and compare with nature also depend on considering culture as a system of symbols or signs. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer, for example, defined man as *animal symbolicum* (Cassirer, 2006: 31). In turn, Levi-Strauss had indicated from structural anthropology, how the evolution of nature to culture depended on symbolic structures and, Humberto Eco, from semiotics said that “the whole of culture should be studied as a communicative phenomenon based on signification systems” (Eco, 1979: 22).

In this way we could say, without excessive simplification, that culture is the result of a singular artifice whose ultimate substrate is the symbolic capacity structured as information. In 1981, the UNESCO defined culture in these terms:

“culture provides mankind the capacity of self-reflection. It is what makes us specifically human, rational, critical and ethically compromised. Through it we recognise values and make choices. As a result, mankind expresses itself, is self-aware and understands itself as an unfinished project, questioning its own achievements, tirelessly searching for new meanings and creating works transcending it”. This definition adds to the two characteristics mentioned, namely artifice character and symbolic structure, a triple functional dimension integrating communication, reflection capacity and sense projection. Later on, in the 2001 Declaration, immediately after the attacks of September 11th and in the middle of the globalisation process, the UNESCO offered a new definition: “culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”². This definition explains and emphasises a new characteristic already present in the previous approaches: the idea that this symbolically structured artifice, not only serves to communicate, reflect and give sense but also includes the ways of coexistence and is condensed in the expression “living together” gathered in the Declaration.

From a definition like this one, it becomes immediately obvious that the IS not only affects culture in its multiple expressions as technological change processes always do, but perhaps involves a profound cultural change, directly influencing all those ideas allowing the definition of culture. We should not forget that the outstanding characteristics of the so-called IS lie in what we refer to as a technological leap. Thus, it is an artifice, having the singularity of being based on information, but moreover makes the globalising process possible, blending ways of living, beliefs and feelings. Our analysis intends to approach this cultural dimension of the IS from a double perspective. Firstly, as a new way of living, that is, as a global culture in the widest sense and secondly, as a process involving profound transformations in previous cultural expressions. It is our intention that this focus takes into account the parameters of what elsewhere we have called *paradox of difference* (Salvat and Serrano, 2010), to the extent that the cultural process and change involved joining the emergence of an integrating tendency in a unique and new culture, to an apparent intensification of differences, now understood as *cultures* a reason for which the term multiculturalism or other versions of the matter, like interculturality, have achieved huge importance within the scope of globalisation.

It is significant that one of the precursors in the use of the term Information Society, already linking it to the postindustrial society, was Daniel Bell, in turn, author of a book having considerable influence in the decade of the seventies called *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Although initially referring to the North American culture, his analysis of cultural changes emerging in the sixties was also applicable to most Western countries emerging a little after the IS. Bell remembered in the *Preface* how this book was a continuation of another one on postindustrial society, although starting from a premise apparently contrary to the idea we are defending here: the narrow relation between technoscience, society and culture. Hence the title of Bell’s book referred to the cultural contradictions of capitalism. The basic thesis of the book could be

² <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf>

summarised in these words: the principles of economic scope and those of culture now conduct people in opposite directions” (Bell, 1976). We believe that this thesis once again expresses, but in another version, this paradox of difference which we mentioned. For Bell, these two directions, apparently opposite, the functional rationality in the techno-economic and non rationality in culture, would have produced capitalism itself, hence enhancing a contradiction where culture would react against the social and economic structure from which it emerged. It is not a coincidence the fact that in those years an important cultural movement arose which appeared to emphasise this stress between a social structure and pragmatic and capitalist economy and a cultural life, foreign to any principle of a rational nature. We refer to the emergence of what is called postmodernism, a term which Bell also used in his book on several occasions and which to a great extent then served to define the culmination of the process announced by Bell. And it is neither by chance because postmodernism began to burst out on the same dates on which the so-called post-industrial society was developing and simultaneously, a thesis like the “end of history” appeared: the supposed expansion of liberal capitalist rationality in the context that it would end up becoming globalisation.

The Postmodern Episode

One of the most renowned theoreticians regarding this cultural phenomenon of today is still the North American analyst, Frederic Jameson. In his already classic work *Postmodernism. Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, he established a narrow correlation between these phenomena: “postmodern theories –whether celebratory or couched in the language of moral revulsion and denunciation– bear a strong family resemblance to all these most ambitious sociological generalisations which, at much the same time, bring us the new of the arrival and inauguration of a new kind of society, most famously baptized “postindustrial society” (Daniel Bell), but often also designated “consumer society”, “media society”, “information society”, “electronic society” or “high tech”, and the like” (Jameson, 1991: 3). Since then, there seems to have been a consensus considering that postmodernism is the most unanimous characteristic to define the culture of this emerging reality that already began to be called the Information Society and which in the economics or political field expressed itself later on under names like globalised society, new economy or from a technological point of view was also called “digital society”.

One of the authors contributing to spread the term, the French philosopher, J. F. Lyotard, directly related the emergence of postmodernism with the decisive importance of the new way of knowledge based on information and data processing which were then called computerised societies (Lyotard, 1984). Since then, postmodernism as a class and phenomenon has undergone considerable development, has been the object of considerable debate and has been questioned even in its presuppositions (Sokal and Bricmont, 1998; Sokal, 2008). Today it has lost the force with which it appeared, but beyond the life cycle of the term and result of the debates, most of the characteristics that the first critics and apologists announced are still present or even had been

intensified with the passing of time and undoubtedly may be considered as characteristics pertaining to culture in a digital society, the reason for which it appears to us to be the suitable nexus to approach us to the culture of the Information Society, our aim here.

Briefly we should remember that beyond other previous records (Welsch, 2002: 10-15), postmodernism emerges, narrowly linked to architecture and aesthetics and its first generalised use was related to a type of architecture. In this sense, it is necessary to mention once again, the architect Robert Venturi's book *Learning from Las Vegas*, published in 1972. It considers an analysis of a city constructed in the postmodern manner and in which affirmations like the following one may be found: "Signs and advertisements on the highway establish verbal and symbolic connections throughout space, communicating important complexes by means of hundreds of associations in a few seconds and from afar. The symbols dominate space. Architecture is not sufficient ... The desert city is intensive communication along the highway" (Venturi, 1972). Years later, Jean Baudrillard considered that if Las Vegas was the expression of postmodernism, it was because in this city, semblance was more important than reality, or in his words, because hyperreality is symbolised architecturally. It was the advertisements, in communication terms, which integrated the city and space as Venturi affirmed in this context that metaphorised the emptiness of the real, the desert, compared with the hyperreal. Las Vegas, the hyperreal, understood as postmodernism, indicates a dimension of the information society from aesthetics and culture which, as such, has been called the Network Society by Castells, *telepolis* by the Spanish philosopher, Javier Echeverría, or "bit city" by the North American architect, Mitchell.

This is the aspect from which we propose revisiting Postmodernism as a cultural expression of the information society: the emergence of a new culture in the widest interpretation of the term, related to this new technological dimension and its effects, globalised, digital and vertical. Besides its own consistency, this emergence has consequences and effects on pre-existing cultures, because it has implied a transformation of what could be called the real spaces of pre-existing cultures. New artistic forms are born as a result of this emergence depending on new technologies and from it traditional ones are modified resulting in a specific evolution of the phenomenon called "cultural" in that more limited sense we spoke about at the beginning of this article and which today is summarised in the term "cultural industries" which according to Bustamante have become "structuring and integrating the most important and dominating culture" (Bustamante, 2003: 24).

The common substrate is what, in total acceptance of the term postmodernism, Baudrillard called *hyperreality* or *Virilio Cyberworld*. Both terms referred to a subtraction from the real, permitting the emergence of a virtual universe, thanks to new technologies. The new culture, whose determinant economic and industrial dimension will be dealt with later, would be this new scenario, according to the already classic description of Baudrillard: "Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real within origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it" (Baudrillard, 1994: 1). By means of a

somewhat cryptic language, authors like Virilio and Baudrillard, tried to express decades ago something that has become common place in our lives: that reality as a whole appears to grow in a way simulated by new technologies and hence cultures have become just another product of these technologies, in a semblance and is no longer a representation: a culture in which semblance invades everything, such that reality itself has become a semblance.

Baudrillard's thesis had a precursor which could be recognised in the founder of the situationist movement, Guy Debord. In *The Society of the Spectacle* he envisaged, before the dawn of the digital revolution, the emergence of a new consideration of culture, in the context of the media and which would be replaced by a scenario where the "spectacle" would be the ultimate context of culture. Furthermore, to a certain extent, these theories were indebted to a concept launched by the authors of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Horkheimer y Benjamin, namely, "cultural industry". The already classical analysis by Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* highlighted the new situation of the work of art subject to mass reproduction methods. In the latter, industry and consumption appear in the forefront of cultural production modifying culture itself, blending with spectacle understood as merchandise and depending on the same conditions as other goods. Art and culture as a whole hence lost, according to them, the emancipation possibilities achieved during the Age of Romanticism as a reply to the technification of capitalism and industrial society.

But these basically romantic critical and evocative analyses, started in the thirties, as in Benjamin's case, could hardly envisage the revolution which in this sense the 'digital one' has produced and to the capacity of new technologies to reproduce art or create it. What Baudrillard was speaking about was not representation and reproduction but semblance. Disneyland was the model, in the same way that Venturi replaced reality by advertisements and the symbol was the space of the city of Las Vegas, in the same way that it was affirmed that the Gulf War had never existed. Beyond the hyperbolic or at least, exaggerated character of Baudrillard's thesis, it is true that in these approaches to the relations between reality and fiction, we found a correlation of the determining phenomenon of the IS, from the economical or social standpoint: virtual reality. Today we know that far from being mere speculation or rhetoric excess, this is the base of economic and social relations determining the globalised world.

From the cultural point of view, this fundamental novelty, linked to information and industry, in fact one of the most relevant elements of postmodern culture which could be expressed in Derrida's terms, namely that nothing exists beyond digital texts or digital poems, to now employing aesthetic streamlining of one of the cult authors of cultural postmodernism like Mallarmé, for whom the poem in some way returns to itself. It is here where postmodernism was culturally anticipated, in its manner of understanding cultural transformations which afterwards the IS would have peaked even beyond postmodernism. In this way, we have already mentioned Lyotard's definitions as among the first, emphasising this dimension and the role of data processing, even before the net had spread. Thus, postmodernism may also be reconsidered as the

materialisation and self-reflection in the middle of the change process towards the information society.

However, as has occurred with the idea of globalisation, postmodernism soon found its critics. For almost all of them, this type of expression was no more than an ideological form, in the old Marxist sense, pertaining to late capitalism. Similar to the economy, financial structure, production methods, outsourcing processes, labour relations or the same geopolitical relations depend on nets and the technologies permitting them. Hence, postmodernism would not have been more than the cultural expression of these other realities: that beyond the digital text, an economic, social and material reality depend on semblances. Under these terms it is reasonable to understand the affirmations formulated by Jameson decades ago at the front of postmodernism: "Yet this is the point at which I should remind the reader of the obvious: that this whole, yet America, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and terror" (1991: 5). As we have already said, this thesis represents the critical aspect of the new cultural reality related to globalisation and the IS and reminds us of the specially critical approaches which consider the information society and its effects as an imperial form (Hardt and Negri, 2000), as an instrument of domination and imposition. This kind of criticism is parallel to those applied to the IS as told by the communication theoretician, Herbert Schiller, for whom the new IS would be a new type of cultural imperialism, specifically aimed at controlling the Third World (Webster, 2006: 134) (Schiller, 2000), or those which in a similar way have been made by intellectuals such as Noam Chomski, who does not hesitate in using the expression of "the terror culture" when referring to the North American hegemony (Chomsky, 2008: 20).

According to these criticisms, we would be before a parallel ideology which Zizek calls liberal multiculturalism. This is a process in which literature and the arts and culture in its widest sense would be characterised by the rupture of old ties of rigid identities, due to the absence of energetic discourses considered to be authoritarian, which Lyotard called "the great stories", due to the aesthetisation of life, the affirmation of differences faced with the oppressive identity, the relinquishment of a firm idea of truth and reason and the emergence of other emotional dimensions. A new western culture in its full scope, where not only aesthetics and literature, but also ways of life would have changed, faced with modernism. Old ideas and beliefs which had predominated for centuries, belief in the truth, progress, reason, strong and accepted values, solid social structures, would be paving the way to another kind of society. Culture understood in a dimension of industry and spectacles would hence lose the dramatic quality it had been given by different traditions from Romanticism until the Frankfurt School, to exist in a new way of being in the world distinct to the modern one. The Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo considered that, in fact, in postmodernism, the human being is an exchange value, as is art, but far from understanding it as something simply negative he sees it as the symptom of a different society and perhaps freer, liberated from the weight of reason and the *ideals* of modernism (Vattimo, 1985).

However, with the passing of time, postmodernism has gradually lost the vitality it had in the last decades of the XXth century. After the controversy triggered by what was known as the Sokal Case, in which two prestigious scientists, Sokal and Bricmont declared that most of the discourses were senseless, when referring to authors like Derrida, Irigaray, or the same Deleuze and other poststructural philosophers. No doubt, the use of the term and the force it had has weakened, being displaced or simultaneously used by others and having in common with it that of trying to describe the new expression of culture in the age of information: as a liquid society, risk society, spectacle society, third threshold. If we have included it in the title and have used it until now, it has been to stress how this expression was and the debates related to it permitting the articulation of initial discourses related to what was happening in culture at the same time in which digital technology advanced unstoppably until our days.

After Postmodernism

Independently from whether the term postmodernism should survive or not, it cannot be denied that, as a minimum, it represents a clear precursor of culture in the IS and as such the joint consideration of both as proposed here, surely permit new light to be shed on both old postmodernism and the new cultural reality of the IS. In this way, helped by this brief analysis regarding postmodernism, we believe that some characteristics of this new culture may be distinguished; now understanding the growing uniformity of ways of living in the globalised information society and co-existing with different pre-existing cultures and supporting it.

First of all, we should consider what the core of the new culture is: the emergence of a new way of understanding relations with the world and other human beings, based on a technology determining an artificial space replacing the predominant beliefs concerning nature, humans, knowledge and political and social relationships. It is important to mention that Martin Heidegger, one of the undeniable references of postmodernism had highlighted the importance of method and technification of the world as an essential characteristic of the modern world and that paradoxically, the new culture which some wanted to call postmodern was characterised by the emergence of a new artificial framework. The latter's maximum expression has resulted in virtual reality, since strictly speaking or in a wider sense, it is considered to be referring to space in the net, the world on the screen and to the set of digital structures on which today's economic structures and our day-to-day life depend.

This emergence of the new virtual universe involves questioning the old ideas around which western culture had been organised and bound to mankind's relationships with nature and the corresponding way of relating with the reality depending on them. The North American philosopher, Richard Rorty was right when already expressing at the end of the seventies this change, resorting to the metaphor of the mirror. Compared with the consideration of the previous culture, which would pertain to the modern world of science, knowledge and culture, based on the idea that "knowing" is reflecting nature, as in a mirror, he proposed a *mirrorless philosophy* (Rorty, 1979) where the truth and ideas that

have accompanied it, including aesthetic values, would take on a new dimension. This transformation was the fruit of what he called the *linguistic turn* affirming the importance of language. Even at that time, Rorty, at the end of the seventies of XXth Century, could not accept taking the network and information society into account, its approaches which with the passing of time seemed to coincide with the fact that the virtual world is the result of a language, beyond which it is difficult to search for a reality foreign to conversation itself, a term that Rorty used to refer to philosophy, that later on may be replaced by the net. In a universe of these characteristics there is no longer space for watertight compartments to locate the truth, aesthetics or even moral values as separate demands. This lack of distinction depends on language and reminds us of Nietzsche's words, another unavoidable reference to what was called postmodernism, about which there are only metaphors and metonyms. Truth becomes virtual as its definition depends on the effects it produces rather than an inert or given consistency. In this sense, it should be remembered that 'virtual' is not 'unreal', but only that whose consistency is able to produce effects without necessarily being real, neither becoming unreal, the reason for which it is virtual. A consideration like this not only affects the concept of science, knowledge and truth, which thereafter is already virtual in the sense of veritable. We have already seen how architecture is presented as postmodern in the way that it influences in this aspect. We cannot fail to mention other arts in which the traditional supports like novels abandon Stendhal's consideration according to what should reflect reality, or in poetry or music. The genres are weakening, are confused and the tendency of pastiche is universalised. Furthermore, new technologies determine the supports and their contents are modified, just because a new relationship between economics and what we traditionally called culture depend on the technologies. It is what has been reasonably called the *functional collision* pertaining to cultural capitalism (Brea, 2003: 13 y 56).

But secondly, this emergence of virtual reality determined that the same idea of "human" would be modified and within too this element so linked to culture like self-reflection. Many postmodern authors have been inspired by Heidegger's ideas who already spoke about the end of humanism in the mid—XXth Century, which he partially identified with technical knowledge. Decades afterwards, another German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk introduced a new turn of the screw to this humanism crisis and in a controversial conference entitled *Rules for the Human Zoo*, he questioned the traditional concept of 'human' as linked to literature and books and made a description which, at the time, created a scandal and which, however, pretended to take into account the new technological dimension and its possibilities when defining 'human' (Sloterdijk, 2009). Beyond the small scandal provoked by Sloterdijk, a mediatic philosopher like few, what is certain is the image 'human' appears to give the arts and sciences which have repeatedly abounded in that direction. In fact, artistic works like *Blade Runner* or the trilogy *Matrix* insisted in that the identity of individuals is not so consistent as had been thought during modernism. Most of the relevant reflections of the thinkers of recent decades share this mistrust regarding identity and independence from different perspectives. From the optimistic and vital point of view of Nietzsche who announced the superman theory and the overcoming of identity to pave the way to multiplicity, or from the

most gloomy theoreticians who consider individuals as the result of discourse literature and language, there is a common element the digital society and the net seem to have fulfilled: the multiple and plural dimension of individuals.

The individual is variable and fragmentary and so is culture, such that the different cultural expressions are not only blended with each other but the classical distinctions between culture as a whole and popular culture or between culture and spectacle disappear, all of them tendencies that could already be detected in the so-called end of the avant-garde age and hallowed with *Pop* art, all of the latter very much linked to postmodernism. Today things have gone much further and the tendency to dilute the frontiers between reality and fiction are also expressed in the disappearance of the frontiers between culture and any other merchandise under the terms indicated above when mentioning Gianni Vattimo, in a vagueness which has even lead to consider that in this new form of merchandise it is suspended, no longer existing (Brea, 2003: 28). Thus, thanks to the simple fact that the electronic multimedia format allows all elements to be blended and determines the end of the old distinctions between the audiovisual, the printed, the cult and the popular, the informative, the educational and persuasion (Castells, 2009: 403).

These characteristics have the particularity of being concentrated, intensified and generated throughout the net and digital technology and constitute a virtual universe, not only in the way we defined this culture as compared with the real, but also in the context of this last resort, which, functioning in terms of real time and based on communication, represents a kind of huge bazaar. In the latter, cultural information travels at the speed of light and is available for any user at any point on the planet. This is the basis of global culture which possesses the same characteristics we are talking about, the paradox of difference exists with special intensity, and where the structures themselves are no longer hierarchies. Most classical cultural expression is available for free, resulting in new economic forms that are inspired in the methods of cultural reproduction, understood in the strictest sense and where in a specific way culture determines the economic method and not vice versa.

Cultural Industries

This new culture, whose characteristics we have tried to indicate without excessive thoroughness, exists in the double sense that we have been using until now. On the one hand, as a way of seeing the world under the terms defined by the UNESCO and, on the other, as a type of expression normally related to music, art, literature, cinema and others, and from which this new digital culture produces effects at different levels, either digitalising pre-existing wealth, or creating new uses and new contents (Zallo, 2007: 333-234). Besides being a new way of living, this new culture produces changes regarding pre-digital cultural products, on the one hand, and results in, on the other, the new ways of expression totally depending on the digital, which have appeared, related to the digital and which we can consider as new forms of cultural expression, like *netart*.

When speaking about culture changes in a strict sense, it seems necessary to resort to a characteristic we have already indicated and which has immediate consequences on the own habits of what we understand as culture: culture is just another merchandise, and is the merchandise *par excellence* of the IS if we accept the definition of culture as information, as provided at the beginning. Obviously, it is reasonable to eradicate culture as merchandise and dream with a universe in which the supposed new economy finally replaces property by access as pretended by Rifkin. But the question is not the names, but that *outside* referred to before, because the existence of this 'outside' is what determines and control processes, in the same way as the net itself and the first expressions of this so-called new economy was created, associated and sustained with the financial support of the USA Department of Defence, whose capacity of military coercion could be defined as the maximum expression of 'outside'. Its recognition or denial configures the consideration that should be made of the implications between what is called new economy, information and culture. For this reason, very few people doubt that the most suitable expression to understand these changes is no longer postmodernism, surrounded by hairy fairy debates, perhaps already blunt, but of cultural industries. But this expression cannot be understood as a mere distribution of pre-existing products (Bustamante 2003: 21). In other words, we are not referring to simple reproduction spoken about by Walter Benjamin, or cultural industry as a simple ideology or mass culture critically analysed by the Frankfurt School, but simply and plainly the fact that it is becoming more difficult to distinguish culture from any other product. Due to the fact of that reproduction possibility described by Benjamin being one of the outstanding characteristics of the new global economy, one of whose keys is zero reproduction cost, transforming culture into an economic model of information or making it almost indistinct from it, culture, regarding production, has hence become a decisive tool of economic activity. Hence, its own definition and regulation have become an extremely important problem, as shown by the political dimension provoked by the controversy regarding downloading, even resulting in the existence of different pirate political parties and to authentic social demonstrations.

This new culture, now understood in its most limited sense, produces multiple consequences and an evolution depending on the extent of it flowing parallel to technological progress, is impossible to predict. Nowadays, however, some of these consequences may be indicated going beyond mere criticism under the classical terms of the Frankfurt School.

The principle of growing yields, related to the fact that information as merchandise hardly costs anything to be reproduced, determines an entire universe of cultural consumption forms and simultaneously, new tension regarding the regulation of their limits, affecting the way of understanding intellectual property, individual rights, relations between users and companies and seems to question the old concepts and practices related to culture. What is new and specific is that new methods of cultural business are emerging, influencing both producers and consumers, as a result of which traditional cultural markets like books and music or cinema have been specially affected.

From the producer's standpoint, the reproduction capacity of cultural wealth at a practically free cost modifies the strategies to produce profit, resulting in what is known as *Long Tail*. If traditionally cultural, discographic, publishing, producing companies keenly searched for what is known in the book market as *best sellers* or in the discographic market as the top hits (Gómez- Escalonilla, 2007: 26), the new digital possibilities permit companies to obtain profits from less relevant works or even works that we can define as failures. Chris Andersen, one of the first to consider this phenomenon said: "Without needing to pay the cost of shelves in the case of exclusively digital services of *iTunes*, without manufacturing cost and almost no distribution cost, the sale of a song for marginal audiences is simply just another sale, with almost the same margins as a super sale. In this way, super sales and failures are equivalent; both are simply another file in a database which merely serves songs on demand. Both of them are worthy of being included in the inventory. Suddenly, popularity no longer holds the monopoly of profitability" (Andersen, 2006).

At the same time, the phenomenon of print on demand is affecting the publishing and book markets, which, coexisting with the old model tend to replace it. On the other hand, the electronic book and library are already realities gradually opening the way. Most conventional publishers market their products in a digital form through the so-called *e-book* which have been expanding since the beginning (Bustamante, 2003: 48-49). New devices like Amazon's *Kindle* represent a leap in that direction and thus in the second quarter of 2009, the sales of electronic books amounted to 37.6 million dollars in a spectacular growth (Fraguas, 2009). The initiatives of book digitalisation by *Google* are creating considerable tension due to fear of the future monopoly by this company. The project implemented in 2004 (Gómez Escalonilla, 2007), has currently foreseen the digitalisation of 34 million books, with partially free access in some cases, but brings up doubts to the associations managing author's rights and those affected and finding strong opposition. In fact, there are already hundreds of thousands of books partially available, but also there are many law suits in the courts and the partial agreements which *Google* is reaching. However, this is not more than the beginning because besides *Google*, Universities, Governments and other public and private entities tirelessly work in digitalisation processes. Access to classical works or other even recent ones is currently a reality modifying methods of intellectual work, multiplying resources and allowing research tasks to be improved without the need to visit libraries or research centres.

In the world of cinema, the phenomenon has characteristics of greater economic importance, due to the significance of the cinematographic industry. Not only has the digital industry finished with old formats, but the emergence of the DVD has modified methods of distribution and today most of the profits depend on these reproduction methods, causing a problem similar to that of books and music regarding the possibility of the so-called piracy, that is, illegal copies. Downloads permitted by free *software* represent one of the most important matters of the current struggle regarding rights in all societies. The French and British governments have felt obliged to pass restrictive laws regarding downloads, even making blockage of access possible for offenders. In Spain the problem has arisen in a similar way and the debate is on the table,

having resulted in a surfers' manifesto confronted with the possibility that the Government may close specific web pages without the need of judicial authorisation, having become an ideological debate. On the other hand, as occurs with everything related to technologies which advance at great speed, the problem of downloads and their regulation has already been overcome by the *Streaming* phenomenon in which the user no longer requires downloading the film or spectacle and simply has access to see it free of charge, as occurs with radio and television. In this way, a computer simultaneously contains all possible variations. Furthermore, the so-called P2P networks can be added, a technology which characteristically operating on line allow access to all types of contents and today is one of the headaches of the watchmen of author's rights and intellectual property.

Everything said about cinema may be applied to the world of music, one of the most powerful media among cultural industries where the already old system of illegal reproduction in the form of a CD and in Spain called *top manta*, having a price for a copy of identical quality much less than the market price. Even more pronounced than in the cinematographic industry is the ease of free downloads and copies travelling at the speed of light, adding a new problem to the old illegal copy, or even access systems not requiring downloads. The problem is the same because it is applicable to all the cultural industries: "Reproduction conditions in the Internet make cultural products distributed/reproduced as computer files, for example by means of P2P systems, whether free or at no cost difficult to change into cultural merchandise and hence, to be economically executed. The latter is mainly due to the difficulties to control their distribution, impose payment models for access or the exclusive right of their reproduction copyright" (Calvi, 2008).

The Ministries of Culture and pertinent regulations increasingly assume more responsibilities pertaining to a Ministry of Industry or Home Office, that is, responsibilities traditionally assigned to economic management and politics and not a single day passes in which the matter of reproduction rights does not appear on the front page of current news. Given the economic relevance and social consequences of these phenomena, free *software* and piracy are transformed into cultural, political and economic agents, in an interaction which has never been produced before, creating considerable economic and even political tension. This was shown in a recent episode in which the surfers and *bloggers* put pressure on the Spanish Minister of Culture confronted with the fear that the new law called sustainable economy restricted fundamental rights. It was a trial of strength obliging the President of the Government to intervene and call an urgent meeting in the Ministry and an example of the profound interrelation between economics, politics and culture in the information society.

Together with this apparent political dimension and around which the struggle is currently centred, that is, also with the dimension related to economic, author's, access limits and regulation of information download rights, there is another one which although political, affects the same idea of culture. The promise of free and unlimited access is an ideal which may be intoxicated if we also assume that art and culture have been diluted in economy or if that is what is intended and on doing it, we celebrate.

Provisional conclusion: The Net, Hamlet's Ghost and Don Quixote's Look

Nowadays we know that the idea of people, and consequently, the old culture, as an expression of the peoples as arisen in the XVIII century, is difficult to maintain, perhaps because the globalised economy and universal culture or the way of universal life accompanying it have excessive centrifugal force to allow the traditional centripetal forces to resist it. The common culture built inside this artifice, which is the artifice itself, is therefore more than ever an artifice and sign, but no longer opposite a "nature" we cannot recognise, but opposite the old cultures resisting this virtual universe presided by the paradox of difference. Also the old concept of culture in the classical sense of *Bildung* is also a resistance. We have already indicated that when the 'outside' of the artifice is not recognised, one tends to dream in these multitudes, intensities and differences that no longer promise freedom, but appear to be fulfilling it by erasing the frontiers with other dimensions of life. The emancipation ideal of the old *Bildung* then appears to be useless and with it all that presented under the metaphor of the tree, compared with the Deleuzian rhizome or under the most pronounced idea of hierarchy, in the same way as at the beginning of modernism where the old cultural forms were becoming obsolete. An excellent example of how that cultural change was processed and which may guide us today, expressing useless forms and the disappearance of old realities, was materialised by two modern, avant-garde, and enigmatic works of art: Hamlet and Don Quixote. The ghost leading Hamlet's action, perhaps represent the power of absence (Roiz, 1994) , of this reality that being absent, nevertheless controls the action of the tragedy. Shakespeare's work, beyond its popular acceptance and by means of which the author earned his living took a long time to be incorporated in modern aesthetics, firstly in the *Sturm und Drang* and then totally in Romanticism and when it did so, it was mainly due to the rupture with respect to the pre-modern aesthetic world, in which the principles of imitation still ruled, as well as the three units hallowed by Aristotle's *Poetics*. Absence and its configuration in the ghost perhaps expressed this 'outside' that modernism left behind, the enigma of a lost nature and thing and after which most modern philosophies have created. And what about Cervantes' look? The alleged farce regarding the ideal of knighthood is more than a criticism, caricature or mockery, but is the invisible crystal of absence to look at the world, and return to the already lost world of pre-modernism. For this reason, the story of the Nobleman of La Mancha inaugurated a genre and with it modern art. Perhaps the latter and that culture which today irremediably are transferred to another place or towards another *non-place* but in no case can any longer be Utopia. In this sense, the identity and the alleged possible individual become remains of the past, and ideal of knighthood unreachable for a net where emancipation is a distant reminder if there are no longer individuals that should be emancipated neither an 'outside' from which to be emancipated. Perhaps today, as in the emergence of modernism, the aim of art is the expression of the ineffable absence of this 'outside' and then art and culture are another thing, becoming another thing. Because if this 'outside', economy, in the old and stale language, has changed into a superstructure and the former in the latter and are undistinguishable, an old concept of art is definitively closed and the culture

linked to this other ghost that we call *soul*. But a question remains open: What has happened to the classics? Are they still speaking? Cervantes in the *Quixote* and Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, who, in fact, already lived from their products, started a new form of poem in its novel version and tragedy to express another absence constituting modernism, at the same time that Descartes placed this *cogito* on the table eliminating any absence. When expressing absence without nostalgia, but perhaps with certain melancholy, they made modern culture the basic material from which the enlightened and romantics prepared and nourished aesthetics, from which they also lived in favour or against the avant-garde and post avant-garde until the same day before yesterday. Will we find the poets that manage to express this new absence and on doing so displacing culture to another dimension and other contents which today are unknown? Their name and methods are unknown to us today, but what is sure is they will express this distance, this new absence which nevertheless they can give no name.

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