



# CONTRIBUTIONS TO COMMUNICATIONAL, CULTURAL, MEDIA, AND DIGITAL STUDIES

Contemporary World-Society

Paulo M. Barroso

# Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies



# Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies:

*Contemporary World-Society*

By

Paulo M. Barroso

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To Mariana.

*Nisi utile est quod facimus, stulta est Gloria.*

Phaedrus, roman poet (15 B.C.-50 A.D.).

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: From Sociology to Sociology of Communication .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1. Precursors of Sociology as a science of the social.....	19
1.1.1. Herodotus.....	20
1.1.2. Plato .....	20
1.1.3. Aristotle .....	22
1.1.4. Saint Augustine.....	25
1.1.5. Saint Thomas Aquinas .....	26
1.1.6. Ibn Kaldun .....	27
1.1.7. Machiavelli .....	27
1.1.8. Thomas More .....	30
1.1.9. Thomas Hobbes.....	32
1.1.10. John Locke .....	35
1.1.11. Montesquieu.....	36
1.1.12. Rousseau .....	37
1.2. The founders of Sociology .....	40
1.2.1. Comte: the scientific approach for a positive Sociology .....	40
1.2.2. Marx: the material and practical approach for the study of societies ....	45
1.2.3. Durkheim: Sociology as a study of social cohesion .....	50
1.2.4. Weber: comprehensive Sociology.....	53
1.3. Branches of Sociology: the Sociology of Communication.....	55
1.4. Questions for review and reflection.....	58
<b>Chapter Two: Communication .....</b>	<b>61</b>
2.1. Origin and evolution of human communication .....	69
2.2. Anthropology of communication.....	74
2.3. Pragmatics of human communication .....	76
2.4. Questions for review and reflection.....	80
<b>Chapter Three: Mass society, culture, and communication .....</b>	<b>83</b>
3.1. The concept of “mass” .....	84
3.2. Society and mass societies .....	87
3.3. Culture.....	92
3.3.1. Culture and symbols.....	100
3.3.2. Values and norms of culture.....	110
3.3.3. Popular culture and mass culture.....	114



3.4. Mass communication.....	119
3.4.1. Functions of mass communication.....	122
3.4.2. Three social functions of the media for Lazarsfeld and Merton.....	123
3.4.3. Characteristics of contemporary mass discourses.....	124
3.4.4. Media imperialism.....	128
3.5. Questions for review and reflection.....	131

#### **Chapter Four: McLuhan: the effects of media and technical prostheses ..... 133**

4.1. The three cultures or galaxies of evolution.....	135
4.2. The global village.....	138
4.3. The medium is the message.....	141
4.4. Questions for review and reflection.....	142

#### **Chapter Five: McQuail: the role and effects of the media in societies..... 145**

5.1. Media as an institution of society.....	146
5.2. The rising of the mass media.....	148
5.3. Theories about the role of the media in society.....	148
5.3.1. Mass society theory of media.....	149
5.3.2. Marxism and Critical political-economic theory.....	150
5.3.3. Functionalist theory of media.....	151
5.3.4. Critical political-economic theory.....	153
5.3.5. Social constructionism theory: media, diffusion, and development.....	153
5.3.6. Media technological determinism.....	154
5.3.7. Information society theory.....	155
5.4. Effects of mass communication.....	158
5.4.1. Immediate and massive influence (1930-1945).....	160
5.4.2. Limited effects (1945-1960).....	160
5.4.3. Complex effects (from 1965).....	161
5.5. Public opinion and the public sphere.....	162
5.5.1. Mechanisms for making public opinion.....	167
5.5.2. Benjamin Constant: the liberty of ancients vs. moderns.....	170
5.5.3. The Spiral of Silence Theory.....	171
5.6. Techniques of communication and influence.....	173
5.7. Communication approaches and studies.....	177
5.7.1. The Mass Communication Research: audience study.....	178
5.7.2. The Frankfurt School: mass society criticism.....	180
5.7.3. Cultural Studies.....	185
5.8. Questions for review and reflection.....	187

#### **Chapter Six: Luhmann: the society as a communication system ..... 189**

6.1. The improbability of communication.....	189
6.2. Action, communication, and social systems.....	191
6.3. Questions for review and reflection.....	195

<b>Chapter Seven: Habermas: the universal pragmatics.....</b>	<b>197</b>
7.1. Public sphere: the public and the private.....	202
7.2. Communicative action vs. strategic action.....	205
7.3. Questions for review and reflection.....	208
<b>Chapter Eight: Giddens: the globalization of the world .....</b>	<b>209</b>
8.1. Conceptualizing globalization.....	216
8.2. Globalization and communication.....	219
8.3. Risks of globalization.....	220
8.4. Globalization vs. tradition.....	222
8.5. Media and ideology.....	226
8.6. Questions for review and reflection.....	232
<b>Chapter Nine: Sartori: the society of the visible.....</b>	<b>235</b>
9.1. From the <i>homo sapiens</i> to the <i>homo videns</i> .....	236
9.2. Questions for review and reflection.....	239
<b>Chapter Ten: Victoria Camps: the information society.....</b>	<b>241</b>
10.1. Mediacracy.....	244
10.2. Questions for review and reflection.....	248
<b>Chapter Eleven: Ramonet: the tyranny of communication.....</b>	<b>249</b>
11.1. From the public interest to the interest of the public.....	250
11.2. Questions for review and reflection.....	252
<b>Chapter Twelve: Modernity, post-modernity, and media.....</b>	<b>253</b>
12.1. Nietzsche and the modernity/post-modernity transition.....	262
12.2. Heidegger: the question concerning technology and modernity.....	271
12.3. Baudrillard: the end of the social.....	274
12.3.1. Images, simulations, and hyperreality.....	276
12.3.2. Instant communication.....	290
12.4. Debord: the society of the spectacle and image cult.....	297
12.5. Foucault: societies of the surveillance and control.....	307
12.6. Charles Taylor: the ethics of authenticity.....	322
12.7. Lyotard: the human condition and the post-modern.....	328
12.8. Lipovetsky: from post-modernity to hyper-modernity.....	331
12.8.1. The era of emptiness and hyper-modernity.....	336
12.8.2. The post-duty age.....	339
12.8.3. World-culture: the triumph of capitalism and individualism.....	341
12.8.4. Global screen.....	344
12.8.5. Paradoxical societies.....	349
12.9. Vattimo: the media, the transparent society, and the end of modernity.....	354
12.10. Zygmunt Bauman: the liquid modernity.....	361
12.11. Byung-Chul Han: the digital mediatization.....	364
12.12. Questions for review and reflection.....	368

**Chapter Thirteen: Hyperreality: when the virtual is real..... 371**  
13.1. Contemporaneity and de-realization..... 373  
13.2. What is hyperreality?..... 379  
13.3. The virtual and the problem of what is not true..... 387  
13.4. Cyber-culture: virtual reality and augmented reality ..... 389  
13.5. Questions for review and reflection..... 397

**Conclusions ..... 399**

**Bibliography ..... 403**

# INTRODUCTION

“The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”  
(Debord, 1995, p. 12).

The human societies and the forms of communication are in constant interrelation, dynamic, and evolution. There is a dialectic between the constitution and functioning of human societies and the nature and forms of communication since the beginnings of humanity. Dialectics<sup>1</sup> is a method of dialogue, a method of reasoning that proceeds by question and answer, a strategy of establishing parallels, an approach that focuses on the opposition of ideas to arrive at other ideas, i.e. dialectic is, in a literal translation, a “path between ideas”. Therefore, the subject matter of this book implies a dialectic between communication and society, which has always existed and will always exist, although communication and society (as well as the dialectical relationship between these two poles) are constantly changing. This preliminary observation justifies the title of the book as *Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies: Contemporary World-Society*.

This assumption justifies *per se* the interest to study, understand, analyze, and critically reflect on societies as a resource to communicability and the forms and means of communication as a resource to sociability. Especially nowadays, when there is an intensification of the digital dimension of information and communication, after a recent change of communicational paradigm: from traditional forms and means of communication to the so-called new media or new information and communication technologies. The new paradigm is that of the immanence and contingency of communication and social relations through the images, as Debord’s epigraph refers to in this Introduction. The paradigm is defined by a kind of modern iconolatry

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<sup>1</sup> From the Greek *dialektiké*, which is the *techné* (“technique”) and the art (“skill”) of debate, discourse, and philosophical discussion, i.e. the art of investigating or discussing the truth of opinions by discussion, resolving the subjacent aporias (difficulties, problems) of the subject matter of the *dialektikos*, “discourse”, “conversation”, “debate” or “discussion”.

regarding the spectacular, which is distracting and alienating. Social and communicational relations are, therefore, paradoxical. Both are invisible and visual; accidental and global; online and offline; contiguous (immediate) and mediated by the new media.

Today, with the globalization of all domains (technological, communicational, social, cultural, economic, political, geographic, etc.) of human life, and with technological developments and the complexity and diversity of the new media and their uses and effects in the transformations of collective and daily life, the interrelations between human societies and forms of communication are even more pertinent and relevant. They become an object of study of general interest. As Niklas Luhmann (1981, p. 122) points out in the essay “The improbability of communication”: “without communication there can be no human relations, indeed no human life”.<sup>2</sup> Communication forms and means are multiform and societies are relational structures and systems of interactions too complex and embracing to be both (communication and societies) objects of univocal and monodisciplinary study.

In *The Transparent Society*, Gianni Vattimo highlights this idea of narrowing and dialectic between communication and societies. The human sciences and social sciences, where Sociology of Communication is integrated, seek to understand societies that today are reconfigured in communication societies. According to Vattimo (2011, p. 21), the relationship between the human sciences and the communication society (our society characterized by the intensification of the exchange of information and the trend identification, i.e. the television, between event and news) is more strict and organic than is generally believed.

Communication is a social phenomenon and process. The communication is multiform, inevitable, and natural in the human being, who is essentially gregarious and, therefore, lives in society. The territory of communication, specifically that of communication as a social phenomenon and process, is the domain of study of this book. With the elaboration of the present work, it is intended to provide a synthesis of the main perspectives, components, and implications of the communication flow in contemporary societies. The

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<sup>2</sup> Although Luhmann refers to the thesis of the improbability of communication, this thesis does not advocate that communication is impossible. The improbability of communication is referred to as a problem because the improbability of communication has become imperceptible; it has to do with the obstacles inherent to communication, which is understood from the perspective of selection, and the practical conditions for communication to happen. Effectively, communication happens, and we cannot live without it, because communication is a social and indispensable human process, which is part of a social system.

objective is to compose a compendium of study and understanding of the phenomenon and process of communication and its effects on societies.

This manual is intended for all those who are interested in knowing a practice (act and activity), a phenomenon and a process as human and social, as natural and cultural, as frequent and spontaneous as communication is. Therefore, although it is designed regarding the students' needs within the courses in the scientific field of communication, it is not exclusive to them. This manual is a compendium, as mentioned because it intends to synthesize what is essential and characterizes the diverse and most relevant theories and perspectives of mass communication. There is not only one theory, one model, or one system of communication, but a plurality of theories, models, and systems. What is common to all of these is the search and presentation of an explanation (a hypothesis) for the phenomenon of communication, satisfying the need to understand the dual communicational and social dimension of the human being. Since the territory of communication is too broad, this manual aims to overcome any difficulties in the study of this field thus delimited, circumscribing it to the field of mass communication and providing its fundamental theoretical contributions. As a *compendium*,<sup>3</sup> a compilation or summary of what is most essential for the study of the interrelationships between communication and society is made.

Communication is, above all, a social practice. However, it is a practice that can be theorized, a practice that needs theory to be understood. In the same way that Aristotle<sup>4</sup> conceives the action of theorizing<sup>5</sup> about some subject, the theorizing of communication (or dedication to admiring communication with thought) corresponds to removing something from

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<sup>3</sup> Precisely written like this, in Latin: *compendium*, “savings”, “profit”, “abbreviation”, “summary”.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle (2004, 1177a-1178b) says that “complete happiness” consists of some contemplative activities and is the updating of the supreme virtue, which is, in turn, “the highest activity, intellect being the highest element in us”, that is, the mind (*voûς*, “intellect”, “mind”, “reason”). For Aristotle, this is a theoretical work, the most continuous, pleasant, self-sufficient, and peaceful activity available to human beings.

<sup>5</sup> From the Greek *theoría*, “action to contemplate attentively”, “admiration of the thought”, “reflection” that allows us to find and confer meanings for what one intends to understand, bringing the human being closer to *Theos*, God. The Greek word *theoría* (*théa*, “through” + *horós*, “to see”) means to look through because whoever looks is called *theorós* (spectator). In the book *Greek Philosophical Terms*, F. E. Peters (1967, p. 194) confirms this etymological sense, stating that *theoría* means “viewing, speculation, contemplation, the contemplative life”.

what constitutes it, from its immediate reality, abstracting it and proceeding to a logically oriented reasoning exercise (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 17). A theory on some subject presupposes the constitution of an ordered system of ideas that are produced with the act of theorizing/viewing (constructing reasoning) on that subject, forming a doctrine that focuses on the reality of the thought/observed object.

Therefore, the purpose of this compendium is to compile and structure the basic elements of the disciplinary area of Sociology of Communication, namely the principles, concepts, models, and theories that characterize communication as an embracing social phenomenon. This purpose is fueled and motivated by my over 20 years of teaching the discipline of Sociology of Communication in the university education system. The reason for this book's existence has to do with being useful, especially for students of Communication Sciences and Sociology of Communication. The book is justified and inspired by the clever saying of the roman poet Phaedrus, the epigraph at the beginning of this book: *Nisi utile est quod facimus, stulta est Gloria* ("Unless what we do is useful, our glory is foolish").

In addition to the simple display of content, it is intended to evoke a Socratic attitude of provoking and resolving questions, doubts, ambivalences, paradoxes, and aporias<sup>6</sup> for interpellation, interpretation, and understanding, through a critical and dialectical ability. In this sense, the themes and issues addressed in this book are necessarily related to communication as a social phenomenon and process that triggers reactions, effects, influences in collective life. Thus, the main methodological question "How might a dialectic play out in communication and society interaction?" is answered. Contradictory ideas about the social and the communicational are always well-come to fully understand the problem of the interrelation between these two poles (communication and society) and, thus, to study divergent perspectives and form an independent and critical idea on the subject in question.

These are themes and issues addressed succinctly, since communication, as a problematic theme and as a broad *corpus* of knowledge, refers to other interdisciplinary areas of Sociology of Communication (or Media Sociology), more specific in the treatment of some subjects: Philosophy of Communication; Cybernetics; Semiotics (Communication Semiotics and

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of "aporia" comes from the Greek *aporía*, which means "with no way out, difficulty, question, problem" (Cf. Peters, 1967, p. 22). According to Peters, "aporia and its cognate verb forms are closely related to dialectic (*dialektike*) and hence to the Socratic custom of interlocutory discourse". See note 1 about the understanding of "dialectics".

Social Semiotics); Linguistics; Anthropology (Social Anthropology, Cultural Anthropology, and Visual Anthropology); Psychology of Communication; Economy; History; Political Science; Literature; Film Studies, etc. The study of communication is interdisciplinary; it is not a discipline. As per Denis McQuail (2010, p. 16), “the study of communication has to be interdisciplinary and must adopt varied approaches and Methods”.

The complexity that involves the study of communication as a multifaceted phenomenon of interaction (more than the simple transmission of messages)<sup>7</sup> makes the univocal definition of “communication” difficult. Given this complexity, which is inherent to communication, McQuail declares in *Mass Communication Theory*:

“Mass communication is one topic among many for the social sciences and only one part of a wider field of inquiry into human communication. Under the name ‘communication science’, the field has been defined by Berger and Chaffee as a science which ‘seeks to understand the production, processing and effects of symbol and signal systems by developing testable theories, containing lawful generalizations, that explain phenomena associated with production, processing and effects’. [...] To complicate matters further, communication can be either intentional or involuntary and the variety of potential channels and content is unlimited. In addition, no ‘science of communication’ can be independent and self-sufficient, given the origins of the study of communication in many disciplines and the wide-ranging nature of the issues that arise, including matters of economics, law, politics and ethics as well as culture. The study of communication has to be interdisciplinary and must adopt varied approaches and Methods.” (McQuail, 2010, p. 16).

From the biological sense of communication, according to which communication is a sensory and nervous activity (i.e. important for the survival of the species), passing through the conception of the systematic and interactionist model of communication (which involves a new definition of communication as the participation of an individual in a system of interactions that links him to others, where it is impossible not to communicate, since communication is omnipresent and not to communicate is already to communicate) until the plurality of theories, models and more complex systems underlying the study of communication, it is intended to

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<sup>7</sup> Transmission of a message that is integrated into the process of production and reception. The message is transmitted and produces effects on the recipients. Consequently, even if communication is faced as a simple message transmission, it is already a complex process to be studied and understood, making it difficult to define “communication”, let alone communication as a multifaceted phenomenon of interaction.



underline the necessity and the pertinence of the study and relation between the human societies and the means of communication. As Lucien Sfez (1992, p. 54) points out, “chaque domaine de connaissance a sa propre définition de la communication, spécifique du champ qu'elle recouvre”.<sup>8</sup> Thus, we conceive the communication as being many different things, as many as the sciences that study communication in its disciplinary areas.

In Sociology of Communication, the meanings of communication are those that are established, in a widespread, unilateral, and massified way, with society, the social system that already integrates the means of information and communication as institutions with social functions and responsibilities. Therefore, the study of Sociology of Communication is relevant. According to McQuail (1983, p. 19), the mass media (press, radio, and television, mainly) has considerable and growing importance in modern societies. McQuail (1983, pp. 20-22) says this view about the mass media is widespread and the reasons are rooted in the fact that the media suppose:

1. A resource of power, a potential instrument of influence, control, and innovation in society.
2. A sphere where many matters of public life unfold.
3. An important source of definitions and images of social reality, that is, a place where the changing culture and values in society are constructed, stored, and expressed more visibly.
4. A primary source of fame and the positioning of celebrities and efficient performance in the public sphere.
5. The origin of an ordered and public system of meanings.

The mass media are an important and expanding industry, with clear social implications. In the same perspective of McQuail, Mauro Wolf (1992, p. 9) states in *Teorie delle Comunicazioni di Massa* that the mass media are:

- A very important industrial sector.
- A symbolic universe subject to massive consumption.
- A technological investment in continuous expansion.
- Daily individual experience.
- A field of political confrontation.
- A system of cultural intervention and social aggregation.
- A way to pass the time, etc.

Thus, considering all these assumptions, this book has the main objectives of:

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<sup>8</sup> Translation: “each domain of knowledge has its definition of communication, which is specific to the field it encompasses”.

- a) To recognize the importance of communication in the contemporary “information societies”, so named due to the preponderance of flows and means of information and communication.
- b) To study and understand the influences of the means and mechanisms of production, transmission/diffusion, and reception of information and communication within simple or complex societies on daily interactions.
- c) To sensitize and train for a critical attitude about the social, technological, and cultural transformations around the communication phenomenon, considering the recent or present communication paradigm-changing (from the old and traditional media to the new technological media, mainly from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>9</sup> when the Sociology of Communication emerges as a specific discipline and branch of applied knowledge, after a period of expansion of the mass media.
- d) To provide the theoretical basic elements of mass communication processes according to the multiplicity of forms and means, presenting a systematic view of communication as a power of expression, representation, and influence.
- e) To frame communication studies in the fluxes of contemporary thought, considering that communication is multiform and that the means and techniques of communication are in continuous transformation, as is the society in which they are based.

Considering the multiple approaches that the themes and issues underlying communication raise, it would be possible to establish a study *corpus* for a teaching and learning process in the discipline of Sociology of Communication. Thus, with the title *Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies: Contemporary World-Society*, this compendium begins by addressing the early stages of Western rationality related to social themes and issues, in Classical Greek Antiquity. It is recognized that, long before thinking about a science of the social, one moves from thinking about the social to thinking about the communicational. The compendium ends with an understanding of contemporary societies, which are characterized by the mastery of the new media, the virtual and digital mediation.

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<sup>9</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century is rightly considered as the century of mass communication, namely by Adriano Duarte Rodrigues (s/d, p. 17), who is one of the leading and pioneering Portuguese experts in communication studies.

Based on the approach, we begin by emphasizing in Chapter 1 the relevance of the disciplines of Sociology, firstly, and Sociology of Communication, subsequently, as comprehensive, analytical, and critical reflections on communication in some issues:

- i) Communication as a social and global phenomenon and process, with effects.
- ii) Communication as an exchange and sharing of experiences, expressions of moods, or simple descriptions or representations of the world.
- iii) Communication as a form of exercising power, a form of domination, influence, and persuasion, namely mass communication and strategic communication activities and techniques.

Chapter 2 highlights the importance of communication in the evolutionary history of humanity, while Chapter 3 studies the triadic relationship between society, culture, and communication based on common effects, such as massification, and involving inevitable interactions because there are no societies without communication (nor communication without social interaction) and communication is culture.

From Chapter 4 to Chapter 13, relevant and sharp approaches and perspectives on communication are developed. For all these chapters, references are made to authors, whose works and reflections on communication are indispensable contributions to understand the complexity of the social and total phenomenon of communication:

- Marshall McLuhan and the technological effects of the media (Chapter 4).
- Denis McQuail and the role of the media as a social institution in modern societies, i.e. the dialectic between communication and society (Chapter 5).
- Niklas Luhmann and the communication systemic or society as a macro-system of communicational interrelations (Chapter 6).
- Jürgen Habermas and social action as a rational and communicational action (Chapter 7).
- Anthony Giddens and the inevitable relationship between the social phenomena of communication and globalization, both involved in the development of technology and the profound transformations of societies and cultures worldwide (Chapter 8).
- The involution from the *homo sapiens* to the *homo videns*, due to the preponderance of the image and the seeing (the sensitive) at the expense of the word and understanding (the intelligible), according to Giovanni Sartori (Chapter 9).

- The characterization of Victoria Camps of contemporary societies and their relationship with the flows and means of information and with citizenship in the public space (Chapter 10).
- The forms and manifestations of certain tyrannies that are exercised by the media, according to Ignacio Ramonet (Chapter 11).
- The problematization of a time of transition from modernity to post-modernity, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, Charles Taylor, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Lipovetsky, Gianni Vattimo, Zygmunt Bauman, and Byung-Chul Han (Chapter 12).
- The conceptualization and problematization of the present digital and virtual dimensions of communication, through the specific production of images that generate hyperreality, with effects on perceptions and sensations and the culture converted into cyber-culture (Chapter 13).

Having presented the object of study, the objectives, and the methodology or strategy followed for the design of this book, the structure and content of the study previously reported justify the following of a guiding thread in the sociological approach of fundamental themes and issues to the Sociology of Communication. To this end, one must first address the basic elements of the “mother science”, the Sociology. Then, already with the bases of the scientific area about the social, one may depart for the study and understanding more directed to the reported i) themes and issues related to the performance, roles, and functions, and ii) to the effects/influences of communication and the several media (including social and digital media), thus giving meaning to the title of this book: *Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies: Contemporary World-Society*.



# CHAPTER ONE

## FROM SOCIOLOGY TO SOCIOLOGY OF COMMUNICATION

“Sociology is now obliged to come to terms with the digital, or miss investigating and theorizing whole swathes of significant cultural activity.”  
(Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 35).

Communication is constitutive of human beings. There are no societies without communication. Human beings are social beings. Communication is an essential anthropological phenomenon, as Dominique Wolton (1999, p. 15) emphasizes. Communication allows social relationships. Therefore, communication is characteristic of human beings either in two main dimensions:

1. A natural (biological) dimension: communication is innate; it is proper to the human being who is born with communicative capacity.
2. A cultural (i.e. adaptive)<sup>10</sup> dimension: communication is adapted, just like the human being himself and everything he produces to satisfy his relative and daily needs. Through communication, human beings understand each other, as well the world around them.

As a branch of scientific and academic knowledge, communication is a *sui generis* object of study, i.e. it is different from the traditional parameters of the other sciences' objects of study, which are also circumscribed and specific. For the branches of knowledge, sciences or disciplines, communication is configured as an abstract, wide-ranging, and multiform object of study. Therefore, the notion of communication covers a multiplicity of meanings, as stated by Armand Mattelart and Michèle Mattelart (1997, p. 7) or McQuail (1983, pp. 17-18). According to McQuail,

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<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of the adaptation to the environment and to other human beings (the community), with whom one is in permanent interaction.

it is unlikely that a communication science will become independent and self-sufficient, given its origins in numerous disciplines and the broad scope of communication.

Communication studies and human communication researches date back to Classical Antiquity. In Ancient Greece, Plato<sup>11</sup> and Aristotle<sup>12</sup> were concerned to understand communication as a social process of influence (e.g. the application of rhetorical language).<sup>13</sup> However, the systematic studies on communication only occur from the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a subject matter or a privileged, in-depth, and multidisciplinary field of study of certain sciences (Fiske, 1990, p. 1). This systematic studies on communication were launched by the Mass Communication Research and based on the effects of mass communication on societies. Harold Lasswell, Paul Lazarsfeld or Marshall McLuhan are precursors in this field, but also Shannon and Weaver's *Mathematical Theory of Communication*,<sup>14</sup> from 1949, which "is widely accepted as one of the main seeds out of which Communication Studies has grown" (Fiske, 1990, p. 6).

Although communication has always been part of the daily life of human beings, it has only recently been given more attention to its study, mainly due to the development of mass media, the multiplication and deepening of interpersonal relationships, the progress from new communication

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Cratylus*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and *The Sophist*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *On Interpretation*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, and *Politics*.

<sup>13</sup> Communication is a process of influence, where a simple communicative exchange causes a social change (McQuail, 1983, p. 39). For example, in *La Comunicazione come Processo Sociale*, Pio Ricci Bitti and Bruna Zani (1997, pp. 237-239) highlight this characteristic of communication, from Aristotle's classic approach about the rhetorical use in persuasive communication to contemporary studies of Harold Lasswell and Paul Lazarsfeld (both from 1948) on the effects and influences of mass communication.

<sup>14</sup> Shannon and Weaver conceived a model of communication, the so-called Information Theory, which has become one of the main sources of communication studies. According to this model, communication is the transmission of messages. It is a basic and processual model that conceives communication as a simple and universally applicable linear process. A useful contribution of this model is the identification of three levels of problems in the study of communication: 1) Level A–Technical problems: How accurately can the symbols of communication be transmitted?; 2) Level B–Semantic problems: How precisely do the transmitted symbols convey the desired meaning?; 3) Level C–Effectiveness problems: How effectively does the received meaning affect conduct in the desired way? (cf. Fiske, 1990, p. 7).

technologies, and the specialization of the object of study, ceasing to be so wide-ranging and abstract and starting to be studied in a piecemeal and interdisciplinary way. By becoming an object of systematic study with the formulation of laws, theories, and models, the communication and the mass media constitute a field of study for a recent science, the set of disciplinary areas called Communication Sciences.<sup>15</sup>

Communication Sciences is a multidisciplinary study; it integrates the intersections of similar disciplines previously mentioned that together and with interdisciplinarity, have the study of communication and the understanding of the communicational phenomenon in all its envelopment and implications as their object. Therefore, it is understandable McQuail's (1983, p. 19) thesis that it is difficult to establish a dividing line between thinking about the mass media and the social sciences in general. The relationship between the means of communication and society is due, firstly, to the understanding that the media are an established social institution.

What is the relationship between communication and society? What is Sociology of Communication? What is Sociology? What is science? Sociology<sup>16</sup> is the science that studies the phenomena, practices (guided by social norms and values), social behaviors, and relations, integrated into a macro-structure or system of interactions called society.

In a text from the year 1813 entitled *De la Physiologie Sociale*, Saint-Simon (1760-1825) refers to the science of the social for the first time, without yet using the word "Sociology". Saint-Simon adopts the designation "Social Physiology":

“Une physiologie sociale, constituée par les faits matériels qui dérivent de l'observation directe de la société, et une hygiène renfermant les préceptes applicables à ces faits, sont donc les seules bases positives sur lesquelles on

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<sup>15</sup> Communication Sciences is a recent science and has followed (and are "obliged" to follow) the late developments in information and communication technologies, especially Internet and multimedia technologies, often referred to as the new media. According to Jean-Pierre Meunier and Daniel Peraya (2009, p. 383), if these technologies have given rise to new uses and practices (e.g. pedagogical, social, and ludic-educational activities), they have also given rise to the development of new theoretical and methodological approaches.

<sup>16</sup> From the Latin *socius, socii*, "the other(s), the partner(s)" and from the Greek *logos*, "study, discourse, reason, word". Therefore, the term "Sociology" etymologically means the "science of society" or the scientific study of the social.



puisse établir le système d'organisation réclamé par l'état actuel de la civilisation.” (Saint-Simon, 1965, p. 29).<sup>17</sup>

In *Socialism and Saint-Simon*, Durkheim (2011, p. 62) underlines this contribution of Saint-Simon in the foundation of a “new science”, as he defines, i.e. the “science of man and societies”. Later, in 1839, Comte coins the equivalent word “Sociology”. Whatever the name of this new science, scientific progress is revealed in the knowledge of subjects in this field concerned about the social.<sup>18</sup> Social phenomena, practices, behaviors, and relations are not isolated; they exist in a given place and happen at a certain time. Therefore, each society has its social phenomena, practices, behaviors, and relations; all societies are dynamic, evolve and change, including what constitutes them (social phenomena, practices, behaviors, and relations).

Sociology seeks to understand the different forms of association of people in the community and their social relationships at two main levels:

- Interpersonal relationships.
- Relationships between people and the social environment (social institutions).

All relationships result from the different categories of association. Sociology is interested in studying and understanding, therefore:

- Social relationships.
- Social actions, behaviors, and practices (e.g. uses, customs).
- Sorts of association.

As it may be understood reading the entry “Sociology” of any encyclopedia:

“The word ‘sociology’ was invented by Auguste Comte and is composed by the combination of two other terms, one Latin (*socius* = associate, ally) and another Greek (*λόγος* = discourse). Etymologically, sociology will therefore

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<sup>17</sup> Translation: “A social physiology, constituted by the material facts that derive from the direct observation of society and hygiene containing the applicable precepts to these facts, is, therefore, the only positive bases on which we can establish the system of organization required by the present state of civilization.”

<sup>18</sup> By the way, it is in this period that the concern with the systematization and compilation of the Enlightenment knowledge arises, resulting in the publication, in 1751, of the first of 28 volumes (the last was published in 1772) of the emblematic work *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (*Reasoned Encyclopedia or Dictionary of Sciences, Arts and Trades*), directed by Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert.

be the science that studies the association or alliance of men with each other, as well as the behaviors they adopt in the resulting collectives. Relationships, collectivities, and behaviors are the three essential elements of social life that Sociology proposes to study.” (Silva, 2000, p. 1213).

This excerpt is, however, reductive. Considering that Sociology is an embracing area of knowledge, reducing its object of study to social relationships, collectivities and behaviors omits many more aspects and elements that make up a society. In *The Study of Sociology*, Herbert Spencer (1873, p. 52) proposes to start with the general principle that the properties of units (i.e. people) determine the property of the aggregate (i.e. society), to conclude that there is a social science that expresses the relationship between people and society. Spencer discusses whether there is a social science, given the specificities of this science and its object of study (Spencer, 1873, p. 73). He argues the peculiar nature of social science.<sup>19</sup> It must be noted that the term “Sociology” is hybrid, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer underline in *Soziologische Exkurse*. According to them, Sociology is an unpleasant linguistic mix, half Latin and half Greek:

“The word ‘sociology’—science of society—is a malformation, half Latin, half Greek. The arbitrariness and artificiality of the term point to the recent character of the discipline. It cannot be found as a separate discipline within the traditional edifice of science. The term itself was originated by Auguste Comte, who is generally regarded as the founder of sociology. His main sociological work, *Cours de philosophie positive*, appeared in 1830-1842. The word ‘positive’ puts precisely that stress which sociology, as a science in the specific sense, has borne ever since. It is a child of positivism, which has made it its aim to free knowledge from religious belief and metaphysical speculation.” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973, p. 1).

The artificial and arbitrary nature of the word “Sociology” refers to the late birth of the subject. “Sociology” is not found as such in the traditional construction of knowledge. Effectively, the term “Sociology” goes back to Comte, whose main sociological work on positive philosophy appears between 1830 and 1842. The word “positive” accurately fixed the emphasis that Sociology preserves, from the beginning, as a science in the *strict sense*, point out Adorno and Horkheimer. “Child of positivism”, Sociology was born from the desire to “free knowledge from religious belief and metaphysical speculation”.

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<sup>19</sup> Spencer’s interest is to conceive a true and rigorous knowledge about the social, focusing on social changes and transformations that, according to Spencer, follow a deterministic line of progress in societies.

Adorno and Horkheimer highlight the unorthodox origin of the term “Sociology” justifying it with the late birth of the subject and the disqualification of the discipline among the branches of scientific knowledge. However, they emphasize Comte as the precursor of Sociology, on the one hand, and the attribution of a positivist nature to this area of knowledge or doctrine of society.

In Lecture One of his *Introduction to Sociology*, Adorno states:

“First of all, I should like to mention something very simple, which you can all understand without any prior discussion of the problems of social antagonisms. It is that sociology itself, as it exists today, is an agglomerate of disciplines which first came into existence in a quite unconnected and mutually independent way. And I believe that many of the seemingly almost irreconcilable conflicts between schools of sociology arise in the first place—although I am aware that deeper issues are also involved—from the simple fact that all kinds of things which initially had nothing to do with each other have been brought together under the common heading of sociology. Sociology originated in philosophy, and the man who first inscribed the name ‘sociology’ on the map of learning, Auguste Comte, called his first major work *The Positive Philosophy*.” (Adorno, 2000, pp. 7-8).

In Lecture Three of the mentioned book, Adorno continues his explanation about the term “Sociology” and the origin of this science:

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the central concept of sociology, the very concept which very many sociologists would like to throw overboard today, is the concept of society. For sociology—that abominable hotch-potch of a word—means: the *logos* of *societas*—the knowledge or science of society.” (Adorno, 2000, p. 26).

According to the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*:

“Commonly accepted definitions of sociology agree that it is the scientific or systematic study of human society. The focus is on understanding and explaining, and ranges from the individual in social interaction to groups to societies and global social processes. Unique to sociology is its emphasis upon the reciprocal relationship between individuals and societies as they influence and shape each other. [...] As a discipline, sociology arose early in the nineteenth century in response to rapid social change. Major transformations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as rapid industrialization resulting in a large, anonymous workforce with workers spending most of their time away from families and traditions; large-scale urbanization throughout Europe and the industrializing world; and a political revolution of new ideas (individual rights and democracy), directed a spotlight on the nature of societies and social change. The French social

thinker Auguste Comte (1798-1857) first coined the term sociology to describe a new way of thinking about societies as systems governed by principles of organization and change. Most agree that Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), the French sociologist, made the largest contribution to the emergence of sociology as a social scientific discipline. Both empirical research—collecting and quantifying social data—and abstract conceptions of society were major elements of Durkheim’s research. Durkheim’s work had a major, early impact on the discipline, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries two more of the giants in sociological thought emerged in mainstream German sociology: Max Weber (1864-1920) and Georg Simmel (1858-1918). Additionally, Karl Marx (1818-1883), while on the edge of sociology, had a major impact on German sociology and on the discipline as a whole. Marx was concerned with the oppressiveness that resulted from industrialization and the capitalist system rather than the disorder to which other social thinkers were reacting. Advocating revolution as the only means to end the inequality between the controlling bourgeoisie class and the exploited proletariat class created by the new industrialized society, Marx produced much of his work while in exile from his native Germany [...] His writing provides a continuous strand of sociological theory, heavily influential in Europe and, at times, in the United States. The importance of Marx’s work in shaping early sociology also lies in how German sociology developed in opposition to Marxist theory.” (Kuipers, 2008, p. 660).

Sociology is the systematic study of people’s lives in society and the consequent interrelationships between people and between people and institutions and organisms that make up the social structure. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sociology emerged as a science from a set of social concerns:

- The understanding of the most profound changes (social reforms) that occur in human societies.
- The observation of living conditions and social organization.
- The social criticism of the structure and *status quo* of the societies.
- The review of the consequences of certain circumstances of anomie, when societies developed more quickly than the organization, normalization, and regulation of social life.

Consequently, the conditions for the advent of a science or area of study that covers the problems that are not properly approached by any other were created at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sociology emerges as a wide-ranging science capable of studying and understanding societies and their transformations at three major levels:

- 1) Political level: political and social instability raises interest in the study of social reality; the 19<sup>th</sup> century is characterized by profound political changes, inspired by the French Revolution of 1789.

- 2) Economic level: changes from the primary sector to the secondary sector with the Industrial Revolution.<sup>20</sup>
- 3) Social level: the emergence of new social classes (proletariat and bourgeoisie), the formation of large cities with a large number of rural workers, whose exodus causes an imbalance between urban and rural areas and more social asymmetries (the precarious conditions of workers favor socialist ideals).

According to Raymond Aron's *Les Étapes de la Pensée Sociologique*, "la sociologie [for Weber] étant science compréhensive de l'action sociale, la compréhension implique la saisie du sens que l'acteur donne à sa conduite"<sup>21</sup> (Aron, 1967, p. 501). In the thought of Weber, Sociology is comprehensive, it is the science that deals with the interpretive understanding of social action, seeking to provide an explanation from the causes of that action and the probable effects it produces. In this perspective, the "interpretative understanding" and "causal explanation" are highlighted, because both expressions define the scientific scope of Sociology. The former is characteristic of the human sciences' interpretive method; the latter is characteristic of the natural sciences' causal method. It may be concluded that social sciences have neither an objective method nor a specific object of study. Between understanding and explanation, there are notable differences. An area of study must fill requirements to be recognized as a science, namely:

- A specific object of study and a delimited field of study.
- Epistemological objectives, i.e. aiming the production of scientific knowledge to understand the object of study.
- A methodology to achieve objectives and lead to the desired results.
- A systematic *corpus* of knowledge, allowing the formulation of laws and explanatory theories of the phenomena (object of study).

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<sup>20</sup> Deep and large-scale revolution, based on technical, economic, and social changes that first occurred in the United Kingdom between 1760 and 1850, when production went from an artisanal base to a machined production in a factory context, with the division of labor and mass production (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 150). With the Industrial Revolution emerged the so-called industrial societies, as well as several social problems that motivated a new academic science (Sociology) to study and understand them.

<sup>21</sup> Translation: "Sociology is a science that seeks to understand social action; the understanding implies the perception of the meaning that the actor attributes to his conduct."

Only fulfilling these requirements will scientific knowledge be obtained, which is true and verifiable as such. In this view, Plato's *Theaetetus* dialogue refers to a true and justified belief to define the knowledge, i.e. scientific knowledge. For Plato (1997a, 201d), knowledge is true opinion accompanied by explanation: "it is true judgment with an account".<sup>22</sup> True opinion (knowledge) has to be accompanied by a third requirement or condition (in addition to belief and truth), a rational explanation, to obtain the status of knowledge.

Considering that a) society is an encompassing and mutable object of study and b) it is scientifically possible to study the social life, Sociology is an obedient science to the principles of autonomy, interdisciplinarity, rationality, and objectivity.

## 1.1. Precursors of Sociology as a science of the social

Starting from Herodotus, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., it is possible to glimpse a line of evolution of thought about the social.<sup>23</sup> A line that begins with expedition trips to study and observe other peoples and is developed with the assumption of the diversity of ways of life and culture patterns in the community, in a given territory, and at a certain time. These are the stages of the sociological thought and the first ones are listed below.

The first stage of the sociological thought is the systematic reflection on life in society. In Ancient Greece, Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle. Herodotus travels to meet and study different peoples and territories, Plato characterizes the "ideal city", and Aristotle defines man as a "political animal", but the three are concerned with human interrelationships and behaviors within the collectivities, geographic and demographic factors, the division of both society and work. Despite the spirit of observation is incipient and the relativism and the search for regularities in collective action are hesitant (Silva, 2000, p. 1213), the initiative of these authors is pioneering, seminal, and inaugural. Therefore, the stages of sociological thought must be considered, i.e. the antecedents of reflections on social life, namely the following precursors.

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<sup>22</sup> According to the notes of John M. Cooper, the editor of Plato's *Complete Works* (Hackett Publishing Company), the word "account" translates *logos*, which can also mean 'statement', 'argument', 'speech', 'discourse'.

<sup>23</sup> Strictly speaking, it is not yet possible to speak of "sociological thought", but of thinking and knowledge produced about the social dimension in different peoples, conditions, factors, territories, and communities. It is an outline of what would become sociological thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.1.1. Herodotus

In Classical Greek Antiquity, Herodotus (485 B.C.-425 B.C.)<sup>24</sup> makes observations and comparisons between life forms of different peoples. It is attributed to Herodotus the production of the first historical narrative, on the one hand, and the interdisciplinary studies of History, Ethnology, Ethnography, Geography, Chronology, and Poetry, on the other hand (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 147). Therefore, he was a precursor in these sciences, producing important sources of information about the ancient world. However, Herodotus is best known for inaugurating the scientific practice of History and Geography.

The only known work of Herodotus entitled *Histories* suggests that he traveled extensively and visited various territories, such as Egypt, Cyrene (in present-day Libya), Babylon (in ancient Mesopotamia), Italy, Ukraine, the Black Sea, and the surrounding area to the Aegean Sea (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 147). He was the first to research, observe and record the past, human behavior, and ways of life, as well as considering them problems of investigation, study, and reflection. Herodotus is interested in studying the customs and uses of other peoples, disseminating them. The objective stated by Herodotus at the beginning of *Histories* is original: to preserve the memory of the past, recording his discoveries (facts and causes of events) about different peoples, from Asia and Europe.

In his extensive and descriptive work, Herodotus only mentions a predecessor, Hecateu of Miletus, who wrote a work on historical geography, entitled *Periods* (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 150). Having followed this practice of travel-expedition of knowledge of other cultures and forms of collective life organization, Herodotus contributes to a methodology of observation and knowledge recording that allows understanding the gregarious dimension of the human being.

### 1.1.2. Plato

Plato (428 B.C.-348 B.C.) is a polygraphic<sup>25</sup> thinker and affirms, as far as Sociology is concerned, the need and protection of democratic ideals

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<sup>24</sup> Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus, in present-day Bodrum, on the Aegean Sea coast, Turkey.

<sup>25</sup> The adjective “polygraphic” comes from the Ancient Greek *πολύς* (“poly”) meaning “many” and *γράφειν* (“*graphein*”), that means “to write”. Thus, a polygraph is an author who writes in a variety of subjects, themes, and issues in different fields, i.e. he is a polygraphic author.

based on public opinion and in its place, the agora, the *pólis*, the *res publica*. In *The Republic*,<sup>26</sup> he outlines a segregating social theory, which can be seen as a difference between classes. This work is an authentic treatise on *Politeia* or the theory of civil constitution. In the thought of Plato, according to Julián Marías, the city is like the soul:

“The city, like the soul, can be considered as a whole composed of three parts, which correspond to the three parts of the soul. These parts are the three great social classes recognized by Plato: the mass of citizens, including the tradesmen, artisans and farmers; the guardians; and the philosophers. There is a close correlation between these classes and the faculties of the human soul, so that each of these social groups is particularly associated with one of the virtues. The proper virtue of the producing class is temperance; the virtue of the guardians, or warriors, is fortitude; and the virtue of the philosophers is wisdom, *phronesis* or *sophia*.” (Marías, 1967, p. 55).<sup>27</sup>

These three parts are related according to a hierarchy and its respective functions. Each class has its virtues: the temperance of the producing classes, the strength of the guardians or warriors (whose function is the defense of the State and the social and political order), and the wisdom (*phronesis* or *sophia*) of the philosophers (who are or should be the rulers). However, the most fundamental virtue is justice, which consists in the balance and good relationship of individuals with each other and with the State (traditional Greek *pólis* as a political unit), as well as with different classes among themselves and with the social community (Marías, 1967, p. 55). It is justice that rules and determines the life of the political body, which is the city. Education is gradual and selects the citizens, determining the class to which they belong, depending on skills and merits. “Plato’s entire conception of the *pólis* reveals a thoroughgoing subordination of the individual to the interests of the community” (Marías, 1967, p. 56) and the primary condition for the functioning of the political life is that the city is ruled by justice.

Plato interprets the succession of political regimes as the result of social changes; he advocates a harmonious modern social organization (which he calls the “ideal city”); he presents the guardians (Plato, 2003, 374d-376c),

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<sup>26</sup> A work from 380 B.C., also better known by its original title *Politeia* (Πολιτεία), as it is a treatise to idealize the political organization of people in society.

<sup>27</sup> The Greek terms *phronesis* and *sophia* are distinct, both in etymological origin and in their respective meanings: *phronesis* means “practical knowledge”; *sophia* means “wisdom”.



as elements of society with the function of guaranteeing order and security, and he attributes the sense of public (i.e. *res publica*) to the “common thing” (commonwealth) in mutual relations between the human beings. The public is the group of human beings who have things in common.

In *Soziologische Exkurse*, Adorno and Horkheimer recognize Plato’s *The Republic* as an early and sociological approach to the society of his time, a fundamental text of ancient philosophy as a doctrine on a just society and institution of the *pólis*. In Plato’s work, this scheme of the ideal State is accompanied by criticisms against the society of that time; thus *The Republic* is, to a large extent, the result of Plato’s personal experience in the society of his time (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973, p. 2).

Adorno and Horkheimer say that Plato is concerned about how society should be ideal, well-organized, and functioning harmoniously, discussing the governance of cities (i.e. the adequacy of laws in educating citizens for the Good).<sup>28</sup> To educate citizens, it is necessary to know what the Good is and this knowledge is the task of philosophy, which thus becomes a basis for a just society, warn Adorno and Horkheimer.

### 1.1.3. Aristotle

Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.) observes and studies the social structures and the political institutions. In *The Athenian Constitution*, Aristotle traces a brief constitutional history of Athens and elaborates descriptive research of Athenian political institutions in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. To that end, he read documents from Athenian archives and historians.<sup>29</sup> Familiar with the political practices of Athens, his research produces a compact and well-documented history of the Athenian life (Barnes, 2000, pp. 12-13). In *The Athenian Constitution*, Aristotle discusses the political problems of community life, for which an independent and balanced mechanism is needed to establish social rules and monitors the compliance of the criterion of justice. Political administration is also considered from the seizure of power to how common interests are conducted, ideally “to carry on the public business in a manner more constitutional than tyrannical” (Aristotle, 1935, p. 45). In his treatise on politics, he states:

“We see that every City-State is a community of some sort, and that every community is established for the sake of some Good (for everyone performs

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<sup>28</sup> In capital letters, because Good is an important, absolute, and abstract concept for Ancient Greece.

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle was not a citizen of Athens; he was born in Stagira, Macedonia.

every action for the sake of what he takes to be good). Clearly, then, while every community aims at some good, the community that has the most authority of all and encompasses all the others aims highest, that is to say, at the good that has the most authority of all. This community is the one called a city-state, the community that is political.” (Aristotle, 1998, 1252a).

Aristotle’s *Politics* starts by saying that man is a political animal (“*zoon politikon*”), i.e. an eminently social, gregarious being.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, “a city-state is among the things that exist by nature, that a human being is by nature a political animal” (Aristotle, 1998, 1253a). Being a “political animal”, the idea of politics is the search for the best form of collective life organization, the *pólis*. “In the eight books of his *Politics* Aristotle was deeply concerned with the problems of society and the State” (Marías, 1967, p. 82). A collective life presupposes the spirit of community: having things or matters in common and space also in common. According to Aristotle’s *Politics*:

“For all citizens must share everything, or nothing, or some things but not others. It is evidently impossible for them to share nothing. For a constitution is a sort of community, and so they must, in the first instance, share their location; for one city-state occupies one location, and citizens share that one city-state.” (Aristotle, 1998, 1261a).

The main goal of social action is the realization of an *eudaimonic*<sup>31</sup> and teleological ethics: policy and ethics as a single collective and individual

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<sup>30</sup> Aristotle’s *zoon politikon* is equivalent to the idea of *animal socialis* by Seneca and Saint Thomas Aquinas, for example, as Hannah Arendt (1998, p. 23) recognizes: “This special relationship between action and being together seems full to justify the early translation of Aristotle’s *zoon politikon* by *animal socialis*, already found in Seneca, which then became the standard translation through Thomas Aquinas: *homo est naturaliter politicus, id est, socialis* (‘man is by nature political, that is, social’).” For Arendt, this substitution of the political for the social suggests that the word “social” is of Roman origin, having no equivalent in Greek language and thought.

<sup>31</sup> This adjective, “eudaimonic”, comes from the Greek a broad term *eudaimonia* (*εὐδαιμονία*), *eu* (“well”) + *daimon* (“fortune”), which means “happiness”, i.e. what is the most practical good for men, according to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean in Ethics*: “Happiness, then, is the best, the noblest and the pleasantest thing” (2004, 1099a) and “if there is anything that the gods give to men, it is reasonable that happiness should be God-given, especially since it is so much the best thing in the human world” (2004, 1099b). This primordial concept of *eudaimonia* must be distinguished from *hedoné*, “pleasure”: the meaning of the latter term is less profound, because “pleasure is simply ‘a supervening end’, something that cannot be desired and sought directly, but is only an accompaniment to the fruition of a way of life” (Marías, 1967,

happiness (a supreme good). All these enunciated ideas fall within the field of concerns of Sociology, despite the philosophical scope of Aristotle's writings.

In the thought of Aristotle, society is *physis*, Nature. Society is not *nómos*, law, or convention. When defending that society is *physis* and there is no *nómos*, Aristotle affirms that “society is inherent in man, not merely something statutory” and “every activity, or *praxis*, is carried on with some good in view; this good is thus the goal of the activity and gives it its meaning” (Marías, 1967, p. 82). The being of the *pólis* is defined by the idea that the whole community or society tends towards a good.

Aristotle initiates a natural conception of sociability. This Aristotelian conception is, much later (in the 17th and 18th centuries), confronted by another that asserts itself as antagonistic, the contractualism, as they are briefly distinguished in the following Table 1-1:

	Naturalistic conception of society	Contractual conception of society
Authors	Aristotle, Cicero, Saint Thomas of Aquino, Saint Augustine, etc.	John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, etc.
Thesis	Society has a natural origin, i.e. a natural tendency for human beings to live together, satisfy their needs, and fulfill themselves as a person.	The origin of society is the social contract, i.e. life in society is not natural but results from an agreement of wills (binding agreement).

**Table 1-1:** Comparison of the two fundamental conceptions of society.

While Aristotle considers sociability to be natural, the most modern authors (Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau) advocate social contract. For these, individuals lived in a “state of nature” (*status naturalis*) before living in society, a *status* characterized by a solitary and errant life, without community bond or laws and authority. The transition to the “state of society” (*status civilis*), with rules and principles of collective coexistence, is made through a social contract, whereby individuals do without the “state of nature”, creating a regulatory entity, the State, and norms that constitute the Law, the legal norms, with a view to the common good.

In the treatise *On Interpretation*, Aristotle stresses on the first page:

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p. 80). For further understanding of this concept, consult the work *Greek Philosophical Terms*, by F. E. Peters (1967, p. 66).

“Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken. As writing, so also is speech not the same for all races of men. But the mental affections themselves, of which these words are primarily signs, are the same for the whole of mankind, as are also the objects of which those affections are representations or likenesses, images, copies.” (Aristotle, 1962, 16a).

According to this passage, Aristotle combines three elements or vertices (concepts, words, and things) of the representation of reality, something close to the triangle of meaning in its various versions. Aristotle starts from a tripartite relationship between a) mental states; b) sounds and words; and c) the world (things and facts). Following a representational perspective that might be a communication theory, these three elements are related:

- a) The thought (source of information and the intentional origin of the expression).
- b) The language (social instrument of expression or exteriorization of inner states—a vehicle that expresses intentional expression).
- c) The reality (set of everything that is the case, exists and happens, and the extra-linguistic referent of the expression that makes it the case).

For Aristotle, the social nature of man is manifested in language.

“Man is a speaking animal and speaking is a social function; it is telling *someone* what *things are*—for example, whether they are just or unjust. Therefore, man needs a community in which to live, and his political being is based on his being articulate, his power of speech.” (Marías, 1967, p. 83).

The use and usefulness of language justify the need for a community, where man is integrated and can communicate with others.

#### 1.1.4. Saint Augustine

Saint Augustine (354–430) was a bishop, writer, theologian, philosopher, and Doctor of the Catholic Church, having contributed to the development of Christianity in the West. “It has been said that Saint Augustine is the last ancient man and the first modern man” (Marías, 1967, p. 119). Saint Augustine studied the fundamental themes for human beings and society, such as the problem of evil, the original sin, and the meaning of the sacred scriptures. His main works are *Confessions*; *De Magistro*; *The City of God*; *The Trinity*; *Immortality of the Soul*; *Against Scholars*; *On Grace and Free Will*. Saint Augustine analyses the causes and effects of the fall of the

Roman Empire and reflects on life in society in his *magnun opus: The City of God*.<sup>32</sup>

“The central idea of this work [*The City of God*] is that all human history is a struggle between two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the World; that is, between the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena*. The State, which has its roots in profound principles of human nature, is charged with overseeing temporal things: well-being, peace, justice. This gives it a divine significance as well.” (Marias, 1967, p. 119).

The role of the State is important to the society, but all authority of the State is divine, it comes from God. Religious values must be promoted by the State. Therefore, the State must be steeped in Christian principles and, consequently, the community is indoctrinated and governed by these principles and values.

### 1.1.5. Saint Thomas Aquinas

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) places the reasoning illuminated by faith before the observation and he methodically reflects on social reality, to conclude that the perfect way of life for people in their reciprocal relationships is the community.

In *Summa Theologica*, for example, Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the importance of the social in human life, revealing Aristotelian ideas, such as the fundamental theories of the pursuit of the common good and that man is naturally a social being:

“But a man is the master of a free subject, by directing him either towards his proper welfare, or to the common good. Such a kind of mastership would have existed in the state of innocence between man and man, for two reasons. First, because man is naturally a social being, and so in the state of innocence he would have led a social life. Now a social life cannot exist among a number of people unless under the presidency of one to look after the common good; for many, as such, seek many things, whereas one attends only to one.” (Saint Thomas Aquinas, 1947, p. 652).

This passage from *Summa Theologica*, which is the *magnus opus* of Thomas Aquinas, reveals the influences of Aristotle. As far as Sociology is concerned, it demonstrates Thomas Aquinas’ concerns about the social

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<sup>32</sup> In the original, in Latin, *Civitas Dei*.

dimension of the human being, to which everyone must contribute to achieve the collective well-being.

### 1.1.6. Ibn Kaldun

In his main work *The Prolegomena*, Ibn Kaldun (1332-1406), an Arab researcher and thinker,<sup>33</sup> focuses on the most significant factors of historical evolution, among the diverse set of ways in which people try to solve their subsistence problems. This work is “a fine example of a philosophy of history or a work of sociology” (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 168). It introduces the analysis and science of the social, formulating theories about social organization, cohesion, and conflict. Ibn Kaldun considers the existence of relations between economic organizations and social structures, forms of political life, and ideologies. One of its main conclusions is related to the thesis that social events obey to laws, as well as the natural facts.

Ibn Kaldun demonstrates influences from ancient Greek philosophy and considers that human beings are naturally social animals with a social instinct (Fromhertz, 2010, p. 160). Therefore, human beings need social organization. It follows that Ibn Kaldun adopts a method of investigation distinct from other historians. He even criticizes the historians for not paying attention to the truth and to various social aspects and dimensions of human life, such as demography, geography, politics, economics, culture, and physical conditions that give shape to civilizations (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 165). In the thought of Ibn Kaldun, all these aspects and dimensions are scientific and allow a better understanding of societies and civilizations. Therefore, Ibn Kaldun contributes to a more complete knowledge of nature and social changes and to the development of social thought.

### 1.1.7. Machiavelli

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) is well-known for his work *The Prince* (1532).<sup>34</sup> He was a pioneer in the process of autonomy and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis, the present capital of Tunisia.

<sup>34</sup> The work was written in 1513, but it was only published *post mortem* in 1532. The period in which Machiavelli lived was decisive for the elaboration of *The Prince*. Renaissance Italy was divided into small states (e.g. Florence, Milan, Venice, Naples), ruled despotically and not always with dynastic tradition or a legitimate right to the political power. The generalized climate was one of permanent instability, confrontations, intrigues, and suspicions conducive to perfidy, cunning,

laicization of the political thought (Ferreira *et al.*, 1995, p. 21). The troubled historical, social, and political context of the Italian peninsula in the late 15th and early 16th centuries also contributes to Machiavelli's perspective about the political power and its relations and representations.

*The Prince*, a work that Machiavelli initially called *De Princitatibus (About the Principalities)*, begins with a dedication to Lorenzo de Medici. Machiavelli considers him the “magnificent”, the model of a prince of the Renaissance. *The Prince* is the author's way of witnessing his veneration for the Medici, according to the book's dedication. In this sense, the title of the work is significant: the “prince” is the principal, the “first citizen”, the one who must assume, exercise, and expand the political power of the State on a lasting basis and who has to follow a set of strategic and effective behaviors to preserve the power. Regardless of moral or religious values as a means of serving the State, everything justifies the ultimate end, which is the State itself. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli intends to historicize timeless categories, exemplified in Ancient Rome and Florence, which become the testing ground for observing good or corrupt government, as do the categories of virtue and vice, which are not incompatible (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 210).

*The Prince* reveals a new way of doing politics, the so-called *Real politik*, containing interesting themes and issues to Sociology: the ideal forms of communication between government and governed (those who govern and those who are governed); the recognition of the importance of public opinion (considered malleable, sensitive to force and easy to deceive) for the exercise of political power; the conditions that make a good citizen; the need for morals and the law, as creations of society, against personal appetites; the strategies to reach and preserve the political power, such as possessing the fox's cunning and the lion's ferocity, i.e. “it is therefore necessary to be a fox, in order to recognize the traps, and a lion, in order to frighten the wolves” (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 60).

According to this realistic view of politics, what justifies the State is the capacity of those who have more *virtú* (what belongs to conscious human

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and cynical and fulminating action against political opponents. Cities were involved with each other, but also with other countries (e.g. Spain, England, and France) already constituted as unified nations. In power struggles, each city tried to protect itself as much as possible, influencing the others. In this context, *The Prince* and Machiavelli represent, on the one hand, the expression of an era, on the other, the appeal to national unity.

action) to reach and preserve the power, facing *fortune* (what belongs to natural need and cannot be known and predetermined).<sup>35</sup>

*The Prince* reports perfidious and cunning forms of government and subjugation of the popular masses, through the artful exercise of political power:

- “[...] injuries should be inflicted all at once, for the less they are tasted, the less harm they do. However, benefits should be distributed a little at a time, so that they may be fully savored.” (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 34).
- “Men are less hesitant about injuring someone who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared, because love is held together by a chain of obligation that, since men are a wretched lot, is broken on every occasion for their own self-interest; but fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that will never abandon you.” (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 58).
- “Men are so simple-minded and so controlled by their immediate needs that he who deceives will always find someone who will let himself be deceived.” (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 61).
- “Men in general judge more by their eyes than their hands: everyone can see, but few can feel. Everyone sees what you seem to be, few touch upon what you are [...]” (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 62).
- “In the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no tribunal to which to appeal, one must consider the final result.”<sup>36</sup> (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 62).

Machiavelli is concerned with human nature and the relationship with the State. One of the main problems of life in society is the relationship

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<sup>35</sup> The *virtù* is an important characteristic that a prince must have, and it includes cunning, strength, stability, and vigor. For Machiavelli, the *virtù* represents an indeterminate set of qualities and skills that, when acquired and exercised by the prince, serve him to relate effectively to luck and, if deemed necessary, to govern and accomplish great deeds. The *virtù* is “virility”: people with *virtù* are characterized by the ability to impose their will in adverse or difficult situations, combining character with strength and calculation.

<sup>36</sup> In the English edition of *The Prince*, the translator, Peter Bondanella (cf. Machiavelli, 2005, p. 108) clarifies that Machiavelli never said that “the ends justify the means”; “he simply says that ends (‘the final result’) matter when no other independent means of establishing a decision exist, ‘no tribunal to which to appeal’”. Therefore, on the contrary to what is common to translate and understand, Machiavelli does not say with this sentence that the ends justify the means.



between people and political power, i.e. the relationship between government and power, which was developed, in an early and original way, by Machiavelli.

### 1.1.8. Thomas More

Thomas More (1478-1535) is well-known for his masterful and original work *Utopia*,<sup>37</sup> published in 1516. The title of More's work demonstrates his proposal to represent the perfect society. So perfect that it does not exist, because it is a utopia.<sup>38</sup> More was a humanist and Saint of the Catholic Church. In this work, he criticizes the social conditions of England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. *Utopia* explores the possibility of alternative social projects. This work narrates a utopia, "an alternative to reality", about which "More says clearly that he has no hope that it will be implemented", according to Paul Ricoeur (1986, p. 309). The utopia is selective imagination and, therefore, it is also incongruous with reality. "By definition, utopias are unrealistic, but they provide a form of thought experiment for examining how society would be if we followed proposed rules and values" (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 312). This is the pejorative sense of the concept of "utopia".

In turn, a positive sense can be identified in the ability of a utopia to serve an important function: to explore the possibilities and the best. It does so by calling into question what presently exists. A utopia serves to bring

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<sup>37</sup> This work has the original and complete title both in Latin, *De optimo reipublicae status deque nova insula Utopia*, and in English, *On the Best State of a Commonwealth and on the New Island of Utopia*.

<sup>38</sup> "Utopia" is a Greek term (composed of *ou*, "no" + *tópos*, "place") which means "nowhere". In More's fictional work, the Greek term *utopia* refers to an island in the New World, a perfect society that, being perfect, is utopian. The term *utopia* should not be confused with the other Greek term *eutopia*, "happy or fortunate place", although More mentions that these two sorts of places are not far apart (More, 1965, p. 62). More's *Utopia*, which is about a place that does not exist, coined the word "utopia", according to Paul Ricoeur (1986, p. 269). For Ricoeur (1986, p. 273), More's work "exemplifies the affinity that exists between the historical method and the literary genre". Therefore, the meaning of "utopia" (especially the sociological meaning), must correspond to More's original understanding of "nowhere", respecting who created the concept and who made his paradoxical description of utopia as a place that exists in nowhere, i.e. "a place which exists in no real place, a ghost city; a river with no water; a prince with no people, and so on" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 16).

about social change, to change the present social order, to improve the governance relationship, suggesting ideal forms:

“Certainly a man who enjoys a life of luxury while everyone else is moaning and groaning round him can hardly be called a king—he’s more like a gaoler. ‘In short, it’s a pretty poor doctor who can’t cure one disease without giving you another, and a king who can’t suppress crime without lowering standards of living should admit that he just doesn’t know how to govern free men. He should start by suppressing one of his own vices—either his pride or his laziness, for those are the faults most liable to make a king hated or despised. He should live on his own resources, without being a nuisance to others. He should adapt his expenditure to his income. He should prevent crime by sound administration rather than allow it to develop and then start punishing it. He should hesitate to enforce any law which has long been disregarded—especially if people have got on perfectly well without it. And he should never invent a crime as an excuse for imposing a fine—no private person would be allowed to do anything so dishonest.” (More, 1965, p. 62).

Without utopias, society would not have these functions and would be “dead”, as it would no longer have collective projects, ambitions, and objectives. In More’s *Utopia*, the importance of collective happiness is recognized, despite the idealized and fictional character of the “perfect society”:

“After all, you’ve a duty to yourself as well as to your neighbor, and, if Nature says you must be kind to others, she can’t turn round the next moment and say you must be cruel to yourself. The Utopians therefore regard the enjoyment of life—that is, pleasure as the natural object of all human efforts, and natural, as they define it, is synonymous with virtuous. However, Nature also wants us to help one another to enjoy life, for the very good reason that no human being has a monopoly of her affections.” (More, 1965, p. 92).

This passage from *Utopia* founds the social nature of human relations and the search for a collective good, as Aristotle defends *eudaimonia*, which are the pleasures of life. These pleasures, conceived as virtues, can only be achieved collectively. According to the above excerpt, the individual has a duty to himself: to be kind to his fellow. Nature dictates this duty. This duty promotes social harmony and collective well-being. This passage demonstrates the sociological perspective of *Utopia*, a sort of More’s concern or recipe for the ideal of social status.

More’s *Utopia* is similar to Saint Augustine’s *The City of God*: both works share the conviction that no human society alone is capable of being perfect, on the one hand, and the explanation of how citizens should relate and behave with each other in a regulated manner, i.e. the nature of social

relations, on the other hand. More begins *Utopia* by referring to the discrepancies in the art of governance and evokes Plato, with whom he identifies (More, 1965, p. 66). For Plato, a happy state of society will never be achieved if philosophers (the citizens more literate and enlightened on matters of governance and common interest) are not kings (or chosen as rulers) or if kings are not philosophers or study philosophy (More, 1965, p. 57).

### 1.1.9. Thomas Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) lived in a context marked by social and political conflicts and religious wars resulting from the Reformation (Ferreira *et al.*, 1995, p. 28). Like Machiavelli, Hobbes must be understood by this social, political, and historical environment that conditions both his life and his work, where he expresses concerns about the social order, peace, and security.

The Hobbesian dilemma of social order is one of the foundations of social theory. It means the verification of the difficulty in establishing a just and peaceful society starting from isolated and selfish individuals, without moral concerns and capable of causing the greatest possible damage to your peers (Ferreira *et al.*, 1995, p. 30).

In the thought of Hobbes, human nature is selfish, and the individual is integrated into a state of nature (*status naturalis*) that is a permanent war of all against all. In the state of nature, the human being is the wolf of his fellow.<sup>39</sup> This state of war is justified by the struggle for scarce goods to guarantee one's preservation, on the one hand, it reveals the need for institutionalization of social regulation mechanisms, i.e. a kind of valid and binding (mandatory) collective contract<sup>40</sup> to abdicate the state of nature and

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<sup>39</sup> In the state of nature, man is the wolf of man, i.e. *Homo homini Deus, et Homo homini Lupus* ("Man is a God for man, and Man is a wolf for man"), according to the full version of Hobbes in his dedication epistle at the beginning of *De Cive* (Hobbes, 1987, p. 24).

<sup>40</sup> The idea of a contract is proposed by political theories that see the contract (a tacit or expressed agreement between most individuals) as the origin of society and the foundation of political power. The set of theories that defend this thesis of the agreement that marks the end of the natural state and the beginning of the social and political state is the contractualism. As a school, contractualism flourished in Europe between the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with several distinguished representatives who defended, in their way, this current of

move to the state of civility (*status civilis*), on the other hand. With this transfer of rights, the individual voluntarily imposes to himself the obligation to be able to guarantee order and social coexistence.

The Hobbesian social contract or pact is motivated by the fear of individuals losing their lives: each has an interest in establishing the pact to guarantee selfishly their survival. Although these general terms, Hobbes' ideas demonstrate the fundamental: the timeless and anonymous human concerns for social coexistence due to artificialities that guarantee indispensable values for any society: order, tranquility, security, rights, and guarantees.

In his major work *Leviathan*, published in 1651, Hobbes presents "a reasoned justification for authoritarian politics derived from assumptions about human nature" (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 137). For Hobbes, the individual lives in permanent conflict and guides his action out of fear of death and the desire for power. In a state of nature, without society (therefore, without laws, norms, state, government, common goods, and public interests, etc.), the individual would live with reduced expectations and could not count on others, if he managed to survive; he would be in permanent war and instability, fighting for its security, which would be a most fundamental necessity.

"Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." (Hobbes, 1998, p. 84).

The state of nature does not present any possibility of a stable and secure collective life. Thus, the reasonable option is the transfer (alienation) of power to civil society (a collective entity, an institution or social group, a state) with sovereign power and laws, which guarantees to everyone what everyone desire and need: stability, peace, and security (Hobbes, 1998, p. 118). In return, this entity or state exercises sovereign power over

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thought: Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau, Kant (Bobbio, Matteucci & Pasquino, 1998, p. 272).

individuals. For Hobbes, the idea of a social contract thus becomes the guarantee of security for the individual.

The transfer (or transition) of the individual's sovereign power to civil society is still a kind of alienation. There is alienation in the contractualism that is transferred from the original legal scope (the *alienatio* as the assignment of property) to the philosophical and political scope (Bobbio, Matteucci & Pasquino, 1998, p. 20). This is the only way to explain the foundation of the State and political society. For Hobbes, it is a transfer or concession of the sovereign right to govern himself (the individual in the *status naturalis*) and, through the social pact, to belong to the *status civilis*.

The third part of the work *Elements of Philosophy*, published in 1642, has a title, *De Cive*,<sup>41</sup> and an approach relevant to Sociology. *De Cive* is Hobbes' first and most genuine work on his political perspective. In Chapter 1 of his work, Hobbes addresses the condition and state of man if he did not have a civil society, which is motivated in its formation by mutual fear between men and to obtain the desired peace (Hobbes, 1987, p. 42). This is the ultimate benefit of all societies. Unlike Aristotle, Hobbes considers that man is not a social animal by nature, because he is born unfit for society:

“Manifest therefore it is, that all men, because they are born in Infancy, are born unapt for Society. Many also (perhaps most men) either through defect of mind, or want of education remain unfit during the whole course of their lives; yet have Infants, as well as those of riper years, an human nature; wherefore Man is made fit for Society not by Nature, but by Education: furthermore, although Man were born in such a condition as to desire it, it follows not, that he therefore were Born fit to enter into it; for it is one thing to desire, another to be in capacity fit for what we desire; for even they, who through their pride, will not stoop to equal conditions, I without which there can be no Society, do yet desire it.” (Hobbes, 1987, p. 44).

According to Hobbes, the man comes from a state of nature and, therefore, is unable to live in society. Man needs education, a socialization process to be integrated and adapted into society. Despite being born in a natural condition, the man wants another social condition. The state of man without society is a state of war of all men against all men (Hobbes, 1987, p. 49). War is the opposite of what all men desire: peace. By consent, men move to civil status to help each other without restrictions (Hobbes, 1987, p. 50).

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<sup>41</sup> In the original Latin, translatable by *The Citizen*. The English version of this work only appeared in 1651, under the title *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*.

### 1.1.10. John Locke

The social thought of John Locke (1632-1704) is relevant to understand the human being as an eminently political and social being. Unlike Hobbes, who justified the social pact with individuals' selfish and psychological interests (e.g. the passions and fear), Locke understands the transition from the state of nature to the civil state subordinated to a legal and moral framework (Ferreira *et al.*, 1995, p. 36). For Locke, the organization of individuals in a civil society must be guided by the need for the law to resolve divergent interests and be recognized as an independent and standard factor of the Good.

Civil laws are made possible by the constitution of the political society. This society derives from the social pact. Civil laws must be based on natural law. Since natural law is morally just, then political society is nothing more than a collective obligation to comply with the law (Ferreira *et al.*, 1995, p. 36). Locke and Hobbes agree that the political society was born from the transfer (alienation) of natural rights by the individuals and the assignment of the power. In Locke's perspective, the alienated rights are not given away to an all-powerful sovereign, but to a community subordinated to natural law and the law that it established itself (Ferreira *et al.*, 1995, p. 36).

In the thought of Locke, the ideal of society does not support the concentration of different powers, because they would conflict, they would not fulfill their respective functions and would not allow society to function with its regulatory mechanisms. At a time already modern, the way of thinking is advanced and shaped by the Enlightenment. In this context of cultural advancement, the social contract thesis arises to explain the emergence of societies. This thesis, followed by Hobbes and Locke, but also by Montesquieu and Rousseau (despite the differences between them), conceives the society as a rational agreement between individuals, according to their needs or conveniences.

In Locke's work, *Two Treatises on Government* and *A Letter Concerning Tolerance* condense his concerns about these themes and issues that are not exclusive to Political Science; they are also interests of Sociology. In *The Second Treatise*, Locke develops a positive theory of government, an alternative hypothesis to the thesis that "all government in the world is the product only of force and violence, and that men live together by no other rules but that of beasts, where the strongest carries it" (Locke, 2003, p. 100). Locke distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate civil government. Legitimate government is instituted by the explicit consent or agreement of the governed, who transfer to the government their right to exercise the law of nature and to judge for themselves. This transfer is what supports the

power of the government, it forms a stable political community and operates the justice system, which is a legitimate function for any government. In *The Second Treatise*, Locke states: “all men are naturally in that state, and remain so, till by their own consents they make themselves members of some politic society” (Locke, 2003, p. 106). Locke’s thesis is that all legitimate government is based on some sort of consent, i.e. all legitimate political authority is rooted in the consent of the governed (the social contract).

With this assumption, the legitimate civil government has fundamental functions to fulfill: to preserve the rights to life, freedom, health and property of the governed citizens, on the one hand, and to prosecute and punish those who violate the rights of others, according to *The Second Treatise* (Locke, 2003, p. 104). For this purpose, there must be an indispensable mechanism that did not exist in the state of nature: an impartial judge to assess the crime and establish the corresponding punishment.

“To avoid this state of war (wherein there is no appeal but to Heaven, and wherein every the least difference is apt to end, where there is no authority to decide between the contenders) is one great reason of men’s putting themselves into society, and quitting the state of nature: for where there is an authority, a power on earth, from which relief can be had by appeal, there the continuance of the state of war is excluded, and the controversy is decided by that power.” (Locke, 2003, p. 109).

A state of nature or an illegitimate government does not guarantee and cannot assume this function of a political society formed by a social contract.

### 1.1.11. Montesquieu

Montesquieu (1689-1755) develops a theoretical construction on political and social life based on historical-comparative methods. As a rationalist, he believes that social phenomena are governed by laws and have a principle of causality: laws are necessary relations that derive from the nature of things. For Montesquieu, there is a motivating relationship between the laws of society and the social structure.

The laws and the characteristics of each society do not depend on a state of nature or a universal standard of human nature. They are the result of chance and accidental and several structural factors, such as the weather (Ferreira *et al.*, 1995, pp. 49-50). Besides the heterogeneity of laws and customs that characterize different societies, Montesquieu argues that there

are some common patterns of comparison and favor predictions regarding the future evolution of societies (Ferreira *et al.*, 1995, p. 50).

Montesquieu argues the existence of four fundamental laws: the need for peace; the satisfaction of hunger; the sexual attraction; the desire to live in society. However, a relevant contribution by Montesquieu to the forms of social organization is the separation of fundamental powers (the legislative, executive, and judicial powers) in *The Spirit of Laws* (1748). As Montesquieu explains, everything (the justice, the authority, the constitution, in short, the society) would be compromised if a single person or just a group of notables exercised these three powers. This Montesquieu's masterpiece also distinguishes three forms of government (the monarchy, the republic, and the despotism) and addresses the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed. *The Spirit of Laws* contributes to the discussion about the diversity and nature of laws, which differ from nation to nation, but which form a legal system under which society is governed.

Half a century later, Montesquieu's theses presented in *The Spirit of Laws* formed the ideological basis of the French Revolution. This influence demonstrates the relevance and modernity of both the author and the work. The ideas advocated by Montesquieu (e.g. in defense of freedom of expression and the republic as an ideal form of government) are relevant to study themes and issues in both fields of Political Science and Sociology.

### 1.1.12. Rousseau

*The Social Contract* (1762) is an important work to understand the main sociological and political theses of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). In this book, he presents a contract theory of the state,<sup>42</sup> a perspective about the social and political agreement between ruler and subjects. Social life is based on a contract, a binding agreement, or a contract of submission. The individual consent to be ruled by this contract. The development of this idea of contract gives rise to the "*volonte generale*" (the "general will"), an important concept to Rousseau's sociological and political thought.

"In order therefore that the social pact should not be an empty formula, it contains an implicit obligation which alone can give force to the others, that if anyone refuses to obey the general will he will be compelled to do so by the whole body; which means nothing else than that he will be forced to be free; for such is the condition which, giving each citizen to his country,

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. note 40.



guarantees that he will not depend on any person. This condition is the device that ensures the operation of the political machine; it alone legitimizes civil obligations, which without it would be absurd and tyrannical, and subject to the most terrible abuses.” (Rousseau, 1999, p. 58).

To avoid misunderstandings and abuses, natural freedom must be distinguished from civil freedom. Natural freedom is limited only by the strength of the individual; civil freedom is limited by the “general will” (Rousseau, 1999, p. 59). The antecedents of what we understand today as the “public opinion” may be due to this perspective developed by Rousseau, who lived in a historical and social context where ideals of direct democracy and contract assumptions of governance were advocated. Rousseau proposes the theory of popular sovereignty based on the “general will”, according to which popular sovereignty is the people submitted to the “general will”. The people must hold political power. The concept of “general will” represents the public interest (Traquina, 2007, p. 29), which is invaluable to understand the social and political relationship between the media, the public opinion, and the social dynamics of the public sphere.

Rousseau’s concept of “general will” is relevant to Political Science and Sociology because it is innovative, and it still contributes today to cement the democratic ideals of a modern State based on the law.

“The first and most important consequence of the principles laid down hitherto is that only the general will can direct the powers of the state in accordance with the purpose for which it was instituted, which is the common good; for if the establishment of societies was made necessary because individual interests were in opposition, it was made possible because those interests concur.” (Rousseau, 1999, p. 63).

With this concept, Rousseau emphasizes the collective will that aims at the common good or interest, that emanates from the people and that is expressed through the law because it is voted directly by the people gathered in assembly. Thus, the “general will” is guaranteed and does not limit the citizen’s freedom. All citizens participate in the “general will” and, therefore, they are “sovereign”, i.e. they are governed, but free, obeying the law to which they contributed (Bobbio, Matteucci & Pasquino, 1998, p. 1298). To obey the “general will” is to obey the legitimate law of politically organized society, the authentic will, and the desire for justice.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> To accept be part freely of a social contract and obey the “general will” is a form of alienation, because the individual takes the initiative to transfer (it is a binding

According to Rousseau, all men are born free and freedom is part of man's nature. The problems arise from the evils that society creates (and that do not exist in the state of nature). Thus, it is understood that public opinion is a concept of modern liberalism and rationalism (from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in France). In the thought of Rousseau, social rights and obligations corresponding to morality, which is not natural. Morality is a social construction. In the state of nature, there is no moral; the individual is amoral (he is neither good nor bad). In this state of nature, there are no differences between individuals; there are no value scales or models or standards.

Is man born good and does society corrupt him? Or is the man born bad and society normalizes him? On this issue, Rousseau defends the good human nature (which is an Enlightenment ideal), unlike Hobbes, for whom the human being is the wolf of his fellow (*Homo homini lupus*) in the state of nature. But Rousseau responds with the "theory of the good savage" (1755): by nature, the human being is good, he is born free, but he behaves with evil and this evil comes from society (which impose servitude, privileging the elites over the weakest and creating inequality.<sup>44</sup> Rousseau argues that people's rights were threatened and destroyed by civilization. Human beings are born free, but let themselves be contaminated by society, becoming unhappy. To be happy again, it would be necessary to return to Nature, to primitive simplicity, where needs would be scarce and concern small. Since this return is impossible, a social contract must be realized: people and their belongings are placed under the control of society. For Rousseau, human nature is good, but society corrupts it. Therefore, social life is guided more by feelings than by reason.

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agreement) the power that institutes the "general will" (Bobbio, Matteucci & Pasquino, 1998, p. 20).

<sup>44</sup> For Rousseau, the individual is in a society that normalizes him, given the impossibility of being free in the state of nature. On the contrary, the perspective of Marx, according to Freud, understands that the individual is born good and society is what makes him bad. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud says: "The communists believe that they have found the path to deliverance from our evils. According to them, man is wholly good and is well-disposed to his neighbor; but the institution of private property has corrupted his nature. The ownership of private wealth gives the individual power and with it the temptation to ill-treat his neighbor; while the man who is excluded from possession is bound to rebel in hostility against his oppressor." (Freud, 1962, pp. 59-60).

## 1.2. The founders of Sociology

After the above twelve authors who appear as a reference background for the fundamentals, themes, and issues that concern to Sociology, came the so-called four founders of Sociology. They are authors who contributed to the presentation, acceptance, and establishment of Sociology as a science and a systematic field of knowledge and study about social reality. These authors are Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber.

The founders of Sociology initially conceived it as a study of a set of fundamental laws of the social phenomena. They had the interest to unveil the laws of the constitution and evolution of societies (Comte and Marx); the historical regularities (Weber); and the functional relationships between social phenomena (Durkheim).

Sociology emerges as an organized initiative of study on the social changes of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, trying to understand the transition from traditional societies to a new social order, i.e. modern, more urban, massified, industrial, secular and democratic, competitive and liberal market economy.

### 1.2.1. Comte: the scientific approach for a positive Sociology

Auguste Comte (1798-1857) has a vast work, namely: *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830-1842); *Discours sur l'Esprit Positif* (1844); and *Système de Politique Positive* (1851). Comte's main concern is the establishment and systematization of Sociology as a science based on positivism.<sup>45</sup> Positivism is the emphasis of scientific values and factual criteria in the study of social life and the rejection of any legitimacy of metaphysics.

At the beginning of the process of establishment of Sociology, as the science best suited to study and understand certain aspects of collective life, this area of study essentially faces three fundamental questions regarding the social transformations resulting from the Industrial Revolution:

- The identification of the causes of social changes.
- The indication of the characteristics of modern society (the massification of life forms, consumption, culture, etc.).

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<sup>45</sup> The concept of “positivism” derives from the verb *positare*, which in Latin means “to put”, “to place”, with the past participle *positum*, which means “set”, “placed”. For the positivism, the reality is what is put, placed, or set before us; what is positive is what is right, what is real, what admits no doubt, what is supported by facts and experience.

- The reflection on what to do face the social problems arising from changes in society.

In *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, Comte presents for the first time the term “Social Physics” to designate this new area of study that he intends to inaugurate and fit into the general branch of the sciences. Comte understands by Social Physics the science whose object of study is the social phenomena, considered in the same spirit as astronomical, chemical, and physiological phenomena, i.e. subjected to invariable natural laws. The assumption of invariable natural laws applied to study society and social phenomena are the special objective of his research. The spirit of this new science consists, above all, in seeing the true explanation of the present and the general manifestation of the future in the in-depth study of the past.

“Les conceptions que je tenterai de présenter relativement à l’étude des phénomènes sociaux, et dont j’espère que ce discours laisse déjà entrevoir le germe, ne sauraient avoir pour objet de donner immédiatement à la physique sociale le même degré de perfection qu’aux branches antérieures de la philosophie naturelle, ce qui serait évidemment chimérique, puisque celles-ci offrent déjà entre elles à cet égard une extrême inégalité, d’ailleurs inévitable. Mais elles seront destinées à imprimer à cette dernière classe de nos connaissances ce caractère positif déjà pris par toutes les autres. Si cette condition est une fois réellement remplie, le système philosophique des modernes sera enfin fondé dans son ensemble; car aucun phénomène observable ne saurait évidemment manquer de rentrer dans quelqu’une des cinq grandes catégories dès lors établies des phénomènes astronomiques, physiques, chimiques, physiologiques et sociaux. [...] En effet, la fondation de la physique sociale complétant enfin le système des sciences naturelles, il devient possible et même nécessaire de résumer les diverses connaissances acquises, parvenues alors à un état fixe et homogène, pour les coordonner en les présentant comme autant de branches d’un tronc unique, au lieu de continuer à les concevoir seulement comme autant de corps isolés. C’est à cette fin qu’avant de procéder à l’étude des phénomènes sociaux, je considérerai successivement, dans l’ordre encyclopédique annoncé plus haut, les différentes sciences positives déjà formées.” (Comte, 1997, pp. 76-77).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Translation: “The conceptions that I will try to present regarding to the study of social phenomena, and I hope this discourse already allows to glimpse the germ, cannot have the purpose of immediately giving to social physics the same degree of perfection as the earlier branches of natural philosophy, which would obviously be chimerical, since these already offer in this respect an extreme inequality, moreover inevitable. But they will be intended to imprint on this last class of our knowledge this positive character already taken by all the others. If this condition is once

Comte understands by “Social Physics” the science whose distinctive object is the study of social phenomena. He intends to apply the scientific method in the study of society. Later, in 1839, he replaced the term “Social Physics” by the designation of “Sociology”. For this reason, he contributes to the construction of a total and unitary social science. Comte gives to sociology a scientific character and considers that all sciences stand in a determined hierarchic order, as Julián Maríán synthetizes:

“The sciences stand in a determined hierarchic order, as follows: mathematics-astronomy; physics-chemistry; biology-sociology. This hierarchy has a historical and dogmatic, scientific and logical meaning, says Comte. In the first place, it is the order in which the sciences were developed and, above all, the order in which they attained their positive state. In the second place, the sciences are arranged in decreasing order of generality and increasing order of complexity. In the third place, they are arranged according to their independence: each one has need of those that precede it and is necessary to those that follow it. Finally, they are grouped in three groups of two, with special affinities between them. The life sciences—biology and sociology—are the last to emerge from the theological-metaphysical state. Sociology, especially, is the creation of Comte, who converts it into a true science. Thus, not only is the hierarchy of sciences completed, but the most important discipline within the Comtean scheme of philosophy, defined by its historical and social character, is obtained.” (Marías, 1967, pp. 351-352).

In 1822, Comte defends the idea that societies advance through successive stages of development and explanation of the phenomena. In the thought of Comte, society is like a collective organism (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1993, p. 166). This assumption leads him to establish the Law of the Three States (Gane, 2006, pp. 24-27):

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fulfilled, the philosophical system of the moderns will finally be founded as a whole; for no observable phenomenon can obviously fail to fall into one of the five major categories, henceforth established, of astronomical, physical, chemical, physiological and social phenomena. [...] Indeed, the foundation of social physics finally completing the natural science system, it becomes possible and even necessary to summarize the various acquired knowledge, then reached a fixed and homogeneous state, to coordinate them by presenting them as so many branches of a single trunk, instead of continuing to conceive them only as so many isolated bodies. It is for this purpose that before proceeding to the study of social phenomena, I will successively consider, in the encyclopedic order announced above, the different positive sciences already formed.”

<b>The theological (or fictitious) state</b>	<b>The metaphysical (or abstract) state</b>	<b>The positive (or scientific) state</b>
<p>Based on transcendental explanations (supernatural agents), synthesizing everything in a single God, as proposed by Catholicism.</p> <p>Prevalence of the belief about the supernatural origin of Law.</p> <p>Power is held by the priests and the military.</p>	<p>Substitution of divinity by metaphysical entities, i.e. the transcendent explanation by the immanent explanation (the pantheism is the apogee of this state).</p> <p>Prevalence of the reason and nature.</p> <p>The predominance of philosophical knowledge (particularly metaphysics).</p>	<p>Centered on the relative, moving away from all conceptions or all absolute concepts.</p> <p>Prevalence of science. Only what is experimental has value.</p> <p>The role of science is to determine the laws that explain the occurrence of all observable phenomena.</p>

**Table 1-2:** The three possible states of societies, according to Comte.

According to Comte, these three states are incompatible with each other and tend to supplant each other. Historically, the insufficiency of the theological and metaphysical states has led societies to a positive state.

Comte presents the fundamentals of Social Science based on observation, experimentation, comparison, and historical research. He states that the fundamental characteristic of Sociology is to consider that all social phenomena are subject to the laws of nature and they should be reduced to the smallest number possible.

Resorting to positivism, Comte creates a doctrinal system that maintains that the only or the highest form of knowledge is the description of sensory phenomena as scientific facts. In its broad (philosophical) sense, positivism is related to a strong anti-metaphysical feeling that postulates that non-scientific forms of knowledge (or those forms not subject to empirical proof) are meaningless, on the one hand, in a restricted (sociological) sense, positivism means a certain way of understanding the use of the scientific method in sociology: it is the notion that Sociology must adopt the same methods as the natural sciences (Sell, 2009, p. 29).

Positivism is defined firstly by the principle of knowledge from the observable. Thought can only reach relationships and laws. The questioning about the ends and the hidden essence of things (the metaphysics) is nothing more than a religious illusion. The criterion of objective truth can only be the criterion of sensory experience.

Sociological positivism is faithful to the set of epistemological principles that postulate a mathematical and logical treatment of facts and empirical evidence as exclusive sources of scientific sociology. Anthony Giddens clearly explains that:

“Comte sought to create a science of society that could explain the laws of the social world just as natural science explained the functioning of the physical world. Although Comte recognized that each scientific discipline has its own subject-matter, he argued that studying the latter could be done using the same common logic and scientific method aimed at revealing universal laws. Just as the discovery of laws in the natural world allows us to control and predict events around us, so uncovering the laws that govern human society could help us shape our destiny and improve the welfare of humanity. Comte argued that society conforms to invariable laws in much the same way that the physical world does. Comte’s vision for sociology was for it to become a ‘positive science’. He wanted sociology to apply the same rigorous scientific methods to the study of society that physicists and chemists use to study the physical world. Positivism holds that science should be concerned only with observable entities that are known directly to experience. On the basis of careful observations, one can infer laws that explain the relationship between the observed phenomena. By understanding the causal relationships between events, scientists can then predict how future events will occur. A positivist approach to sociology aims for the production of knowledge about society based on empirical evidence drawn from observation, comparison and experimentation.” (Giddens, 2009, pp. 12-13).

So, what is the importance of positivism to the establishment of Sociology as a science? The importance of positivism is decisive to the establishment of Sociology as a science, i.e. as a positive science, according to Comte’s terminology. Positive Sociology means Sociology equipped with the method of science, moving from a field of subjective, abstract, and general knowledge to a field of positive knowledge: objective, concrete, and rational study about social relations or science of society. The introduction of positivism in Sociology made it a more factual, empirical, and demonstrable science, just like traditional sciences.

In *Soziologische Exkurse*, Adorno and Horkheimer gird themselves on Comte’s *Positive Philosophy* and, according to them:

“Positive sociology, in Comte’s sense, saw as its task the recognition of natural laws, then still conceived as ‘unchanging’. Its goal is ‘precision’ and not absolute truth or the actualization of a just society. ‘At all times’ it avoids ‘conscientiously every useless exploration of an inaccessible inner nature or the essential modalities in the generation of any phenomena’. And as its

means it employs exclusively ‘pure observation, the experiment in the true sense, and finally, the comparative method’. It explicitly and quite dogmatically presupposes ‘that the social movement necessarily is subject to unchanging natural law, instead of being governed by this or that power of volition’. Society becomes purely an object of observation, that is neither to be admired nor condemned. A doctrine is to be established, which ‘has no other intellectual ambition than to discover the true laws of nature’ and which ‘is sufficiently rationally thought out, that during the course of its entire active development it can still remain completely true to its own principles’ thus raising immanent freedom from contradiction as its criterion. Theory and practice are sharply separated, as ‘all intermixture or any links of theory and practice tend to endanger both equally, because it inhibits the full scope of the former—theory—and lets the latter vacillate back and forth without guidance. Indeed, one must admit, that because of their greater complexity the social phenomena require a greater intellectual distance, than is the case for any other scientific object, between the speculative conceptions, no matter how positive these might be, and their ultimate practical realization. The new social philosophy must thus carefully protect itself from that tendency, only too general today, which would induce it to intervene actively in actual political movements; these must above all remain a permanent object of thorough observation for it’. By the postulate of Comtean sociology ‘to always subordinate scientific views to the facts, for the former are only intended to ascertain the real interconnections of these’, science is committed to a fundamentally retrospective character.” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973, p. 4).

What Adorno and Horkheimer underline in this excerpt is the pursuance of scientific (stable, established) laws by Sociology. This pursuance is important because it is like a path (a method)<sup>47</sup> to follow for the knowledge that comes, which is based on firmness, objectivity, and stability.

### 1.2.2. Marx: the material and practical approach for the study of societies

Karl Marx (1818-1883) has contributed differently to the establishment of Sociology as a science. While Comte and Durkheim contribute in epistemological and methodological terms, respectively, Marx contributes

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<sup>47</sup> The word “method” means “way to go through”, as it derives from the Greek term *methodos*, which is composed of *meta* (“along”, “through”, “by means of”) and *hodos* (“way”). Therefore, the method is a *sine qua non* condition to form and sustain a body of scientific knowledge; it is a rational process to reach a goal (to obtain a predetermined result or something) in a regular, sequential, orderly, explicit and possible way i.e. following (*meta*) a way (*hodos*).



in practical terms, i.e. he starts with the concrete reality and people's experiences, observes and interprets it to understand the individual's situation in society, considering that "the material conditions of life determine the nature of human consciousness and society, rather than the other way around" (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 221). Marx is concerned with explaining the social changes caused by the Industrial Revolution and the relations between economic problems and social institutions, presenting a materialist conception of history: social change is instigated by economic influences (not by ideas and values).

In the thought of Marx, it is important to understand the social institutions, laws, and morality of a society, as well as the changes that a society undergoes. For this, it is necessary to understand the nature of its productive forces and relations of production. By studying them, Marx assures that societies have passed through several key "modes of production" (i.e. forms or stages of economic organization, defined by a characteristic form of relations of production): the primitive communal mode, ancient mode, feudalism, and capitalism (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 222). In this comprehensive scope of social and economic dynamics, Marx's research makes the objects of study and interest of History and Sociology coincide.

Marx refers to the class struggle as an explanation of historical development. The revolutionary *praxis* is an invitation to social mobilization, i.e. to do something to reverse the *status quo*; it is a kind of upheaval of the proletariat, the activity of transforming circumstances. In *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Anthony Giddens argues:

"To seek, therefore, to abolish this state of affairs through philosophical criticism is futile, since this merely preserves the existing dislocation between ideas and reality. The exposure of contradictions on the intellectual level does not thereby remove them. It is necessary to proceed 'to *tasks* the solution of which admits of only one means—*practice (Praxis)*.'" (Giddens, 1971, p. 8).

Marx uses peculiar terms to understand the asymmetrical and materialistic state of societies, referring to the fetishism of merchandise and social alienation. Marx conveniently explores the concept of "alienation".<sup>48</sup> In *Capital* (1867), Marx considers that the alienation of the worker means

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<sup>48</sup> The term "alienation" derives from the Latin *alius*, "other", "strange", "to be alien to oneself", "absent-minded", "outburst of spirit", i.e. to be deprived, unaware of oneself and of one's existential conditions, be out of one's mind or to be another person, in the sense of Marx's economic and social theory.

not only that his work becomes an object, an external existence, but also that he exists outside of the worker, regardless of the worker, foreign to him and becomes an autonomous power towards him and until his life is opposed to him, hostile and strange. According to *Capital*:

“Hence the rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labor over the living, of the product over the producer. For the commodities that become the instruments of rule over the workers (merely as the instruments of the rule of *capital* itself) are mere consequences of the process of production; they are its products. Thus at the level of material production, of the life process in the realm of the social—for that is what the process of production is—we find the *same* situation that we find in *religion* at the ideological level, namely the inversion of subject into object and *vice versa*. Viewed *historically* this inversion is the indispensable transition without which wealth as such, i.e. the relentless productive forces of social labor, which alone can form the material base of a free human society, could not possibly be created by force at the expense of the majority. This antagonistic stage cannot be avoided, any more than it is possible for man to avoid the stage in which his spiritual energies are given a religious definition as powers independent of himself. What we are confronted by here is the *alienation* [*Enfremdung*] of man from his own labor. To that extent the worker stands on a higher plane than the capitalist from the outset, since the latter has his roots in the process of alienation and finds absolute satisfaction in it whereas right from the start the worker is a victim who confronts it as a rebel and experiences it as a process of enslavement. At the same time the process of production is a real labor process and to the extent to which that is the case and the capitalist has a definite function to perform within it as *supervisor* and *director*, his activity acquires a specific, many-sided content. But the *labor process itself* is no more than the *instrument* of the *valorization process*, just as the use-value of the product is nothing but a repository of its exchange-value. The self-valorization of capital—the creation of surplus-value—is therefore the determining, dominating and overriding purpose of the capitalist; it is the absolute motive and content of his activity.” (Marx, 1990, p. 990).

In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx clarifies the meaning of “alienation” and “alienated work”, on the one hand, and the causes for alienation:

“This fact expresses merely the object which labor produces—labor’s product—confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labor. Labor’s realization is its objectification. In the conditions dealt with by political economy this realization of labor appears as *loss of reality* for the workers;

objectification as *loss of the object* and *object-bondage*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*. [...] All these consequences are contained in the definition that the worker is related to the product of *his labor* as to an alien object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful the alien objective world becomes which he creates over-against himself, the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the greater is the worker's lack of objects. Whatever the product of his labor is, he is not. Therefore the greater this product, the less is he himself. The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien." (Marx, 1988, pp. 71-72).

According to Tom Bottomore's *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*:

"Alienation—In Marx's sense an action through which (or a state in which) a person, a group, an institution, or a society becomes (or remains) alien (1) to the results or products of its own activity (and to the activity itself), and/or (2) to the nature in which it lives, and/or (3) to other human beings, and—in addition and through any or all of (1) to (3)—also (4) to itself (to its own historically created human possibilities). Thus conceived, alienation is always self-alienation, i.e. the alienation of man (of his self) from himself (from his human possibilities) through himself (through his own activity). And self-alienation is not just one among the forms of alienation, but the very essence and basic structure of alienation. On the other hand, 'self-alienation' is not merely a (descriptive) concept; it is also an appeal, or a call for a revolutionary change of the world (de-alienation). The concept of alienation, regarded today as one of the central concepts of Marxism, and widely used by both Marxists and non-Marxists, entered the dictionaries of philosophy only in the second half of the twentieth century. However, before it was recognized as an important philosophical term it was widely used outside philosophy: in everyday life, in the sense of turning or keeping away from former friends or associates; in economy and law, as a term for the transfer of property from one person to another (buying and selling, stealing, making a gift); in medicine and psychiatry, as a name for deviation from normality, insanity. And before it was developed as a metaphilosophical (revolutionary) 'concept' in Marx, it was developed as a philosophical concept by Hegel and Feuerbach. In his elaboration of alienation Hegel in turn had a number of precursors. Some of them used the term without coming close to its Hegelian (or Marxian) meaning, some anticipated the

idea without using the term, and in some cases there was even a kind of meeting between the idea and the term.” (Bottomore, 2001, p. 11).

According to *The German Ideology*, the material life process conditions the political and individual life process in general: “It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness” (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 42). For Marx, “consciousness is rooted in human *Praxis*, which is in turn social” and this is the sense of the previous statement” (Giddens, 1971, p. 41). What are commodities if not products of human labor, i.e. products resulting from social relations?

The individual lives in a society that surpasses him. Dialectical materialism explains the development of societies. In a capitalist and materialistic society, there are too many distracting signs that shape human relations with objects (goods, commodities), making the individual alienated, including his work. Giddens (1971, p. 12) mentions four main dimensions of Marx’s discussion of alienation, but the first two are relevant and explanatory:

- i) The worker lacks control over the disposal of his products since what he produces is appropriated by others so that he does not benefit from it.
- ii) The worker is alienated in the work task itself: ‘if the product of labor is alienation, the production itself must be active alienation—the alienation of activity and the activity of alienation.

According to Giddens, Marx is concerned with social change and considers it according to a materialist conception of history:

“Marx’s viewpoint was grounded in what he called the materialist conception of history. According to this view, it is not the ideas or values which human beings hold that are the main sources of social change; rather, social change is prompted primarily by economic influences. Conflicts between classes provide the motivation for historical development—they are the ‘motor of history’. As Marx wrote at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto*, ‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’. Although Marx focused most of his attention on capitalism and modern society, he also examined how societies had developed over the course of history. According to him, social systems make a transition from one mode of production to another—sometimes gradually, sometimes through revolution—as a result of contradictions in their economies. He outlined a progression of historical stages that began with primitive communist societies of hunters and gatherers and passed through ancient slave-owning systems and feudal systems based on the division between landowners and serfs. The emergence of merchants and craftspeople marked

the beginning of a commercial or capitalist class that came to displace the landed nobility. In accordance with this view of history, Marx argued that, just as the capitalists had united to overthrow the feudal order, so too would the capitalists be supplanted and a new order installed: communism. Marx theorized the inevitability of a workers' revolution which would overthrow the capitalist system and usher in a new society in which there would be no classes—no large-scale divisions between rich and poor. He did not mean that all inequalities between individuals would disappear. Rather, society would no longer be split into a small class that monopolizes economic and political power and the large mass of people who benefit little from the wealth their work creates. The economic system would come under communal ownership and a more humane society than we know at present would be established. Marx argued that, in the society of the future, production would be more advanced and efficient than production under capitalism.” (Giddens, 2009, pp. 18-19).

Marx questioned about the nature of social relations. He is, therefore, one of the founders of Sociology. These social relations are problematic and depend on economic factors. With the existence of economic problems, social relations become asymmetrical and problematic, especially in contemporary societies, i.e. in an age of profound changes and social differences marked by massification, materialism, and consumerism.

### **1.2.3. Durkheim: Sociology as a study of social cohesion**

Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) also has an interesting work for the foundation and establishment of Sociology as a science. From his work, the following titles stand out: *The Division of Social Work* (1893); *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895); *The Suicide* (1897); *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Like the other founders of Sociology, Durkheim “produced pioneering studies of substantive sociological topics (mostly concerned with the novel characteristics of modern industrial societies) and contributed to debates about the appropriate methods for sociological study” (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 78).

In *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim establishes a clear and specific method for the new discipline that then emerged, as the title indicates. This method had to be based on observation (rather than the generation of abstract philosophical schemes), had to provide both the causes and functional explanations, and had to study social facts (instead of psychological facts) (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 78).

Precisely one of the most pertinent topics developed by Durkheim for Sociology is the definition and characterization of the social fact, i.e. aspects of social life that shape individual actions. Durkheim starts from a basic

principle: to study social facts as things. This means that social facts are Sociology's objects of study. Social facts, which are relative and subjective (because they vary from culture to culture) are compared with things, which are concrete and objective.

What is a social fact? Durkheim answers in his book *The Rules of Sociological Method*:

“When I perform my duties as a brother, a husband or a citizen and carry out the commitments I have entered into, I fulfill obligations which are defined in law and custom and which are external to myself and my actions. Even when they conform to my own sentiments and when I feel their reality within me, that reality does not cease to be objective, for it is not I who have prescribed these duties; I have received them through education. [...] The system of signs that I employ to express my thoughts, the monetary system I use to pay my debts, the credit instruments I utilize in my commercial relationships, the practices I follow in my profession, etc., all function independently of the use I make of them. Considering in turn each member of society, the foregoing remarks can be repeated for each single one of them. Thus there are ways of acting, thinking and feeling which possess the remarkable property of existing outside the consciousness of the individual. Not only are these types of behavior and thinking external to the individual, but they are endowed with a compelling and coercive power by virtue of which, whether he wishes it or not, they impose themselves upon him. Undoubtedly when I conform to them of my own free will, this coercion is not felt or felt hardly at all, since it is unnecessary. None the less it is intrinsically a characteristic of these facts [...] If I attempt to violate the rules of law they react against me so as to forestall my action, if there is still time. [...] Here, then, is a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him. Consequently, since they consist of representations and actions, they cannot be confused with organic phenomena, nor with psychical phenomena, which have no existence save in and through the individual consciousness. Thus, they constitute a new species and to them must be exclusively assigned the term social.” (Durkheim, 2013, pp. 20-21).

Another interesting idea developed by Durkheim is that of the theory of social cohesion. In the thought of Durkheim, there is a “collective conscience”, which is a cultural junction of moral and normative ideas. This cultural junction is what allows people to enter and interact in society.

How are individuals integrated into society? This question runs through Durkheim's research. Based on his thesis *The Division of Social Work*, which questions the nature and causes of the evolution of modern societies

towards greater differentiation of social functions, Durkheim again raises the question about the origin of the social order, challenges the artificial explanations by contract, and proposes a theory based on norm and sanction as the first conditions of all life in society.

For Durkheim, macro social change does not come because it is useful and corresponds to any purpose, but because it is generated by mechanical causes, such as the increase of volume, population density, and social relations. These ideas are taken up and deepened in *The Suicide*. Durkheim sees this social phenomenon and its growth during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the confirmation of his thesis on the consequences of individualism and the poor integration of individuals in modern societies.

The question of social integration is also developed in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, a book where Durkheim defines the essence of the religious in terms of a certain sacred element (which implies beliefs, rituals, and a social institution called the Church), considering that the supernatural or the transcendent are not sufficient conditions for a universal definition of religion. It is the sacred, as a collective and impersonal element, that allows the integration of everyone in society. According to Giddens:

“Durkheim saw sociology as a new science that could be used to elucidate traditional philosophical questions by examining them in an empirical manner. Like Comte before him, Durkheim argued that we must study social life with the same objectivity as scientists study the natural world. His famous first principle of sociology was ‘Study social facts as things!’. By this, he meant that social life could be analyzed as rigorously as objects or events in nature. Durkheim’s writings spanned a broad spectrum of topics. Three of the main themes he addressed were the importance of sociology as an empirical science, the rise of the individual and the formation of a new social order, and the sources and character of moral authority in society. We will encounter Durkheim’s ideas again in our discussions of sociological theories, religion, deviance and crime, and work and economic life. For Durkheim, the main intellectual concern of sociology is the study of social facts. Rather than applying sociological methods to the study of individuals, sociologists should instead examine social facts—aspects of social life that shape our actions as individuals, such as the state of the economy or the influence of religion. Durkheim argued that societies have a reality of their own—that there is more to society than simply the actions and interests of its individual members. According to Durkheim, social facts are ways of acting, thinking or feeling that are external to individuals and have their own reality outside the lives and perceptions of individual people. Another attribute of social facts is that they exercise a coercive power over individuals. The constraining nature of social facts is often not recognized by people as coercive. This is because people generally comply with social facts freely, believing they are acting out of choice. In fact, Durkheim argues, people

often simply follow patterns that are general to their society. Social facts can constrain human action in a variety of ways, ranging from outright punishment (in the case of a crime, for example) to social rejection (in the case of unacceptable behavior) to simple misunderstanding (in the case of the misuse of language). Durkheim conceded that social facts are difficult to study. Because they are invisible and intangible, social facts cannot be observed directly. Instead, their properties must be revealed indirectly by analyzing their effects or by considering attempts that have been made at their expression, such as laws, religious texts or written rules of conduct. In studying social facts, Durkheim stressed the importance of abandoning prejudices and ideology. A scientific attitude demands a mind which is open to the evidence of the senses and free of preconceived ideas which come from outside. Durkheim held that scientific concepts could only be generated through scientific practice. He challenged sociologists to study things as they really are and to construct new concepts that reflect the true nature of social things. Like the other founders of sociology, Durkheim was preoccupied with the changes transforming society in his own lifetime. He was particularly interested in social and moral solidarity—in other words, what holds society together and keeps it from descending into chaos. Solidarity is maintained when individuals are successfully integrated into social groups and are regulated by a set of shared values and customs.” (Giddens, 2009, p. 14).

According to the above-mentioned excerpt from Giddens, Durkheim contributes to the foundation and establishment of Sociology; he is concerned with studying the social changes that occurred and for which, until then, there was still no specific area of study to understand and explain them. In this sense, Durkheim, together with the other founders of Sociology, contributes making a necessary, systematic, and unprecedented knowledge area of study.

#### **1.2.4. Weber: comprehensive Sociology**

Max Weber (1864-1920) is also concerned with understanding social changes, giving relevance to cultural values and ideas in the formation of society and based on individual actions. In Weber’s work and thought, the idea of the role of religion (Christian beliefs) and its influences on the economy and society, namely the flourishing of capitalism, is highlighted. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904) is an example. Even today, these are the subjects of Sociology’s intervention field, which define this science as the systematic study of the individual’s life in society.

Religion is a form of power in societies and there are no societies or cultures without forms of life and the manifestation of religion (religious beliefs, cults, and rites), so analyses regarding the types of legitimacy and



ways of exercising religious power over people in the social structure are necessary. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber demonstrates that the social behaviors of individuals are only understandable if their conceptions about the world are analyzed, mainly when they are shaped by religious beliefs. According to Giddens:

“Weber opens *The Protestant Ethic* by posing a statistical fact for explanation: the fact that in modern Europe ‘business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labor, and even more the higher technically and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant’. [...] Protestantism adopts a resolutely stringent attitude towards relaxation and enjoyment—a phenomenon which is especially pronounced in Calvinism. The conclusion can be reached, therefore, that we must look to the specific character of Protestant beliefs if we are to account for the connection between Protestantism and economic rationality. [...] It is usually the case that those whose lives are bound up with economic activity and the pursuit of gain are either indifferent to religion, or positively hostile to it, since whereas their actions are directed towards the ‘material’ world, religion is concerned with the ‘immaterial’. But Protestantism, rather than relaxing the control of the church over day-to-day activities, demanded of its adherents a much *more* vigorous discipline than Catholicism, and thereby injected a religious factor into all spheres of the life of the believer. There is clearly a relationship between Protestantism and modern capitalism which cannot be wholly explained by seeing the former as a ‘result’ of the latter; but the character of Protestant beliefs and codes of behavior is quite different from that which might be expected, *prima facie*, to stimulate economic activity.” (Giddens, 1971, pp. 124-125).

The relationship between capitalism and Protestant ethics demonstrates some influence of religious beliefs on the economy and the development of societies.

“Like Marx, Max Weber [...] cannot simply be labeled a sociologist: his interests and concerns ranged across many areas. [...] His writings covered the fields of economics, law, philosophy and comparative history, as well as sociology. Much of his work was also concerned with the development of modern capitalism and the ways in which modern society was different from earlier forms of social organization. Through a series of empirical studies, Weber set forth some of the basic characteristics of modern industrial societies and identified key sociological debates that remain central for sociologists today. In common with other thinkers of his time, Weber sought to understand the nature and causes of social change. He was influenced by Marx but also was strongly critical of some of Marx’s major views. He rejected the materialist conception of history and saw class conflict as less significant than did Marx. In Weber’s view, economic factors are important,

but ideas and values have just as much impact on social change. Weber's celebrated and much discussed work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* proposes that religious values—especially those associated with Puritanism—were of fundamental importance in creating a capitalistic outlook. Unlike other early sociological thinkers, Weber believed that sociology should focus on *social action*, not structures. He argued that human motivation and ideas were the forces behind change—ideas, values and beliefs had the power to bring about transformations. According to Weber, individuals have the ability to act freely and to shape the future. He did not believe, as Durkheim and Marx did, that structures existed external to or independent of individuals. Rather, structures in society were formed by a complex interplay of actions. It was the job of sociology to understand the meanings behind those actions. Some of Weber's most influential writings reflected this concern with social action in analyzing the distinctiveness of Western society as compared with other major civilizations. He studied the religions of China, India and the Near East, and in the course of these researches made major contributions to the sociology of religion. Comparing the leading religious systems in China and India with those of the West, Weber concluded that certain aspects of Christian beliefs strongly influenced the rise of capitalism. He argued that the capitalist outlook of Western societies did not emerge, as Marx supposed, only from economic changes. In Weber's view, cultural ideas and values help shape society and our individual actions." (Giddens, 2009, pp. 19-20).

For Giddens, Weber is interested in several themes and issues that go beyond the very wide field of Sociology. Weber's view, like other pioneering authors in this new area of study on the social, allows us to pay attention to new forms of social organization. This circumstance justifies *per se* the relevance of Sociology in contributing to the study and understanding of the transformations that modern societies face.

### **1.3. Branches of Sociology: the Sociology of Communication**

If the twelve authors mentioned above (listed in the Subchapter 1.1.) and these four founders of Sociology (mentioned in the Subchapter 1.2.) contributed, each in their way and with their respective perspective, to the emergence and foundation of a science of the social, this same science branches out, because it is so wide-ranging (the "social" is vague and abstract). Considering that the object of study of Sociology is too vast, there are branches more targeted and specified, namely: Sociology of Work; Sociology of the Family; Sociology of Organizations; Sociology of Education; Sociology of Religion; Sociology of Culture; Political

Sociology; Sociology of the Environment; Economic Sociology; Rural Sociology/Urban Sociology; Sociology of Sport; Sociology of Art; and Sociology of Communication or Media Sociology.

It is this last branch that is interesting to address and understand, starting by considering that we live today the age of information and communication, i.e. we live under the aegis of the media and its influences (since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and until today) that characterizes not only this specialization of Sociology (the Sociology of Communication or Media Sociology) as well as the information society itself, as the society in which we live is designated.<sup>49</sup>

Sociology of Communication intends to understand the influence and effects of communication on the configuration of modern societies (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 11). As an object of study and sociological analysis, communication is seen as an essential phenomenon in social life. For this reason, it is treated by the Sociology of Communication as capable of producing a *corpus* of solid and scientific knowledge. Communication Sociology is interested in human communication and its social processes, namely mass communication and its social influences, which emerged systematically in the USA, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The communicative phenomenon is a key element of collective life and human existence. This phenomenon has been treated with clear pretensions and scientific knowledge for a few decades ago. Regarding the sociological research, the existence of a specialized Sociology centered on communication (which, therefore, could be called “Sociology of Communication”) is very recent (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 13). From the moment on the research on mass communication began seriously and systematically, a large number of social scientists from different fields and disciplines focused their research work on the study of mass communication and, consequently, an important *corpus* of knowledge was generated (which was baptized as the Mass Communication Research), trying to endow it with a distinctive and independent science (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 18). Sociology was one of the disciplines that, in the beginning, showed greater interest in the study of mass communication and, for many years, mass communication research was synonymous of Sociology of Mass

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<sup>49</sup> This is the way society is called due to the predominance of the media, information flows, and immediate and easy access (anytime, anywhere, by anyone) to information. The concept of “information society”, which has become dependent upon complex electronic information and communication networks, may have appeared as a logical extension of earlier ideas about the rise of “post-industrial society” (McQuail & Windahl, 1993, p. 201).

Communication, especially within the USA (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, pp. 18-19).

It is this propitious period of scientific and technological development (from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), which encourages the development of the media and its consequent effects on society. In fact, at the end of the 1960s, technological progress and its applied electronic achievements (including in the media) allowed the production of culture for the masses, to the point of being called “mass culture” the set of profound transformations in the social sphere and the field of communication (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 13). The transformations in the communication sphere are added the transformations in the structure of society and social relations, caused by the effects and influences of the mass media.

Sociology’s interest in mass communication comes from the recognition of the central role that the media occupy in the social, economic, and political structure of society (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 19). In this perspective, the Sociology of Communication is the study of the influences of mass communication in the interaction between individuals and between these individuals and society, focusing on barriers to communication and the functions and strategies of communication. Sociology of Communication focuses on the study and understanding of:

- Reciprocal implications between mass societies and mass communication.
- Increasingly global and technological effects of the media on cultural patterns and social values.
- The roles of the media and technological communication devices in the social, civic, cultural, educational, and political development of citizens.

Sociology of Communication comprises the dialectic between communication and society, the role of the media in society, and the implications of the so-called new information and communication technologies in an age of globalization. The approaches in Sociology of Communication allow criticism (positive or negative, constructive, or comprehensive) about the role and use of communication in contemporary societies. Mass communication is the privileged form of study and it is closer to popular culture, so there is an influential role for mass communication in the development of modern societies and cultures.

The relations between the mass media and society are complex and, therefore, they are difficult to specify in their most diverse articulations. Mass Communication Research’s pioneering and meritorious studies proved to be insufficient for understanding the vast and complex social

phenomenon of communication and its multiple relationships and influences with society (Wolf, 1992, pp. 11-12). Progressively it became aware that the themes and issues related to the media are extremely complicated and require a systematic and complex approach, according to Wolf (1992, p. 12), who considers three guidelines that made it possible to overcome these difficulties:

1. The sociological approach was imposed as a fundamental relevance of the studies on the media.
2. The recognition of the need for a multidisciplinary study within this sociological framework.
3. The change of the temporal perspective of this area of research.

In this sense, a Sociology of Communication is established as an appropriate and extended study of mass communication, the influences of the media as social institutions<sup>50</sup> on the public. It must be concluded, however, that both Sociology and Sociology of Communication (the latter as a branch of the former) are both sciences difficult to define as such since the objects of study are relative, multiform and give rise to subjective approaches.

#### 1.4. Questions for review and reflection

1. What is Positive Sociology? What is the importance (or the contributions) of positivism for the establishment of Sociology as a science?
2. Is the study and understanding of the relationship between the individual and the society (in which he is integrated) important? Why?
3. Considering the heterogeneity of societies and social relations, is it possible to study scientifically the social life? In other words, is it possible to study objectively what is *per se* subjective?
4. Is Sociology a science like the others? How to define Sociology's object of study?
5. In the stages of sociological thought, what are the contributions of Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle? And what are those of Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Rousseau?

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<sup>50</sup> The media as social institutions, as it is defended by McQuail (2010), i.e. formal institutions of production, reproduction, and distribution of knowledge and meanings that are capable of shaping the public's perception, as well as their recognition of the past and their current understanding of the world.

6. What is a social fact and what are its characteristics? What does Durkheim mean when he says that social facts should be treated as things?
7. How to associate the emergence of Sociology with the advent of capitalism? What may capitalism have to do with the massification of societies?
8. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, what is the relationship between the basic economic problems of workers' subsistence, in post-industrial societies, and the emergence of Marxism, socialism, or unionism ideals?



# CHAPTER TWO

## COMMUNICATION

“Communication is common to all societies, to all cultures and to all times. [...] Communication monopolizes the imaginary, produces the real and its simulations, generates changing sociologies, shapes, and imposes the figures that have power or compels them to depend on it.”  
(Balandier, 1994, p. 151).<sup>51</sup>

Etymologically, the word “communication” derives from the Latin *communicatio*, which means the “act of imparting”, “information giving” and the term “communicate” means “impart, transmit”, from the Latin *communicare*, “as common”, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Communication is the “act of giving part”. For the *Etymological Dictionary* of José Pedro Machado (1977, vol. II, p. 198), the family of words around the Latin term *communicare* is also the origin of the word *communis*, “commune” (“to put or have in common; share; receive in common, take your share of”), that is, “entering into relationships with someone, communicating with someone”. From this etymology, it can be inferred that communication is the establishment of something in communion and sharing in the community. We enter in a community when we communicate, i.e. when we share information. It is thus implied that there are no human communities without communication and we daily and naturally communicate and are in coexistence, often without realizing it.

In his book *Communication as Culture—Essays on Media and Society*, James W. Carey emphasizes that communication is not a mere transmission of information. The etymology of the word “communication” presupposes the mentioned association between “communication” and “community”.

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<sup>51</sup> My translation from the consulted Spanish edition of Balandier’s book, *El poder en Escenas: De la Representación del Poder al Poder de la Representación* [*Power in Scenes: From Power Representation to Power of Representation*] (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós). This book is originally published in French as *Le Pouvoir sur Scènes*, by Éditions Balland (Paris) in 1992.



Culture is a broad field that encompasses both communication and community.

“The ritual view of communication, though a minor thread in our national thought, is by far the older of those views—old enough in fact for dictionaries to list it under “Archaic.” In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as “sharing,” “participation,” “association,” “fellowship,” and “the possession of a common faith.” This definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms “commonness,” “communion,” “community,” and “communication.” (Carey, 2009, p. 15).

Communicating is so intimately human, so simple, and natural that it is paradoxically difficult to explain what it is. Mamoru Itoh’s book entitled *I Want to Tell You about My Feelings* is a good example of a suitable, accurate, and simple way to explain what communication is. According to Mamoru Itoh (2002, p. 4), “communicating is like playing catch. I throw the ball and you catch it. Then, you throw the ball and I catch it. And, again, I throw the ball...”. That is how communicating begins. Communicating is like playing the ball, it is like participating in a game with the ball and with other players. I (the sender) throw (encode) the ball (the message) and the other (the receiver) catch it (decodes). Then, the other one throws the ball and I catch it. This is the reversibility of the communication process. To participate in the game (i.e. to interact) we need to throw the ball. Someone must throw the first ball and, thus, the communication process starts. The others need to be available and able to receive the ball that I intend to throw at them. There are different ways to throw the ball; the same is to say that there are different ways of communicating. This is a simple, but effective and demonstrative perspective on communication.

Following Mamoru Itoh’s metaphor, if the person to whom we throw a ball catches it and if we catch the ball that person throws back to us, then an act of communication takes place. However, sometimes we feel that the receiver did not catch the message the way we wanted him to; other times there is no way we could catch the ball that the other person threw at us. Unfortunately, there are always many attempts of communication that fail and when unsuccessful communications accumulate, our emotions become unstable.

There is always the possibility for good or bad communication. However, a relationship process is always triggered whatever the communication is. As Mamoru Itoh states, if there is understanding, we can have different thoughts, interests, feelings, and still be together. This characterization of communication implies the need to normalize the practice of communicating (i.e. throwing the ball), the obedience of a certain grammar, a stipulated

procedure for using the available signs, and following the rules that dictate the possible productions of sense. As John Fiske points out:

“I assume that all communication involves signs and codes. Signs are artefacts or acts that refer to something other than themselves; that is, they are signifying constructs. Codes are the systems into which signs are organized and which determine how signs may be related to each other. I assume, too, that these signs and codes are transmitted or made available to others: and that transmitting or receiving signs/codes/communication is the practice of social relationships.” (Fiske, 1990, pp. 1-2).

Communication is essential for social relationships and behavior; it is innate. The origin and evolution of communication reveal that the history of communication is cumulative: each new means or technique of communication benefits from the previous means and techniques to improve itself and become more efficient. The evolution of communication is long and increasingly accelerated and multifaceted. There is a progressive and joint transformation of communication as a human process of interaction. If communication is inseparable from social and behavioral activities and if Sociology is additionally the study of human interactions, this science benefits a lot from understanding the roles of communication in these interactions. As the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* points out: “Communication is inseparable from social and behavioral activities; as a consequence, it has become an integral part of research and discussion in the social sciences” (Waltman, 2008, p. 31).

However, there are different meanings of the term “communication”. Every day we participate in several communication processes. We communicate with other people and other people communicate with us without paying attention or without being aware that we are communicating. The ability to communicate has always accompanied the existence of human being. In the early days of human life, forms of communication were not as developed as they are today, but they served to establish the basic and indispensable function: establishing social ties and interactions between human beings and functioning as means of expression or representation.

To answer the question “what is communication?” we must mention several meanings that the concept of “communication” implies. In the first etymological meaning of communication, the word “communication” translates the idea of communion, as previously mentioned. In this view, communication means the establishment of a communion. Through communication, living beings that use communication meet each other and exchange information. Therefore, communication is the faculty of making information common to others not only concerning the world but also

concerning the sender himself, such as his ideas, wishes, feelings, perceptions, etc.

On another level, the biological meaning of communication is identified with a sensory and nervous activity, which is important for the survival of the species. That includes the collection, storage, exchange, and transmission of information. What happens in the nervous system is externalized. Without communication, living beings could not reproduce themselves.

A historical-social meaning of communication is also relevant. As human beings inevitably live in a society (a group of people who have uses, customs, cultural patterns, and ways of life in common and establish among themselves a certain number of rules only possible because of the existence of communication), thus it is communication itself that allows the transmission of ideas, techniques, customs, beliefs, rules, in short, the culture. One of the manifestations of the social nature of human beings is the need for the exchange of ideas, which is impossible to occur without communication.

Since its origins, the development of human society has been dependent on the appearance and development of language as a set of symbols that allows the transmission of information, whether between elements of a particular social group or different social groups, or the transmission of information for future generations. In this perspective, communication is indispensable in the course of history and, at the same time, it is an educational activity that modifies the behavior of the interlocutors (sender and receiver). The appearance and the corresponding development of new information technologies contribute to social evolution, where changes in the cultural habits of individuals occur.

The shared meanings are always the result of an interactive construction. We commonly understand the meaning as the direction in which the statement follows, according to the communication rules. Even with the violation of these rules, there are meanings that are produced and understood, sent, and received. The meaning is associated with the ideas of expectation, intention, and expressiveness. Attending to the meanings of statements allows unveiling obscure meanings and finding others. In this unveiling process of the meanings of the statements that we commonly produce, receive, interpret, and understand, attention is required to the daily uses of language.

Communicating is not just informing; it is also to convince and seduce; it is to make the interlocutor recognize an intention (which is not always conveyed explicitly by the statement); it is to provide and execute steps towards an interlocutor. The interlocutor or receiver will recognize the form

of the sender's words and will contribute to the assumption of both as interlocutors, considering the conformity of the present behaviors with social norms. Social conventions, linguistic norms, and relationship rituals form a framework of obligations for exchanging meaning through words but leave the opportunity to the interpretation of intentions.

After these conceptual remarks about the term "communication", the concept of "communication" designates a transmission of information between a sender and a receiver through signals encoded in a channel and medium.<sup>52</sup> To communicate is to transmit messages, establishing a relationship in which the actions, thoughts, intentions, and feelings of a sender stimulate, influence, and trigger responses in the recipients of the messages. In this view, it is assumed the recognition of the other as interlocutor and the possibility of influencing him, i.e. his feedback.<sup>53</sup> Communication is a social phenomenon and process that involves the transmission and reception of messages between a sending source and a receiving interlocutor. The information is transmitted through physical resources (speech, hearing, vision, etc.) or technical devices in an encoded way at the source and decoded at the destination. To encode and decode, the use of conventional systems of signs and rules to use these signs (the code) is indispensable.

Therefore, the concept of "communication" is definable as the temporal process (it is developed in time) and dynamic (it is dialectical, involves dialogue, interaction, reversibility) in which information is transmitted and in which an agent (the sender) has certain information that shares as a message with the interlocutor, making it common. All communication presupposes a sender that sends a message in a certain code, a transmission channel, and a receiver that decodes the message. Communication presupposes an exchange of ideas, feelings, or experiences with others, through a process in which the interlocutors (the sender and the receiver) intervene.

To understand communication as a process is to conceive public systems of linguistic exchanges. In these systems, principles of cooperation between the interlocutors compete, explains Paul Grice (1989, pp. 26-28). The use

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<sup>52</sup> The channel and the medium are different: while the channel "is simply the physical means by which the signal is transmitted" (e.g. light waves or radio waves), the medium (e.g. the voice) "is basically the technical or physical means of converting the message into a signal capable of being transmitted along the channel" (Fiske, 1990, p. 18).

<sup>53</sup> Feedback is the process by which the communicator obtains information from the receiver about whether and how he received the message.

of language functions like a social market, where the meaning and procedures for the regulation of exchanges already exist. In this social market, a game of supply and demand is played on different types of products, such as:

- a) Communication contracts underlying the idea that the whole communication act is part of a pre-structured framework, which varies according to the definition of the situation in four terms: i) objectives; ii) identity of the interlocutors; iii) exchange of messages; and iv) communication device.
- b) Language rituals, i.e. usual behaviors that the sender must adopt from the moment he intends to establish or maintain contact with a receiver.
- c) The social value of words: signs that convey a social identity and can convey values of truth and identity, as in the case of sociolects.

In his book *Ce Que Parler Veut Dire*,<sup>54</sup> Pierre Bourdieu states that what circulates in the language market are stylistically characterized speeches, because every speech act and, more generally, every action, is a conjuncture: on the one hand, the socially shaped dispositions of linguistic *habitus*, which imply a certain propensity to speak and to say certain things (expressive interest); on the other, the structures of the language market, which impose themselves as a system of specific sanctions and censorship (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 14). For Bourdieu, the grammar only partially defines the meaning, and it is in the relationship with a market that the complete determination of the meaning of the discourse takes place (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 15).

Agreeing with Paul Watzlawick, that it is not possible not to communicate, refuse, or accept a contact is already communicating. Speaking to others is an effective act, but also a symbolic act, which compels or invites one to become an interlocutor, imposing feedback. By convention, society prescribes several behaviors and language formulas that are ritualized and adapted to certain endeavors and contexts. These rituals correspond to the cultural habits of a socio-linguistic community.

If the different types of products mentioned above as a), b) and c) constitute social frameworks of expression, we can represent communication as a social game, within which each participant is free to establish different intentionality strategies. Language is not only used to design the world and label objects. The meaning is, above all, an intention addressed to the partners of the acts of language, who construct the meaning and, at the same time, determine their way of existence as speakers. The

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<sup>54</sup> Original title in French (cf. Bourdieu, 1998).

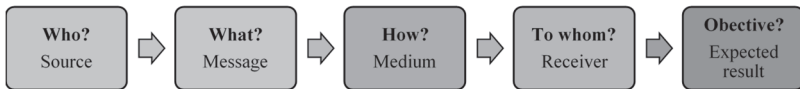
meaning is not necessarily based on the truth, but it is built on the framework of community life, the daily game of exchanges and simulations consciously assumed or not, the sharing of roles, the metaphorical representation and figuration of words. Language is built at the confluence of the explicit and the implicit; it is not just the said/unsaid, but the relationship between both.

Interpersonal communication is bilateral: the interlocutors are alternately senders and receivers. In contrast, the information (standardized in the mass media) can be limited to make something known to someone, not through a process, but through a unilateral circuit, where the content circulates exclusively from the sender to the receiver.

Communication	Information
Bilateral: the subjects (interlocutors) are alternately senders and receivers.	Unilateral circuit, where the content circulates exclusively from the transmitter to the receiver.
A process that assumes a source that emits a message in a certain code, a transmission channel, and a receiver that decodes the message.	It may be limited to make something known to someone, but not through a process.
It requires feedback/reversibility.	It does not require feedback/reversibility.

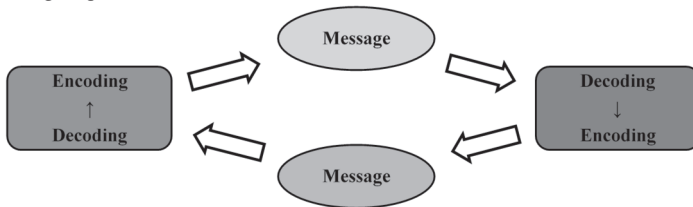
**Table 2-1:** General differences between communication and information.

Information is an isolated action, which can be triggered by an individual or by a machine (the sources or senders of the message). There is no reversibility in the information, as shown in the following linear scheme:



**Figure 2-1:** Scheme of the information.

The information<sup>55</sup> is the result of data processing, manipulation (treatment and editing), and organization. It is the sending, transmitting, and receiving data (information, items of knowledge) by signals about something or some situation. Therefore, it represents a change in a person's knowledge. Communication is an active interaction, as shown in the following Figure 2-2:



**Figure 2-2:** Basic scheme of communication as a reversible process.

Among many things, communicating is expressing, representing, sharing information, thoughts, perceptions, sensations, or feelings through verbal signs (words of a language) or non-verbal signs (gestures, facial expressions, body postures, clothing, silence, etc.). If communication is important, its study will also be important. From what has already been mentioned, communication is important because:

- It is a social and global phenomenon.
- It is a crucial social process for community life (not only for the gregarious human being).
- It is an interaction that allows us to acquire information; express wishes, interests, and needs; to relate to others and the environment, even if one does not want to or does not know how to do it.

The study of communication allows us to understand how we are and live, what the culture we belong to is like, and how we integrate and participate in it, according to social rules and values, cultural standards, and normative models. The following Table 2-2 is about the different forms of communication and it demonstrates that communication is polymorphic, occurring in or having many forms or shapes or appearances:

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<sup>55</sup> The concept of “information” comes from the Latin *informare*, in the sense of “giving form, shape or appearance”, i.e. putting in shape, forming, creating, representing, presenting, creating an idea or notion.

<b>Verbal</b>	Writing	Handwritten or printed	Alphabetical	Publications; newspapers; magazines; letters; telegrams; exhibitions; reports; warnings.
			Syllabic	
			Ideographic or pictographic	
	Relief writing	Braille publications; relief writing.		
	Oral		Sound systems; radio; loudspeakers; speech and hearing; telephone; seminars; speeches; meetings; contacts; gestures.	
	Audio-visual		TV; cinema; videophone; slide projection.	
<b>Non-verbal</b>	Gestural		Deaf and dumb language; signalman gestures.	
	Coded or symbolic		Morse; flags; traffic signs code; mathematical or chemical symbols.	
	Tactile		Tactile language of the blind-deaf and dumb.	
	By signs	Visuals	Smoke signals; lights signs.	
		Acoustic	Drums; whistled languages; ambulance sirens.	
	By action		A spectator's laugh provoked by a comic scene.	
	Chemistry		Aromas that are caused by snacks.	

**Table 2-2:** The different forms of communication between verbal and non-verbal.

Due to the different forms of communication available, it is shown that communication is multiform, social, and naturally human.

## 2.1. Origin and evolution of human communication

A brief reference to the origin and evolution of human communication, like the one proposed here, is inevitably also a reference to the origin and evolution of humanity. As Joseph N. Pelton claims, to understand this new age in which we live and to which this author attributes the name of *e-Sphere*,<sup>56</sup> we must recognize that it is founded on millions of years of human history and that this long history cannot be divided (Pelton, 2000, p. 39). In

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph N. Pelton (2000, p. 204) characterizes the *e-Sphere* as the time and the world marked by the interactivity and globality of a single brain or collective and interactive way of thinking. It is a global village, but different from the one favored by satellite television, in which everyone saw the same image, and which was approached by McLuhan. This *e-Sphere* is a global village based on electronic culture, a *Word-Wide Mind* that can think and interact collectively. The global village of McLuhan is characterized by the *panopticon*; the *e-Sphere* is characterized by *synopticon*.



the book *2001: Space Odyssey*, Arthur C. Clarke demonstrates this same reference, when he summarizes the rise of the human being:

“Unlike the animals, who knew only the present, Man had acquired a past; and he was beginning to grope toward a future. He was also learning to harness the forces of nature; with the taming of fire, he had laid the foundations of technology and left his animal origins far behind. Stone gave way to bronze, and then to iron. Hunting was succeeded by agriculture. The tribe grew into the village, the village into the town. Speech became eternal, thanks to certain marks on stone and clay and papyrus. Presently he invented philosophy, and religion. And he peopled the sky, not altogether inaccurately, with gods.” (Clarke, 1999, p. 30).

In this excerpt from Arthur C. Clarke’s *2001: Space Odyssey*, the idea of a global village stands out: “The tribe grew into the village, the village into the town”. Much further on in this long and slow process of human ascension, the techniques and technological means have improved and, as Arthur C. Clarke acknowledges:

“The more wonderful the means of communication, the more trivial, tawdry, or depressing its contents seemed to be. Accidents, crimes, natural and man-made disasters, threats of conflict, gloomy editorials—these still seemed to be the main concern of the millions of words being sprayed into the ether. Yet Floyd also wondered if this was altogether a bad thing; the newspapers of Utopia, he had long ago decided, would be terribly dull.” (Clarke, 1999, p. 52).

This excerpt is still relevant to understand the media today, how they work, and the logic of the newsworthiness criteria. As he states, “the more wonderful the means of communication, the more trivial, tawdry, or depressing its contents seemed to be”.

Communication skills are innate. The human being starts to communicate instinctively and from a very early age, with natural expressions such as babbling, screaming, and crying. These natural expressions can manifest hunger, sleep, pain, discomfort, or fear. Seen as innate behaviors, one begins to communicate, necessarily assuming the other as an interlocutor. Assuming and entering in communion (in the sense of communing and sharing something) with the other is a *sine qua non* condition for all communication processes.

As has been stated, communication is essential both for social relationships and for the development of any gregarious living being. It is a socio-cultural and biological need inherent to human beings. The chronology of the processes of development of forms and techniques of communication is

remote, slow, and cumulative: each new form, means, or technique of communication benefits from the previous ones, increasing more and more the capacity to communicate. Although slow, the processes of development of forms and techniques of communication have been accelerated and multifaceted in recent years and increasingly, due to the advancement of science and technology.

About 500 thousand years separate the invention of language from the invention of more formal and codified writing (registered 4,000 years B.C.). Later, the alphabet (1500 B.C.). After the jungle drum, the smoke signals, the Chinese bamboo telegraph, the bonfires, the tower, the carrier-pigeon, the horse mail, etc. as a means of communication, a revolutionary moment is the invention of the press by Gutenberg (*circa* 1450). Gutenberg was the first in Europe to print using movable type and the first to use a press and, after this invention, the form of printed communication expands (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1993, pp. 37-41). It was necessary to wait around five thousand years between the birth of writing and the birth of the press. Since then, progress has accelerated. A little more than 400 years separate the invention of the press and that of the telephone (with Bell, in 1876) and the radio (with Marconi, in 1899), which accelerated the transmission of messages, especially after the First World War.

Only 40 years later, television broadcasts the first regular programs. If television broadened the worldview, the Internet created another world (a virtual world without borders, the cyberspace) 30 years later (in 1969).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> There is a necessary difference to establish between the Internet and the World Wide Web, also known as the web (network) or just www. The Internet was developed from the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) created in 1969. It is a network that connects the millions of computers in the world. The World Wide Web is one of the several tools for accessing the Internet; it is an interconnected information system that allows access to content or information through the Internet, on which it is dependent. The Internet provides various services, such as the exchange of messages by electronic mail (email). The World Wide Web uses the HTTP protocol to promote this transfer of information and it depends on browsers to present the content to the user, allowing him to click on links to access files hosted on other computers. In the beginning, “although the Internet was much bigger and more accessible than ARPANET, it was still pretty hard to use. You could exchange messages, files, and even run some programs remotely, but beyond that, you couldn’t really do much unless you were an expert” (Poe, 2011, p. 214). Accordingly, Castells (2001, p. 15) explains that “in cooperation with Robert Cailliau, Berners-Lee built a browser/editor program in December 1990, and named this hypertext system the world wide web (www). The www browser software was released by CERN over the Net in August 1991”. About the invention

The Internet is the third industrial revolution, says Ignacio Ramonet (2001, p. 17). The Internet is a component of the media system and presents a threat to traditional media, insofar as it constitutes a platform that increasingly integrates television, cinema, publishing, music, video games, information, stock exchange data, sports, personal banking, show and travel ticket offices, e-mail, the weather, the documentation (Ramonet, 2001, p. 19). This is the digital multimedia world (the new information and communication technologies). As Manuel Castells (2001, p. 1) says, in *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*: “the Internet is the technological basis for the organizational form of the Information Age: the network.”

“The Internet is a communication medium that allows, for the first time, the communication of many to many, in chosen time, on a global scale. As the diffusion of the printing press in the West created what McLuhan named the ‘Gutenberg Galaxy’, we have now entered a new world of communication: the Internet Galaxy. The use of the Internet as a communication system and an organizing form exploded in the closing years of the second millennium. At the end of 1995, the first year of widespread use of the world wide web, there were about 16 million users of computer communication networks in the world.” (Castells, 2001, pp. 2-3).

Today, the number of users is much higher. A piece of information (e.g. about the occurrence of a given event transmitted via twitter) travels across the planet in a few seconds over the Internet. The worldwide communication is a widespread practice. The access to information was a privilege of minorities with economic powers in the recent past. Today, access to information is frequent, accessible to all, and immediate, due to the new technological means of communication. Today, communication represents an ideology of modernity and the foundation of sociability, it serves to legitimize discourses, behaviors, and actions, such as the religion in traditional societies, the progress in modern societies, or the production in industrial society, according to Adriano Duarte Rodrigues (1999, p. 13). Communication is the latest mobilizing instrument, available to provoke consensus effects that are universally accepted in the most different domains of modern experience (Rodrigues, 1999, p. 13). Communication has vague and indefinite outlines and it is suitable for the most diverse strategic uses.

In today’s societies, the use of social networks is increasingly frequent. But this does not mean more sociability; on the contrary, the virtual quality

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of the World Wide Web, see the testimony of the inventor himself (Berners-Lee, 1999).

of interpersonal relationships is a generalized deficit in interpersonal relationships. According to Castells:

“The emergence of the Internet as a new communication medium has been associated with conflicting claims about the rise of new patterns of social interaction. On the one hand, the formation of virtual communities, primarily based on on-line communication, was interpreted as the culmination of a historical process of separation between locality and sociability in the formation of community: new, selective patterns of social relations substitute for territorially bound forms of human interaction. On the other hand, critics of the Internet, and media reports, sometimes relying on studies by academic researchers, argue that the spread of the Internet is leading to social isolation, to a breakdown of social communication and family life, as faceless individuals practice random sociability, while abandoning face-to-face interaction in real settings.” (Castells, 2001, p. 116).

The computing age has both advantages and disadvantages. ENIAC<sup>58</sup> is usually regarded as the first modern computer. It had a military purpose and had the following characteristics: 5.5 meters high and 25 meters long (occupying an area of 180 square meters); Weight 30 tons; 17 468 valves; without monitor, keyboard, or mouse. This computer had a lot of limitations: operation errors, malfunctions, and slow processing (a multiply operation took 11 seconds). It was deactivated on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1955.

In 1975, Jean Cloutier’s *L’Ere d’Emerec* divides the history of communication in four episodes. These episodes are characterized by the cumulative use of new ways of communication that transform society:

- Interpersonal communication: externalized through gestures and words.
- Elite communication: characterized by drawing, music, and writing.
- Mass communication: emerges with the press and culminates with the satellite.
- Individual communication: based on multimedia and self-media.

In the age of the self-media, it is the consumer who makes up the product he is going to consume. The finished product offered to him is no longer enough. It is a self-service of daily practice information. Self-media presupposes active receivers that also produce and transmit information.

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<sup>58</sup> ENIAC is the acronym for *Electronic Numerical Integrator And Computer*, built in 1946 by John Mauchly and John Eckert.

## 2.2. Anthropology of communication

Anthropology is a social science. According to researchers in this field of study, such as Mischa Titiev (1963), its object concerns aggregates of people who generally occupy a single region and share a common way of living. Anthropology is a science related to Sociology and Sociology of Communication, as mentioned in the Introduction. If we insert the “communication” factor in this circumstance of aggregating people in a space and with common way of living, an anthropological approach to communication becomes more pertinent (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1993, p. 43), i.e. about linguistic communities based on interrelationship systems.

Considering the naturalness of human communication skills, it is pertinent and necessary to approach it firstly in an anthropological dimension, as it is proper to the gregarious human being. In this sense, the anthropological approach to communication is demonstrable by Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), when he analyses the fundamentals of human life in his *Essai sur le Don* (1950), i.e. the *potlatch* as a system of interrelations.<sup>59</sup>

Human life is communal, interactive, institutionalized. Consequently, institutions are created for social life; there is no place for the state of nature. The best example is presented by Mauss with the *potlatch*. The gift works as a device for sociability and communication logic, considering that the *potlatch* is a system of total social and economic *prestations*.<sup>60</sup> In societies where *potlatch* is practiced, the gift is developed as a social process and symbolic communication that, because it is so, also develops interactions and social relationships, i.e. it is a foundation of sociability. According to Mauss, the nature of any society is to express itself symbolically in its customs and institutions; on the contrary, normal individual behaviors are

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<sup>59</sup> The term *potlatch* means “gift” and it is a system of social and total benefits that is typical of some primitive tribes, such as those in Canada. The ritual or social practice to give gifts creates and maintains relationships and social ties in societies, not only in archaic or primitive ones but also in modern and more complex societies. Therefore, the English edition of Mauss’s book is entitled *The Gift-Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*.

<sup>60</sup> There is no convenient English word to translate the French *prestation*, as Ian Cunnison, the English translator of Mauss’s book. The French word *prestation* is used to mean “delivery”, “benefit”, “performance”, “allowance”, “any thing or series of things given freely or obligatorily as a gift or in exchange; and includes services, entertainments, etc., as well as material things”, points out Cunnison (Mauss, 1966, p. xi).

never symbolic; they are the elements from which a symbolic system is built, which can only be collective.

The *potlatch* is a social institution. The creation, preservation, and restoration of social ties depend on processes of generalized symbolic exchanges such as those provided by the *potlatch* system. Exchanges are made through the obligation acts of giving, receiving, and giving back gifts. This is the sociability and communicability practice.

When studying the *potlatch* institution in the Trobrianders tribes, Mauss shows one of the fundamental principles of the social bond, the source of all value: the generalized process of exchange and circulation of gifts (Rodrigues, 1999, p. 16). The *potlatch* is a system of total social *prestations*; it has specific requirements or characteristics. They are:

- Voluntary (freely participated).
- Mandatory: socially imposed and necessary to preserve social ties.
- Phased: they involve three moments: giving, receiving, and giving back.
- Disinterested: they imply the active and disinterested participation of the members.
- Social: they lead to sociability (and social problems are involved).
- Economic: they are based on exchanging gifts logic in a symbolic market.
- Totals: they imply the participation of all, under penalty of self-exclusion and rupture with the system.
- Symbolic: they have exchange value, use value, and symbolic value.

What is the relationship between the *potlatch* and communication? To understand the functioning of the *potlatch* is to understand the functioning of both communication (as a symbolic exchange) and natural human ability and the social relationships that are based on permanent interactions. Both *potlatch* and communication are social practices or acts:

- They create interrelationships between those who integrate both processes.
- They are forms of sharing.
- They establish common situations (they are generalized exchanges).
- They enhance relationships of domination and social influence.
- They are a system whose power lies in its meaning.
- They are caused by an agreement (exercised by the circulation and correspondence of relationships).
- They emphasize the value of collective ritual and synthesize social integration.

The problem of social relations is to know if present societies would have ceased to count with this device to create value, by virtue of their ideal of rationality, establishing objective mechanisms in their place, independent of the relationships and social ties that agents create throughout generalized symbolic exchange processes (Rodrigues, 1999, p. 17). The communication processes are predictable and reciprocally understandable. Communication responds to expectations generated by relationship (Rodrigues, 1999, p. 21). Without the freedom of the sender's act of communication or the meaning recognition by the receiver, there is no communication or understanding.

Communication is a symbolic exchange and it does not mean above all that it is a simple product (it can even be understood as such); it does mean that it is a process of generalized symbolic exchange. It is a process that fosters sociability and generates social bonds, overlapping natural relations with the environment. The survival of living beings depends on exchanges with the environment and with other beings. Exchanges are like a relationship between a stimulus and a response.

According to Mauss (2008, p. 309), in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, the facts we study are all total social facts, i.e. they put into action the totality of society and its institutions (*potlatch*, clans, tribes, etc.). All these phenomena are legal (of private and public law), economic (the ideas of value, usefulness, gain, luxury, wealth, acquisition, accumulation, and consumption), religious (of strict religion, of magic, of animism, of diffuse religious mentality), and even aesthetic (dances, chants, and parades of all kinds, dramatic representations).

Societies are open and dynamic systems; they are like extensive living organisms with social institutions and organs, as well as the respective functions that allow them to function in an integrated and complementary way. In permanent social systems, there are interrelations and communication relations,<sup>61</sup> constituting a social and cultural ecosystem that is the natural habitat of human beings.

### 2.3. Pragmatics of human communication

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical paradigm developed in the rail of Georg Simmel, from the works of Edgar Morin, Gregory Bateson, Erving Goffman, Paul Watzlawick, Edward Hall, and many authors of the so-called Palo Alto School (Gonçalves, 2002, p 78) or Palo Alto Mental Research Institute, in California. The focus of symbolic interactionism is

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<sup>61</sup> Both the relationship (between parts or elements of a system or structure, such as society) and communication are necessarily social, i.e. social, and total phenomena.

the social practices and social relations triggered by the action of individuals who are in interaction. Relationships are integrated and reproduced in the social structure and according to institutional forms, requiring conformity with representations and ideologies (Gonçalves, 2002, p. 78). The symbolic interactionism starts with the analysis of human communication.

Communication is an essential cultural element for social practices and relationships. Communication is fundamental to collective life and continuous social and symbolic interaction, varying communication behaviors and practices from culture to culture. In each culture, the pragmatics of human communication follows a pattern and produces meanings. Behaviors and social relationships will make sense (i.e. be understood) within a given framework of cultural standards and references.

Effectively, communication is the foundation of unity and variability of culture and collective life (Gonçalves, 2002, p. 25). It structures life forms, behaviors, actions, and social relationships. For this reason, the pragmatics of human communication was eminently developed by the Palo Alto School, particularly by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson. This perspective is based on the most fundamental characteristics of human communication and attaches importance to psychological factors (e.g. behavioral disorders as a communicative reaction) and to the practical or pragmatic (behavioral) effects of human communication. The perspective focuses on the formal relationships between communication and behavior. Communication is a condition for social life, to which we are all inserted since birth. In 1967, Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson published *Pragmatics of Human Communication—A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes*, from which the following excerpts are extracted:

“First of all, there is a property of behavior that could hardly be more basic and is, therefore, often overlooked: behavior has no opposite. In other words, there is no such thing as non-behavior or, to put it even more simply: one cannot *not* behave. Now, if it is accepted that all behavior in an interactional situation has message value, i.e. is communication, it follows that no matter how one may try, one cannot *not* communicate. Activity or inactivity, words or silence all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot *not* respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating. It should be clearly understood that the mere absence of talking or of taking notice of each other is no exception to what has just been asserted. The man at a crowded lunch counter who looks straight ahead, or the airplane passenger who sits with his eyes closed, are both communicating that they do not want to speak to anybody or be spoken to, and their neighbors usually ‘get the message’ and respond appropriately by leaving them alone. This, obviously, is just as much an interchange of communication as an animated discussion. Neither can we say that ‘communication’ only



takes place when it is intentional, conscious, or successful, that is, when mutual understanding occurs. Whether message sent equals message received is an important but different order of analysis, as it must rest ultimately on evaluations of specific, introspective, subject-reported data, which we choose to neglect for the exposition of a behavioral theory of communication. On the question of misunderstanding, our concern, given certain formal properties of communication, is with the development of related pathologies, aside from, indeed in spite of, the motivations or intentions of the communicants. In the foregoing, the term ‘communication’ has been used in two ways: as the generic title of our study, and as a loosely defined unit of behavior. Let us now be more precise. We will, of course, continue to refer to the pragmatic aspect of the theory of human communication simply as ‘communication’. For the various units of communication (behavior), we have sought to select terms which are already generally understood. A single communicational unit will be called a *message* or, where there is no possibility of confusion, a communication. A series of messages exchanged between persons will be called interaction. (For those who crave more precise quantification, we can only say that the sequence we refer to by the term ‘interaction’ is greater than one message but not infinite.)” (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967, pp. 48-50).

This first excerpt is about the axiom of the impossibility of not communicating. This axiom is probably the most relevant of the five. The second axiom is the content and relationship levels of communication:

“Another axiom was hinted at in the foregoing when it was suggested that any communication implies a commitment and thereby defines the relationship. This is another way of saying that a communication not only conveys information, but that at the same time it imposes behavior. Following Bateson, these two operations have come to be known as the ‘report’ and the ‘command’ aspects, respectively, of any communication. [...] The report aspect of a message conveys information and is, therefore, synonymous in human communication with the *content* of the message. It may be about anything that is communicable regardless of whether the particular information is true or false, valid, invalid or undecidable. The command aspect, on the other hand, refers to what sort of message it is to be taken as and, therefore, ultimately to the *relationship* between the communicants. [...] If we now return to human communication, we see that the same relation exists between the report and the command aspect: the former conveys the ‘data’ of the communication, the latter how this communication is to be taken. [...]” (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967, pp. 51-53).

The third axiom has to do with the punctuation of the sequence of events:

“The next basic characteristic of communication we wish to explore regards interaction—exchanges of messages—between communicants. To an outside observer, *a series of communications can be viewed as an uninterrupted sequence of interchanges*. However, the participants in the interaction always introduce what, following Whorf, Bateson and Jackson have termed the ‘punctuation of the sequence of events’.” (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967, p. 54).

Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson summarize the fourth axiom of communication, the digital and analogic communication, as follows:

“[...] *Human beings communicate both digitally and analogically. Digital language has a highly complex and powerful logical syntax but lacks adequate semantics in the field of relationship, while analogic language possesses the semantics but has no adequate syntax for the unambiguous definition of the nature of relationships.*” (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967, pp. 66-67).

About the symmetrical and complementary interaction, the fifth axiom:

“[...] symmetrical and complementary interaction. They can be described as relationships based on either equality or difference. In the first case the partners tend to mirror each other’s behavior, and thus their interaction can be termed *symmetrical*. [...] In the second case one partner’s behavior complements that of the other, forming a different sort of behavioral Gestalt, and is called *complementary*. Symmetrical interaction, then, is characterized by equality and the minimization of difference, while complementary interaction is based on the maximization of difference. There are two different positions in a complementary relationship. One partner occupies what has been variously described as the superior, primary, or ‘one-up’ position, and the other the corresponding inferior, secondary, or ‘one-down’ position. These terms are quite useful as long as they are not equated with ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ ‘strong’ or ‘weak.’ A complementary relationship may be set by the social or cultural context (as in the cases of mother and infant, doctor and patient, or teacher and student), or it may be the idiosyncratic relationship style of a particular dyad. In either case, it is important to emphasize the interlocking nature of the relationship, in which dissimilar but fitted behaviors evoke each other. One partner does not impose a complementary relationship on the other, but rather each behaves in a manner which presupposes, while at the same time providing reasons for, the behavior of the other: their definitions of the relationship fit.” (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967, pp. 68-69).

Therefore, this set of excerpts state five important axioms to understand human communication through this pragmatic perspective:

- 1) The impossibility of not communicating: it is not possible not to communicate, i.e. communication is inherent to human beings and it is inevitable for interaction and behavior; therefore, it is impossible not to communicate, because we all communicate, conscious or not.
- 2) The content and relationship levels of communication: communication includes content (the message, information: what is said) and relationship (meta-communication: explains and qualifies the content: the way it is said). Content and relationship are the two levels in each communication act. Communication problems arise due to the content or the relationship, i.e. when meta-communication is not clear or when it contradicts the content of the message (e.g. saying that one is not ashamed and having a red face). To avoid conflicts, the content and the relationship must be clarified.
- 3) The punctuation of the sequence of events: the nature of the relationships depends on how the parties perform in the communication; the message depends on its internal organization.
- 4) The digital and analogic communication: people communicate digitally and analogically, as they are integrated into systems (school, family, work, etc.) where they exercise communication patterns of two types: analog (non-verbal, without semantic code: elevation of voice, red face/exaltation, etc.) and digital (coded and essentially verbal). All behavior transmits a message that, without having a semantic code, carries with it a meaning that may or may not clarify the verbal (digital) message. Digital communication loses meaning when it is not accompanied by analog communication.
- 5) The symmetrical and complementary interaction: all communication is symmetrical (reveals rivalry, competition, minimizing the differences) or complementary (reveals solidarity for maximizing the differences).

## 2.4. Questions for review and reflection

1. What is communication? What are the differences between interpersonal communication and mass communication? In which of these kinds do the goals of Sociology of Communication best fit?
2. Is communication important? Is the study of communication important? Why?
3. How to explain the most recent development of the media, compared to the past centuries when the evolution of the means and techniques of communication was slower and more widely spaced?

4. Is it important the anthropological dimension of communication in relation to other dimensions, approaches, and perspectives?
5. What is the relationship between *potlatch* and communication? How can the *potlatch*, a system from a primitive context, serve to understand the present relationship systems of modern societies, i.e. more technologically developed and complex?



# CHAPTER THREE

## MASS SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND COMMUNICATION

“If one were to compress within one sentence what the ideology of mass culture actually adds up to, one would have to represent this as a parody of the injunction: ‘Become that which thou art’: as the exaggerated duplication and justification of already existing conditions, and the deprivation of all transcendence and all critique.”  
(Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973, p. 202).

There is no human society without culture or culture without communication. The concepts of “society”, “communication” and “culture” are related; they belong to the same social process of transformation from the traditional into the modern, from the identity (or culturally exclusive) to the massified (or world-culture, i.e. a world that is increasingly uniform, homogenized and globalized, with increasingly equal societies). Communication is culture and both are part of this complex process of a global transformation of societies. Therefore, studying communication means understanding culture and society, as communication is a manifestation of culture and social interaction. However, society, culture, and communication assume, in the present technological age of globalization, a common characteristic: they are mass. The masses produce the totality or unrestricted set of individuals outside traditional social structures.

The relations between culture and communication are complex, multiple, progressive, intimate, and reciprocal. Cultures are related to each other through mediation and mediatization mechanisms.<sup>62</sup> These mechanisms

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<sup>62</sup> The mechanisms of mediation or mediated interaction are mediated communication and are based on the processes, technical means, and institutions (family, school, church, media, new media, etc.) of socialization that transmit information, behaviors, habits, and attitudes, i.e. they create living conditions in society. The mediatization (media coverage) mechanisms are mediated communication, which

attribute meanings and ethical and aesthetic values to cultures; meanings and values that take effect in daily life through collective and individual practices (Ferin, 2009, p. 9). There are interdependencies and interrelations between the fields of communication and culture. Given these relationships, on the one hand, and due to technologies and traditional and modern media, global communication and global culture develop, where everyday life, lifestyles, traditions, beliefs, and worldviews, in short, the different cultures interpenetrate, at an accelerated pace and with unpredictable consequences (Ferin, 2009, pp. 10-11). Global communication, technically equipped, interferes in the global culture and in each culture.

### 3.1. The concept of “mass”

The concept of “mass” is, although abstract, vague and equivocal (Acosta, 1979, p. 141), relevant to characterize contemporary societies and cultures, where the role of the media is decisive in shaping them, informing and influence people and form (clarify or “indoctrinate”) public opinion. In the process of massification, it is also important to develop technology (transforming society into a digital society or a hyperreal society) and the means of communication available to people and collective entities. The concept of “mass” presupposes a large aggregate of people who are generally undifferentiated and without order (McQuail, 1983, pp. 34-35). It is a reflex of the modern forms of collective life that constitute mass societies.

In 1976, when he published *Les Communications de Masse: Guide Alphanétique*, Jean Cazeneuve (1999, p. 174) already stated that, when it is said that the new means of diffusion are mass media and they constitute a mass communication system, it is understood that they tend to homogenize the individuals who form their audiences, to create in them certain attitudes, tastes, almost identical behaviors, relegating to a secondary plane the distinctive signs and the differences that could confer, on the contrary, its belonging to a family, a social class, a profession and attenuating to the maximum the specific traits of its personality. At the limit, Cazeneuve (1999, p. 175) continues, it is even imagined or suggested that, if the action of the mass media persists and the massification is perfect, all individuals, sitting in front of their television sets, will engulf the same show at the same time and have the same reactions”.

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takes place through the media, the new media, and the cultural and content industries (Ferin, 2009, pp. 27-28).

The mass has no traditions or rules of behavior. The mass is the set or agglomerate of people not especially qualified. According to Ortega y Gasset, the mass is the average man, it is the man as long as he is not distinguished from the others; the mass revolutionizes everything that is different (singular or individual); the mass is only concerned with their well-being and does not feel supportive to well-being causes. It is a homogeneous set of individuals, even if they come from different environments and other social groups. The mass is made up of people who do not know each other (they are separated from each other) and they have practically no possibility of exerting a reciprocal influence. For Ortega y Gasset, the mass-man is a being who:

- Does not anguish, does not bother; he feels good about being identical and indistinguishable to the others.
- Has no self-awareness.
- Has no history or tradition.
- Has no particularities.
- Wander, without fixing or taking root.

In the following excerpt from *The Rebellion of the Masses*, Ortega y Gasset traces the psychological profile of whom he calls the mass-man:

“In our time it is the mass-man who dominates, it is he who decides. [...] Public authority is in the hands of a representative of the masses. [...] The mass-man is he whose life lacks any purpose, and simply goes drifting along. Consequently, though his possibilities and his powers be enormous, he constructs nothing. And it is this type of man who decides in our time. It will be well, then, that we analyze his character. [...] If that human type continues to be master in Europe, thirty years will suffice to send our continent back to barbarism. [...] What is he like, this mass-man who today dominates public life, political and non-political, and why is he like it, that is, how has he been produced? [...] This leads us to note down in our psychological chart of the mass-man of today two fundamental traits: the free expansion of his vital desires, and therefore, of his personality; and his radical ingratitude towards all that has made possible the ease of his existence. These traits together make up the well-known psychology of the spoilt child. And in fact it would entail no error to use this psychology as a ‘sight’ through which to observe the soul of the masses of today. Heir to an ample and generous past—generous both in ideals and in activities—the new commonalty has been spoiled by the world around it. To spoil means to put no limit on caprice, to give one the impression that everything is permitted to him and that he has no obligations. The young child exposed to this regime has no experience of its own limits. By reason of the removal of all external restraint, all clashing with other things, he comes actually to believe that he is the only one that exists, and gets used to not considering others, especially



not considering them as superior to himself. This feeling of another's superiority could only be instilled into him by someone who, being stronger than he is, should force him to give up some desire, to restrict himself, to restrain himself. [...] My thesis, therefore, is this: the very perfection with which the XIXth Century gave an organization to certain orders of existence has caused the masses benefited thereby to consider it, not as an organized, but as a natural system. Thus is explained and defined the absurd state of mind revealed by these masses; they are only concerned with their own well-being, and at the same time they remain alien to the cause of that well-being." (Ortega y Gasset, 1932, pp. 48-60).

There is a pejorative connotation of the term "mass", in the sense of "unconscious herd", which is justified by the fact that individuals are submissive and malleable in society. In an initial period, the term "mass" referred to an ignorant and unruly mob or multitude (McQuail, 1983, p. 35). The Ortega y Gasset's mass-man is the antithesis of the humanistic and cultured man; the mass is the jurisdiction of incompetent, i.e. it is everything that does not evaluate itself (Wolf, 1992, p. 20). The mass is the property of the uncritical and undifferentiated individual who subverts what is different and is concerned only with himself, with his well-being.

Salvador Giner's book *Mass Society* also traces the characteristics of mass societies as undifferentiated societies and without referents from the past or projects or directions for the future:

"As I say, one of the major social outlooks present in, and characteristic of, the modern world is a conception called the 'mass society' interpretation. In some quarters it also receives the name of the 'theory of mass society'. Yet, I hasten to say, it very rarely appears in a guise that can deserve the title of theory, with its minimal connotations of logical rigor and falsifiability. I will nevertheless retain the expression 'theory' in many instances, in order to remain faithful to sources and common speech, conscious however of the pitfalls and fallacies involved. (Moreover, the fact that the word 'theory' is so lavishly used by mass society 'theorists' to describe their cogitations is quite revealing in itself). The outlook in question claims basically that modern society is the result of a general breakdown of the elements of differentiation that internally diversified former societies, as well as the parallel result of a loss of the sense of the sacred: technology, economic abundance and political equality have created a homogeneous society, in which men are the prey of the impersonal forces of bureaucracy and regimentation, while ideological fanaticism is their only, fatal refuge from the moral desert created by generalized apathy and secular disbelief." (Giner, 1976, p. xi).

There is a close, if not cause-and-effect, relationship between the development of mass media and the massification of societies. If we consider that the content disseminated by the media is popular and superficial (promoting spectacle and sensationalism, meeting the basic needs of satisfaction and distraction) and are undemanding in terms of rigor (in information) and quality (in entertainment programs), media audiences become what they “consume”. By preferring content of this nature, the audiences encourage the media to disseminate them, considering that the media have an interest in pleasing their audiences and having as much audience as possible. According to Adorno e Horkheimer:

“The mass is produced socially—in its nature it is not unchangeable; not a community fundamentally close to the individual, but only welded together by the rational exploitation of irrational psychological factors, it confers on people the illusion of closeness and communion. But precisely as such an illusion, it presupposes the atomization, alienation, and impotence of the individuals.” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973, p. 81).

Therefore, the concept of “mass” has a pejorative sense. It is “produced socially”, claim Adorno and Horkheimer. The mass “thinks” and reacts in an unthinking, and irrational way, it is illusory, atomized and alienated; it absorbs the differences and idiosyncrasies to make homogeneity prevail.

### 3.2. Society and mass societies

A society is an organized and stable group of people who seek together to achieve certain common goals (Cabral, 2000, p. 1208). Society is a system of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions in permanent interaction, which develops through the process of socialization. Society is an organized collectivity of individuals who live together in the same territory, cooperate in groups to satisfy their basic social needs, adopt a culture, and function as a distinct social unit. Therefore, society has the following general characteristics:

- Demographic unit or unified plurality of people and interrelationships.
- Common geographical area.
- Groups with diverse and specific social functions, which complement each other.
- Similar culture, with respective social norms (means for harmony: the norm/law and authority).
- Global functional unit.
- Social unity and cohesion.
- Conformity, consent, and consensus on cooperation and coexistence.

In *The Sage Dictionary of Sociology*, Steve Bruce and Steven Yearley define society as follows:

“It may seem a curious discipline that has trouble succinctly defining its core term but this word [society] carries a very wide variety of meanings. Broadest and least useful, it can be the totality of human relationships. More useful, it means any self-reproducing human group that occupies a reasonably bounded territory and has a reasonably distinctive culture and set of social institutions. We commonly refer to nation-states as societies: France or Holland, for example. But we may also use the term for a particular people within a state: the Scots or the Welsh, for example. It is also used for distinctive groups that sustain some sort of collective identity by virtue of culture and social interaction but lack a territory. So we might talk of ‘Hispanic society’ in the USA or ‘Pentecostal society’ in Uganda. However, the absence of a territorial element probably means that ‘subculture’ would be a more useful designation.” (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 286).

For their part, Adorno and Horkheimer, in *Soziologische Exkurse*, consider society from the following functional perspective:

“Under society in the most pregnant sense is understood a sort of linking structure between human beings in which everything and everyone depend on everyone and everything; the whole is only sustained by the unity of the functions fulfilled by all its members, and each single one of these members is in principle assigned such a function, while at the same time each individual is determined to a great degree by his membership in this total structure. The concept of society becomes a functional concept as soon as it designates the relationship between its elements and the lawfulness of such relationships rather than merely the elements themselves or when it is merely descriptive. Sociology would thus be primarily the science of social functions, their unity, their lawfulness.” (Adorno & Horkheimer 1973, pp. 16-17).

For Adorno and Horkheimer, what most defines a society is the understanding of it as a unit composed of functions and individuals in relationships and dependencies with each other. Therefore, Sociology is the study and understanding of the social functions that all fulfill so that the unit, the society, works according to certain laws. It is concluded that Sociology, as a science of the social, and society, as a core object of study of Sociology, are difficult to define, due to the scope of the concepts.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, there are defining elements of what society is:

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<sup>63</sup> The concepts “Sociology”, “society” or “communication” are important keywords in this book, mainly because they fall within the scientific area of Sociology of

- Human relationships.
- Human group self-reproductions.
- Occupation of a defined territory.
- Distinct culture.
- Social institutions.

A mass society is a vast and modern collectivity generated by industrialization, urbanization, wage labor, communication, consumption, and political promotion established by universal suffrage. The masses represent a homogeneous social group with general features:

- “Dissolution” or, at least, dilution of the primary groups.
- “Disintegration” or, at least, the de-structuring or reconversion process of the traditional structure of local communities.
- Domination of bureaucratic systems.
- Standardization of living conditions and lifestyles.

These characteristics lead to the following standardized consequences:

- Displacement of socialization functions outside the family.
- “Loss” or, at least, reduction of spontaneous solidarity ties (including the class category).
- Development of impersonal relationships in the constitution of a vast anonymous society exposed to all interests and strategies.
- Substitution of demanding physical work by new experiences of sensations and coexistence with more free time.

According to *The Sage Dictionary of Sociology* of Steve Bruce and Steven Yearley, mass society is:

“Popular from the late 1930s to the 1950s, this gloomy depiction of modern society asserted that a variety of recent developments (universal voting, mass education, the growth of mass media, urbanization and mass production) was undermining many forms of local community bonding and thus creating a society of isolated atomized individuals who (and this was

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Communication, which is mirrored in its title. These terms do not allow, in themselves (i.e. outside the scope of Sociology of Communication), monotetic definitions, that is, a classification that uses only a differentiating criterion. As Wittgenstein designates (1998, p. 44), they are “odd-job words”, i.e. ambiguous concepts, with irregular referential functions and applicable in different contexts. The “umbrella term” option is also accepted to define these embracing and polysemic concepts.

the topical part of the analysis) were vulnerable to political manipulation by unscrupulous elites.” (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 186).

These developments had repercussions in fostering the favorable conditions for societies of atomized individuals and vulnerable to the manipulation and influence of public discourses (namely political, propaganda, advertising).

Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s 1970 essay “Constituents of a theory of the media” remains current when it points out that “every use of the media presupposes manipulation” and, therefore, “the question is therefore not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them” (Enzensberger, 1982, p. 54). Considering the etymology of the term “manipulation”, which means a conscious technical intervention on some material that is presented, Enzensberger states:

“Manipulation—etymologically, ‘handling’—means technical treatment of a given material with a particular goal in mind. When the technical intervention is of immediate social relevance, then manipulation is a political act. In the case of the media industry, that is by definition the case. Thus, every use of the media presupposes manipulation. The most elementary processes in media production, from the choice of the medium itself to shooting, cutting, synchronization, dubbing, right up to distribution, are all operations carried out on the raw material. There is no such thing as unmanipulated writing, filming, or broadcasting. The question is therefore not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them. A revolutionary plan should not require the manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator. All technical manipulations are potentially dangerous; the manipulation of the media cannot be countered, however, by old or new forms of censorship, but only by direct social control, that is to say, by the mass of the people, who will have become productive.” (Enzensberger, 1982, p. 54).

The media operate as a consciousness industry. “The electronic media do not owe their irresistible power to any sleight-of-hand but to the elemental power of deep social needs that come through even in the present depraved form of these media” (Enzensberger, 1982, p. 60).

“In the productions of the consciousness industry, the difference between the ‘genuine’ original and the reproduction disappears—‘that aspect of reality which is not dependent on the apparatus has now become its most artificial aspect’. The process of reproduction reacts on the object reproduced and alters it fundamentally. The effects of this have not yet been adequately explained epistemologically.” (Enzensberger, 1982, p. 73).

Mass societies also function as mass-markets, where strategic and particular (individual) interests predominate over more collective interests for the well-being of all. As in the laws of the market, societies or mass-markets are shaped according to what best suits those who have and exercise more power. If journalism is considered the fourth power in a democratic regime (after the other separate constitutional powers: legislative, executive, and judiciary)<sup>64</sup> and if the media, in general, produce and transmit content that interests them to please their audiences and have the maximum audience, the societies where these media are integrated are shaped, for better or for worse, in what is presented and transmitted. Thus, the ingredients of the mass-market are all provided in excess, namely with:

- Information as permanent flashes about *fait-divers* (i.e. brief news stories, as those typically presented by sensational, lurid, spectacular newspapers).
- Production, promotion, and consumption of popularized and superficial knowledge.
- Appeals to the global consumption of commercial brands and ephemeral products to the detriment of the cultivation of social values and normative principles.
- Entertainment with soap operas or endless series to retain public loyalty.
- Essentially visual spectacle, because it attracts and seduces more, both the content (what is transmitted) and the form (how it is transmitted).

The “age of the masses” has become a global and networked consumer market. The media themselves, as collective entities specialized in the production and transmission of content, are mass media industries.

The genesis of mass societies is based on certain factors and circumstances, namely the role of the media in the West. The media act as ideological means (they have more influence than political agents) and act globally. The interaction between the media and the new technological means makes mass communication and public discourses more seductive, i.e. influential; it provokes an increase of the individual’s basic needs. The issue of seduction, with its effects/consequences in the formation of public

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<sup>64</sup> The media are considered the fourth power, because they play a decisive role in the formation and clarification of public opinion and in the critical, free, and independent surveillance of society and constitutional democracies, namely over the branches of the three powers (legislative, executive and judiciary).

opinion and mass society, is not absent from the media field or from the news production process, which obeys the logic of influence of the media.

In this regard, Baudrillard characterizes seduction in his book entitled *Seduction* as having signs for social relation based on appearances, artifices, meanings connected; a ritual order with peculiar rules; and ways of thought (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 21). Masses are psychologized and seduced by media discourses. It is like everything is driven by seduction, ideology, desire, illusion, etc. widespread by advertising messages (Barroso, 2019c, p. 150). As Baudrillard states:

“Seduction/simulacrum: communication as the functioning of the social within a closed circuit, where signs duplicate an undiscoverable reality. The social contract has become a ‘simulation pact’ sealed by the media and the news. And nobody, one might add, is completely taken in: the news is experienced as an ambience, a service, or hologram of the social. The masses respond to the simulation of meaning with a kind of reverse simulation; they respond to dissuasion with disaffection, and to illusions with an enigmatic belief. It all moves around and can give the impression of an operative seduction. But such seduction has no more meaning than anything else, seduction here connotes only a kind of ludic adhesion to simulated pieces of information, a kind of tactile attraction maintained by the models.” (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 163).

The strength of the market is linked to the importance of consumption habits, which are triggered by communication and seduction techniques (advertising, marketing, etc.) and public speeches structured in the media.

### 3.3. Culture

There are several definitions of “culture”, but all focus on relative aspects, such as their representations, expressions, and models of action and behavior, as well as their constituent elements (symbols, knowledge, values, beliefs, and norms). In *The Sage Dictionary of Sociology* of Steve Bruce and Steven Yearley (2006, p. 58), for example, a culture of a society is defined as “the totality of its shared beliefs, norms, values, rituals, language, history, knowledge and social character”.

The concept of “culture” derives from the Latin *cultura*, in the sense of agriculture, something cultivated, cared for, prepared, with an ornate spirit or soul, following the *Etymological Dictionary* of José Pedro Machado (1977, p. 264). This definition allows a classic understanding of culture based on all the human being’s actions concerning himself and the environment.

Culture is a *continuum*, it is *in inconstantia constans* (constantly changing) and, therefore, it requires adaptation, considering static aspects (conservatism, finished forms embodied in tradition) and dynamic aspects (modernization, the future) of the culture itself. As James W. Carey explains, in *Communication as Culture—Essays on Media and Society*, culture is not a unidirectional process. An understanding of social experience must be based on cultural transactions between people, which always contain elements of collaboration, dialogue, sharing, or ritualized interaction. Culture is never singular and univocal; on the contrary, “it is, like nature itself, multiple, various, and varietal” (Carey, 2009, p. 50). Culture is like that for each of us, even when we have different cultures.

All human beings have a culture that they assimilate, adapt, and transmit. There is no human being without culture or culture without society. Throughout life, we assimilate and accumulate various material or spiritual components, modifying them and even reinventing them and inventing new components. The naturally gregarious human being is at the same time a product and a producer of his culture or the culture to which he belongs. Therefore, culture is a heritage of material or spiritual artifacts in which man moves and uses to satisfy his physical, physiological, and spiritual needs that he received from his ancestors or that he added, modified, transformed, or invented and transmits (Lima, Martinez & Filho, 1980, p. 38).

Cultural dynamism is due to the natural changes that life forms, in general, undergo according to the influences of various factors, such as time and space. All cultures are interpretations and cannot be studied and understood in a preliminary way (Gonçalves, 2002, p. 19). They do not denote a concrete reality, but certain meanings and abstractions. Culture is a totality made up of a set of:

- Representations (concepts and symbols of interpretation).
- Expressions (material and formal modalities to manifest something).
- Norms (values and rules to guide practices, behaviors, and actions).
- Actions (technical and social actions).

Culture is the set of social practices and behaviors conceived and transmitted collectively, such as rites and cults, customs, and popular uses. Clifford Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Cultures* Geertz advocates a concept of culture that highlights the particularities of culture as a process when we understand it represented by specific manifestations and ceremonies:

“[...] the culture concept to which I adhere has neither multiple referents nor, so far as I can see, any unusual ambiguity: it denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited



conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89).

One of the more useful ways of distinguishing between culture and social system is to consider, on the one hand, “the former as an ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social integration takes place”, and, on the other hand, “to see the latter as the pattern of social interaction itself” (Geertz, 1973, p. 144). According to this perspective, if on one plane we find the framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values by which individuals define their world, express their feelings and ideas and issue their judgments, on the other plane we have the dynamic process of interactive conduct. Therefore, culture is a plot of meanings by which individuals interpret their individual and collective experiences and guide their social action; the social structure represents the form that this action takes, the existing network of human relationships. Thus, Geertz concludes that “culture and social structure are then but different abstractions from the same phenomena” (Geertz, 1973, p. 145).

From the conception of culture as the sum of the ways in which a given community of individuals or society have learned to behave, Geertz states:

“[Parsons] has elaborated a concept of culture as a system of symbols by which man confers significance upon his own experience. Symbol systems, man-created, shared, conventional, ordered, and indeed learned, provide human beings with a meaningful framework for orienting themselves to one another, to the world around them, and to themselves.” (Geertz, 1973, p. 250).

For Parsons, culture is a shared symbolic system. Despite the ambiguity of the concept, Parsons underlines three fundamental aspects for the definition of culture:

“Perhaps the point may first be discussed briefly in relation to the problem of culture. In anthropological theory there is not what could be called close agreement on the definition of the concept of culture. But for present purposes three prominent keynotes of the discussion may be picked out: first, that culture is *transmitted*, it constitutes a heritage or a social tradition; secondly, that it is *learned*, it is not a manifestation, in particular content, of man’s genetic constitution; and third, that it is *shared*. Culture, that is, is on the one hand the product of, on the other hand a determinant of, systems of human social interaction.” (Parsons, 2005, p. 9).

Culture is everything that human beings add to Nature. All human works are culture. This assumption presupposes the radical difference and complementarity between the categories of Nature and culture. There is no human being without culture or culture without society. The relationship between human beings, culture, and society is intimate. In this sense, a society is defined as a heterogeneous set of individuals or as an extensive social group formed by subsets or subgroups, in communion with cultural standards (language, uses, and customs, traditions, social norms, laws and constitution, social institutions, etc.) and complementarity of roles and functions in space (territory) and time. Human activity (intuition, thinking, or behavior) maintains an individual character, but its impulse and model come from culture, which is necessarily collective.

If symbols are fully integrated into cultural structures, social and cultural systems are always systems of communication. Everything or almost everything in culture communicates. Each cultural object represents something that it means; each cultural object forms an encoded system that contains messages; integrates and adapts individuals in the group or in society. In this way, culture is understood as a language (instrument of thought and communication) or a semiotic system. Then, symbols emerge in the ritual (objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures, and spatial units in a given ritual context) as things that, by consensus, are thought to typify naturally, represent or remember something, whether by possessing analogous qualities either by association with fact or thought, as Victor Turner (1980, p. 21) argues in *The Forest of Symbols*.

Involved in social processes, ritual symbols become factors of social action. According to Turner, the structure and properties of ritual symbols can be deduced from three classes of data:

- 1) External form and observable characteristics.
- 2) Interpretations are offered by religious authorities and believers.
- 3) Significant contexts.

Everyday experiences are shaped by culture. The norms, values, meanings, and customs of a given community shape all who are part of it. As cultures are symbolic and structured patterns of action, human action is regulated by frames of meaning and symbolic patterns previously determined in the process of cultural symbolization. Frames of meaning that are also social representations of cultural behaviors collectively manifested, as well as relations of meaning and relations of symbolic social power. Symbols are productions that represent and express the cultural values rooted and defended by a given community. They involve significant components and are guided by significant constructions, insofar as they are

produced from the concrete reality represented by the symbols and are endowed with values to maintain and externalize.

According to Jerome Bruner, it is the culture that shapes life and the human mind; it also gives meaning to the action. Culture places intentional states (such as beliefs or desires) in an interpretive system (Bruner, 2000, p. 34). In seeking to define what he means by “cultural psychology” or “popular psychology” as a cognitive system of cultural cohesion by which people organize their experiences, their knowledge, and their transactions with the social world, Bruner aims to show how individuals, interacting with each other, they form the meaning of the canonical and the usual (Bruner, 2000, p. 67). In addition, he questions how individuals interpret and attribute narrative meaning to transgressions and deviations from normal states of the human condition. For this endeavor, he praises the usefulness of the narrative, which organizes the experience through memory.

“[...] what makes a cultural community is *not* just shared beliefs about what people are like and what the world is like or how things should be valued. There must obviously be some consensus to ensure the achievement of civility. But what may be just as important to the coherence of a culture is the existence of interpretative procedures for adjudicating the different construals of reality that are inevitable in any diverse society.” (Bruner, 2000, p. 95).

In *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, T. S. Eliot (1948, p. 27) argues that “culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living”. Although vague, this definition allows us to understand that culture is everything that human beings produce for their own benefit or to respond to the diverse needs that arise daily. Each culture has its own ways of manifesting and expressing itself. Therefore, the human being is simultaneously subject and object of culture. Therefore, culture is a collective attribute that accompanies the development of human life (which is an instrument of culture) in each society and is, consequently, a relative, subjective, fluctuating concept.

Cultural values are diverse. As artifacts produced, the components of culture presuppose different types of societies (places of development and implementation of culture). Communication is culture and cultures cannot exist without societies and these without culture. Without culture, we would not be human, we would not have language (forms of expression), a sense of self-awareness and our ability to think would be limited. Cultural variations between human beings are related to different types of society and variations in forms of communication are related to different cultures or stages of development.

As a rule, cultures have the following characteristics:

- They are holistic, encompassing everything that has to do with the people who integrate them do, say and how they live and relate to each other, with the institutions of which they are part and with other people from other cultures.
- They are apprehended, inherited, transmitted, and readapted from generation to generation.
- They are dynamic, advance, and develop permanently.
- They are ethnocentric, they value themselves, esteem themselves, and think they are the best in relation to others.<sup>65</sup>

Culture is a collective and dynamic phenomenon, a tangible and intangible heritage, which serves in a moment or circumstance as a practice and instrument for people's needs and for them to adapt to the environment (therefore, culture is also temporary, mutable).<sup>66</sup> Culture is a tangible and intangible heritage because culture can be material (concrete elements produced by human beings for a purpose: objects, clothing, bow and arrows, vases, cutlery, food, housing, etc., i.e. instruments, technology, means, resources, objects that represent the cultural content) or immaterial (intangible elements: values, ideals, habits, beliefs, superstitions, norms, meanings, laws, traditions, uses, customs, etc. that constitute the content of culture). If culture is an inheritance, everyone is open to the culture in which they live. Cultures are manifested, as their components (symbols, knowledge, values, beliefs, and norms) are followed and put into practice. Carley H. Dodd (1988, p. 38) indicates three levels of culture manifestation:

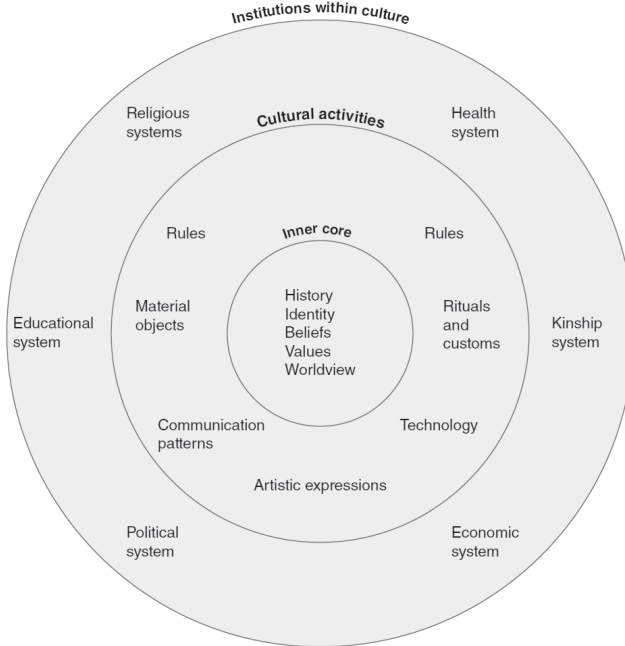
1. Inner core.
2. Cultural activities.
3. Institutions within culture.

In the following Figure 3-1, these three levels are shown in the form of rings, in the endogenous order (from inside to outside), according to the previous numbered list:

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<sup>65</sup> As Giddens (2009, p. 495) states, "virtually all cultures have been ethnocentric to some degree".

<sup>66</sup> Culture is the production and circulation of sense, meaning, and awareness. The sphere of meaning unifies the spheres of production (economics) and social relations (politics), according to John Hartley (2004, p. 51). Culture gives meaning to reality and the social system (social relations and interactions, collective identity, daily activities) of which it is a part. Culture is, therefore, the sphere of the reproduction of life.



**Figure 3-1:** Model of culture with the three levels.<sup>67</sup>

As Malinowski points out, culture is the integral set of instruments and consumer goods, the constitutional codes of the various groups in society, ideas and arts, human beliefs, and customs, etc.:

“At the outset it will be well to take a bird’s eye view of culture, in its various manifestations. It obviously is the integral whole consisting of implements and consumers’ goods, of constitutional charters for the various social groupings, of human ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs. Whether we consider a very simple or primitive culture or an extremely complex and developed one, we are confronted by a vast apparatus, partly material, partly human and partly spiritual, by which man is able to cope with the concrete, specific problems that face him. These problems arise out of the fact that man has a body subject to various organic needs, and that he lives in an environment which is his best friend, in that it provides the raw materials of man’s handiwork, and also his dangerous enemy, in that it harbors many hostile forces.” (Malinowski, 1961, p. 37)

<sup>67</sup> Source: adapted from Carley H. Dodd (1988, p. 38).

The components of culture are the fundamental and transversal aspects to all cultures, however different they may be. They are:

- Symbols (carrying recognizable meanings) and language (system of symbol to communicate).
- Knowledge.
- Values (i.e. social values structured as desirable cultural patterns, e.g. goodness).
- Beliefs (a given creed accepted and held as truth).
- Norms (conventional and accepted social practices).

These components of culture are shared and make cooperation and communication possible. The components of culture form the common context in which individuals of a given society live. The culture of society encompasses both intangible and tangible aspects.

Habermas places the public sphere (which is also a cultural sphere, because it is the place where cultural traditions, meanings, conceptions, patterns, communicative actions, and mutual understandings, social interactions, etc. are lived, practiced, maintained, and developed) in the center of the collective lifeworld (Wessler, 2018, p. 43). He distinguishes three types of resources (three structural components of the lifeworld: culture, society, and personality) provided by the lifeworld:

- a) A repository of cultural knowledge.
- b) The collective values and norms.
- c) The individual competences acquired in socialization and learning processes.

In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas states:

“Considered as a *resource*, the lifeworld is divided in accord with the ‘given’ components of speech acts (that is, their propositional, illocutionary, and intentional components) into culture, society, and person. I call *culture* the store of knowledge from which those engaged in communicative action draw interpretations susceptible of consensus as they come to an understanding about something in the world. I call *society* (in the narrower sense of a component of the lifeworld) the legitimate orders from which those engaged in communicative action gather a solidarity, based on belonging to groups, as they enter into interpersonal relationships with one another. *Personality* serves as a term of art for acquired competences that render a subject capable of speech and action and hence able to participate in processes of mutual understanding in a given context and to maintain his own identity in the shifting contexts of interaction. This conceptual strategy breaks with the traditional conception—also held by the philosophy of the subject and praxis philosophy—that societies are composed of collectivities

and these in turn of individuals. Individuals and groups are ‘members’ of a lifeworld only in a metaphorical sense.” (Habermas, 1998a, p. 343).

The concept of “culture” is quite broad and ambiguous; it encompasses different elements, some tangible or material and others intangible or immaterial, and can be perceived according to several perspectives:

- A social or structural perspective, which sees culture as a set of categories of social organization (e.g. religion or economics) that shape or adapt the social behaviors perceived as standardized, modeled, and interrelated ways of life or lifestyles.
- A historical perspective, which understands culture as a heritage from the past, of which traditional elements or aspects are an example when passed down from generation to generation.
- An ethical or normative perspective, which conceives culture as a guide for ideas and ideals, values or rules learned and shared for the better organization of human beings in the community, inhibiting impulses or putting a brake on excessive individual wills.
- A functional perspective, which frames culture as an instrument for solving or satisfying problems or needs that are fundamental to community and daily life.
- A symbolic perspective, which assumes culture as the set of all meanings consigned in an arbitrary and shared way in society, allowing the production, transmission, and reception of meanings in everything that is done or said.

Regarding this latter perspective, the following Subchapter develops the symbolic conception of culture, i.e. relating culture and symbols.

### 3.3.1. Culture and symbols

Culture and symbols have an umbilical and seminal relationship as a whole and its parts. Symbols are essential elements of any culture. Symbols are both the product of culture and the expression of the culture, which is thus transmitted, in addition to social practices (e.g. traditional uses and customs), through ideas, emotions, and desires expressed in language. With the language, it is possible to assimilate a cumulative and shared experience. The thought is symbolic and exclusively human: the ability to create symbols and use them is human. Therefore, symbolism<sup>68</sup> is a form of

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<sup>68</sup> A set of symbols peculiar of culture, religion, or people by which these express themselves.

language and an expression of culture or tradition; it allows a kind of proto-interpretation on the way of living the human experience.

The symbol is defined and understood by its double meaning power. According to *Le Conflit des Interprétations—Essais d'Herméneutique*,<sup>69</sup> Paul Ricoeur (2004, p. 28), argues that “the symbol invites us to think, calls for an interpretation, precisely because it says more than it says and because it never ceases to speak to us”.

“Symbol gives rise to thought.’ This maxim that I find so appealing says two things. The symbol gives: I do not posit the meaning, the symbol gives it; but what it gives is something for thought, something to think about. First the giving, then the positing; the phrase suggests, therefore, both that all has already been said in enigma and yet that it is necessary ever to begin again and rebegin everything in the dimension of thought. It is this articulation of thought left to itself in the realm of symbols and of thought positing and thinking that I would like to interpret and understand.” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 285).

In 1959, when he published the essay “Le symbole donne à penser” in the infamous *Esprit* magazine,<sup>70</sup> Ricoeur insists on the original and interesting idea that “the symbol gives” and that it is not the speakers who put the meaning they want in the use of language. It is the symbol that gives the meaning it already has. This possession of meaning in symbols is an exclusive condition for a symbol to be a symbol.

Departing from an already constituted symbolism, the symbol gives meaning and, therefore, also gives what to think, what to say, and what to interpret. One can only use language and any other symbolic representation system from this original and fruitful donation because everything is already said implicitly by the symbol in the form of an enigma (Ricoeur, 1959, p. 61). It is as if the thought that the symbol donates had a previous articulation and therefore consisted of a sort of a “thought already thought” in the realm of symbols. For this reason, it is possible and necessary to interrogate the symbols. The symbols of a culture invite us to their interpretation. There is an interpretation of culture only if there is a raw material for interpretation, that is, symbols with meanings and senses to be read, unveiled, thought out. The symbols say more than they allow to foresee preliminarily and superficially, as if they kept in themselves what they say. This question

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<sup>69</sup> Original title in French.

<sup>70</sup> The essay “Le symbole donne à penser” is integrated with some variations at the end of *La Symbolique du Mal* (cf. Ricoeur, 1960, pp. 323-332).



implies the relationship of symbols with knowledge and action, i.e. with the substrate of any culture.

A symbol is what represents a thing, it is in place of something, and this connection can be symbolized differently according to each culture. According to Gurvitch's *Sociology of Law*, symbols simultaneously reveal and conceal, or rather they reveal by concealing and conceal by revealing:

“The symbols are the inadequate sensitive expressions of spiritual meanings, taking the place between appearances and things in themselves (*an sich*). They are the intermediaries between these two and depend on both. They simultaneously reveal and conceal, or rather they reveal by concealing and conceal by revealing. What they express and what they hide is on the one hand the spiritual, on the other reality (physical, biological, psychological, sociological), in which the spirit partly embodies itself, partly reveals itself. As George Santayana so well put it, ‘symbols are presences and they are those particularly congenial presences which we have inwardly invoked’.” (Gurvitch, 2001, p. 35).

In this symbolic perspective on culture, it is also understood that culture is communication and communication is culture. It is not possible to have communication without the transmission of symbols or signs (a more general category). Culture is all human intervention on the Natural (i.e. what is given without human intervention), modifying it so that it can be integrated into a social relationship. Culture is an ordered system of meanings, symbols, beliefs, and values that allow social interaction and integration.

Considering communication as culture, on the one hand, and communication as a system of symbols, on the other hand, all forms and means of communication promote social integration. It is on this basis that the authors of the Chicago School conceived communication as more than the transmission of information, as emphasizes James W. Carey:

“[...] the Chicago School scholars conceived communication as something more than the imparting of information. Rather, they characterized communication as the entire process whereby a culture is brought into existence, maintained in time, and sedimented into institutions. Therefore, they saw communication in the envelope of art, architecture, custom and ritual, and, above all, politics. And this gave the third distinctive aspect to their thought: an intense concern with the nature of public life.” (Carey, 2009, p. 111).

According to James W. Carey, the Chicago School<sup>71</sup> was therefore characterized by a fundamental concern about the nature of public life. Thus, the idea of the public is justified as a central notion for the Chicago School. Although the authors and researchers of this School agree with Gabriel Tarde that the public is something brought into existence by the printing press, “they went beyond him [Gabriel Tarde] in trying to work through the conditions under which the public sphere gives rise to rational and critical discourse and action” (Carey, 2009, p. 111). As far as communication is concerned, the Chicago School developed the idea that the processes of cohesion and integration in society are based on symbols about social life. The use and sharing of symbols establish forms of communication, interaction, appreciation, power, and structuring of the social and cultural ecosystem.

Culture is a symbolic system of adaptation to the environment and of transforming the natural and biological condition of the Human into a cultural and symbolic condition. The reality is both physical and symbolic and, naturally, the human being is an *animal symbolicum*, says Ernst Cassirer (1954, p. 33) in *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. However, in *Language and Myth* Cassirer says:

“For all mental processes fail to grasp reality itself, and in order to represent it, to hold it at all, they are driven to the use of symbols. But all symbolism harbors the curse of mediacy; it is bound to obscure what it seeks to reveal. Thus the sound of speech strives to ‘express’ subjective and objective happening, the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ world; but what of this it can retain is not the life and individual fullness of existence, but only a dead abbreviation of it.” (Cassirer, 1953, p. 7).

Symbolism is an indispensable dimension of social and cultural life. Without symbolism, there is no interaction, communication, or community.

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<sup>71</sup> Formed by authors linked to the University of Chicago, between the 1920s and 1940s, namely Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Louis Wirth, who developed works that became the basis of theory and research in the field of Urban Sociology (Giddens, 2009, p. 895). At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social transformations and growing urbanism, especially in the United States, gave rise to reflections and collective awareness about the problems of societies (in terms of asymmetries between rural and urban environments, social cohesion and integration, economics or criminality), as examples are the works in this area of Sociology by Robert Park, George Herbert Mead and Thomas Dewey (McQuail, 2010, p. 63).

In *Treatise on the History of Religions*, Mircea Eliade (1972, p. 404) presents the characteristics of symbolism as following:

- Coherence.
- Systematization (system or structure of meanings).
- Polysemy.
- Economy (fast transmission of a lot of information with few resources).
- Meaning objectivation (e.g. the white dove as a symbol of peace).
- Functioning and unification.

Furthermore, symbolism plays an important role. Ian Craib (1992, p. 87) mentions them, namely:

- Act on things, considering the meanings they have.
- Determine the meanings as the product of social interaction.
- Establish the meanings that form/encode the world.
- Encourage solidarity.
- Define the hierarchical organization of cultural collectives.
- Link the present to the past.
- Update the forces and “supernatural beings”.

In *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) argues about the importance and omnipresence of the symbolic in the social system:

“Everything that is presented to us in the social-historical world is inextricably tied to the symbolic. Not that it is limited to this. Real acts, whether individual or collective ones—work, consumption, war, love, child-bearing—the innumerable material products without which no society could live even an instant, are not (not always, not directly) symbols. All of these, however, would be impossible outside of a symbolic network. We first encounter the symbolic, of course, in language. But we also encounter it, to a different degree and in a different way, in institutions. Institutions cannot be reduced to the symbolic but they can exist only in the symbolic; they are impossible outside of a second-order symbolism; for each institution constitutes a particular symbolic network. A given economic organization, a system of law, an instituted power structure, a religion—all exist socially as sanctioned symbolic systems. These systems consist in relating symbols (signifiers) to signifieds (representations, orders, commands or inducements to do or not to do something, consequences for actions—significations in the loosest sense of the term) and in validating them as such, that is to say in making this relation more or less obligatory for the society or the group concerned.” (Castoriadis, 2005, p. 117).

Castoriadis presents significant characteristics of symbolism, saying that the symbolism determines the aspects of social life, i.e. what we are:

“Society does constitute its symbolism, but not with total freedom. Symbolism is bound up with nature, and it is bound up with history (with what is already there); finally, it partakes of rationality. As a result of this, links emerge between signifiers, relations between signifiers and signifieds, connections and consequences emerge which were neither intended nor foreseen. Not freely chosen, not imposed upon a given society, neither a neutral instrument nor a transparent medium, neither an impenetrable opacity nor an irreducible adversity, neither the master of society nor the flexible slave of functionality, not a direct and complete means of partaking of a rational order—symbolism determines the aspects of social life (and not merely those it was supposed to determine) while simultaneously being full of interstices and of degrees of freedom.” (Castoriadis, 2005, p. 125).

The imaginary and the symbolic are necessarily present in social practices (in religions and political ideologies and regimes) and are constitutive pillars of any social order. The imaginary and the symbolic perform collective functions in the autonomy of societies, i.e. in the social organization that is assumed as a self-creation, self-management, and self-institution, as the social is conceived and implemented without recourse to immanent laws of Nature, History, or Economics.

“The deep and obscure relations between the symbolic and the imaginary appear as soon as one reflects on the following fact: the imaginary has to use the symbolic not only to 'express' itself (this is self-evident), but to 'exist', to pass from the virtual to anything more than this. The most elaborate delirium, just as the most secret and vaguest phantasy, are composed of 'images', but these 'images' are there to represent something else and so have a symbolic function. But, conversely, symbolism too presupposes an imaginary capacity. For it presupposes the capacity to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is. However, to the extent that the imaginary ultimately stems from the originary faculty of positing or presenting oneself with things and relations that do not exist, in the form of representation (things and relations that are not or have never been given in perception), we shall speak of a final or radical imaginary as the common root of the actual imaginary and of the symbolic.” (Castoriadis, 2005, p. 127).

Due to the imagination and the subjacent symbolic, societies create, generate, and institute order and conscious organization (Dortier, 2006, p. 61). Concerning the definition of the symbol, Guy Rocher (1998, p. 82) declares that the simplest way to define the symbol is to say that it is “anything that takes the place of something else” or “anything that replaces

and evokes something else”. For example, a statue symbolically evokes someone important, an event or an idea, and thus assures the presence and continuous action of such someone, event, or idea. Likewise, a word symbolically replaces a thing and it can evoke it without its presence.

According to Habermas in his essay “Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel’s Jena Philosophy of Mind”:

“As the name of things, the symbol has a double function. On the one hand, the power of representation consists in making present something that is not immediately given through something else that is immediately given, but which stands for something other than itself. The representational symbol indicates an object or a state of affairs as something else and designates it in the meaning that it has for us. On the other hand, we ourselves have produced the symbols. By means of them speaking consciousness becomes objective for itself and in them experiences itself as a subject.” (Habermas, 1973, p. 153).

For his part, Mauss stresses the vital importance of symbols for communication and culture. The following excerpt from *Sociologie et Anthropologie* is demonstrative:

“Durkheim and we have been teaching for a long time that there can be no communion and communication between men except by symbols, by common, permanent, external signs to individual mental states that are simply successive, by signs of groups of states taken next by realities. We even suppose why they impose themselves: it is because, in return, for seeing and hearing, for hearing the cry, for feeling and seeing the gestures of others simultaneously with ours, we take them for truths. We have long thought that one of the characteristics of the social fact is precisely its symbolic aspect. In most collective representations, it is not a single representation of a single thing, but a representation chosen arbitrarily, or more or less arbitrarily, to mean others and to command practices.” (Mauss, 2008, p. 328).<sup>72</sup>

For his part, George Steiner considers relevant what he calls “images from the past” to understand what governs us, that is, what culture is, as the following excerpt from *In Bluebeard’s Castle—Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture* demonstrates:

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<sup>72</sup> My translation from the consulted Portuguese edition of Mauss’s *Sociologia e Antropologia* [*Sociology and Anthropology*] (São Paulo: Cosacnaify).

“It is not the literal past that rules us, save, possibly, in a biological sense. It is images of the past. These are often as highly structured and selective as myths. Images and symbolic constructs of the past are imprinted, almost in the manner of genetic information, on our sensibility.” (Steiner, 1971, p. 3).

The importance of symbolism is evident in the culture. Symbolism is one component of the culture. Symbolism allows the expression and manifestation of the culture. As Mary Foster says:

“Without symbolism there could be no culture. A symbol is an artefact: a ‘thing’ that exists out there somewhere in space and time. As a ‘thing’, a symbol has material reality and is experienced through the senses. It is a ‘thing’ that represents: that is culturally involved in such a way that it can be used in a multiplicity of contexts to convey meaning, not just about itself, but about cultural processes and relationships. Every symbol participates in a web of significances that we call culture. In other words, any symbol *resonates* with meaning. The meaning of a symbol is *not* a ‘thing’, and it can only be grasped inductively by observation of many instances of the social uses of that symbol, or similar symbols.” (Foster, 1994, p. 366).

Whether material and tangible or immaterial, spiritual, and intangible, all the components of culture come from the human hand and brain, i.e. from culture itself as a human production and reproduction to satisfy needs. The cultural world is artificial; it is composed of everything that is built to live, whether material elements or spiritual elements. The world of culture confronts the world of Nature, in a symbiotic or complementary relationship.

The complementary relationship between these two worlds is highlighted by Norbert Elias’ *The Symbol Theory* as a double character of the world of which we have experience as:

- A world independent of, but including, ourselves.
- A world mediated for our understanding.

These two worlds are presented in the following excerpt of *The Symbol Theory*:

“I have tried to indicate the twofold character of our experienced world, as a world independent of, but including, ourselves and as a world mediated for our understanding by a web of human-made symbolic representations predetermined by their natural constitution, which materializes only with the help of processes of social learning. It can become more and can become less reality congruent. We can experience this world and ourselves within it here-and-now directly as a tangible entity, as a moment in a condition of change usually represented today as a process in the four dimensions of time and space. But it is also always represented by sound-symbols. If it were not

symbolically represented human beings could neither know it nor communicate about it. In that sense one has to speak of a five-dimensional universe. By means of sentences and words people can refer to the world as it was, as it is, or as it may be in the future. In that case human beings can free themselves from bondage to the moment. Everything which can become an object of human communication can be located as an item in time and space and as an item of language or knowledge.” (Elias, 1995, pp. 128-129).

If the world were not represented symbolically, we would not be able to know it or communicate. Therefore, a singularity of the symbols is their implication of relations.

The cultural world is complex. All its elements acquire a name, a meaning, an image, an idea when they are invented or built. This is the symbolic thinking (ideas about things, ideas concerning the world) that takes the form of language, as it is expressed. Things are complemented with one’s idea of things. Thoughts, ideas, and knowledge about things constitute the “*noosphere*”.<sup>73</sup> The term “*noosphere*” (or the sphere of the mind) was developed by Teilhard de Chardin (2004, p. 125) and includes the language and symbolism, in addition to the activity of thought. Language and symbolism are also expressions of thought and ideas that are associated with respective attributed meanings.

Symbolism would belong, recalling Karl Popper’s Three Worlds Theory, to world 3, which is the place of symbols and expressions. According to Popper theory, there are precisely three worlds:

World 1	World 2	World 3
Physical events and external objects (e.g. stones, trees, animals, substances, etc.).	Mental events and subjective events of conscious, perceptual, visual, auditory experience.	Objective creations (products) of the human mind (e.g. theories, hypotheses, problems, arguments, linguistic expressions, etc.).

**Table 3-1:** The three worlds of Popper.

As the following excerpt of Popper’s *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*:

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<sup>73</sup> From the Greek *Nous*, which means “intelligence, intellect, mind”, explains F. E. Peters (1967, p. 132). The related term *Noesis* is the operation of *nous*, thinking (as opposed to sensation), intuition (as opposed to discursive reasoning), according to Peters (1967, p. 121).

“In this pluralistic philosophy the world consists of at least three ontologically distinct sub-worlds; or, as I shall say, there are three worlds: the first is the physical world or the world of physical states; the second is the mental world or the world of mental states; and the third is the world of intelligibles, or of *ideas in the objective sense*; it is the world of possible objects of thought: the world of theories in themselves, and their logical relations; of arguments in themselves; and of problem situations in themselves.” (Popper, 1994, p. 154).

These three worlds are real, independent, and ontologically distinct. Worlds 1 and 2 are opposed: the world 1 is material and world 2 is mental. World 3 (world of theories, arguments, or problems) is peculiar and more distinct from the others, resembling the world of Platonic ideas or forms, in which ideas are immutable, eternal, and true (Plato, 2003, 507b). But Popper’s world 3 is that of the products of the mind, which are constantly changing; it is the world of objective knowledge.

In his *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography*, Popper explains:

“If we call the world of ‘things’—of physical objects—the first world, and the world of subjective experiences (such as thought processes) the second world, we may call the world of statements in themselves the third world. (I now prefer to call these three worlds ‘world 1’, ‘world 2’, and ‘world 3’ [...])” (Popper, 2002, p. 211).

Then, Popper (2002, p. 214) asks: “Should we call the pictures we see on television ‘real’?” As television images are the result of a process by which the device decodes messages transmitted through waves, we must call these encoded and abstract messages “real”, since the result of their decoding is “real”.

“I think we should, for we can take photographs of them with the help of various cameras and they will agree, like independent. But television pictures are the result of a process by which the set decodes highly complicated and “abstract” messages transmitted with the help of waves; and so we should, I think, call these “abstract” coded messages “real”. They can be decoded, and the result of the decoding is “real.” (Popper, 2002, pp. 214-215).

If the human being is a symbolic animal, he is a cultural animal. All societies have a culture and a system of symbols and meanings that are interdependent. All material or spiritual elements of culture, all modes of manifestation of culture (rituals, parties, games, fashions, customs, uses, forms of arts, etc.) and all social relations are symbolic forms, because



exchanges of symbols, meanings, and interpretations take place. Consequently, socio-cultural systems are fundamentally integrated systems of communication (Lima, Martinez & Filho, 1980, p. 63). Everything or almost everything in the culture communicates. Culture is multiform and universally acquired. Everything that human beings add to Nature (everything that human beings do or conceive in different ways and results as the work of their action) is culture. It is not genetically transmitted, i.e. we are not born with culture; culture is socially inherited (Lima, Martinez & Filho, 1980, p. 67). The human being goes through a process of endoculturation<sup>74</sup> or inculturation<sup>75</sup> that integrates them in their social system. Therefore, there are different cultures (cultural relativism), but also the elements of culture (symbols, knowledge, values, beliefs, and norms) are present in different ways and proportions in all cultures.

### 3.3.2. Values and norms of culture

Values prescribe ideal ways of being and acting in accordance with certain standards that define what is important, useful, or desirable for living in communion, i.e. for cohesion and social harmony. Therefore, values are fundamental in all cultures. They are abstract ideals that assign meaning and guide human beings in their interaction in the social world.<sup>76</sup>

Norms<sup>77</sup> are rules of behavior that reflect or embody the values of a culture. Norms and values determine how members of a given culture behave.<sup>78</sup> Norms are authoritative rules or standards (of right and wrong or truth and falsehood) by which someone or something is judged and, on that basis, approved or disapproved. Since ancient Greek thinkers, norms are the embodiment of values and virtues (Barroso, 2020a, p. 1269). For example,

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<sup>74</sup> Set of acquisition or learning processes by which the human being appropriates the culture of the social system to which he belongs.

<sup>75</sup> Cultural adaptation process.

<sup>76</sup> An example of a value is monogamy, which is prominent in most Western societies.

<sup>77</sup> The concept of “norm” derives from the Greek *nómoi*, law or convention, in contrast to the concept of *physis*, nature. The term “norm” means etymologically “carpenter’s square, rule, the pattern” and presupposes socially shared rules of behavior or action, expressing what one ought and ought not to do in certain circumstances (Barroso, 2020a, p. 1269).

<sup>78</sup> For example, in a culture that values hospitality, cultural norms encourage expectations regarding the offer of gifts or the social behavior of guests and hosts.

thinking about committing a crime does not violate any legal norm, but it violates a moral norm. The following classic maxims justify the need of normality for society: *ubi homo, ibi societas* (“where there is man, there is society”) and *ubi societas, ibi jus* (“where there is society, there is Law”). Therefore, norms are indispensable in any association and relationship of people, as they are rules, precepts, and models that govern and guide the course of social actions.

The norms aim to establish and substantiate a set of principles and rules of action that allow avoiding and resolving conflicts in relations between citizens, looking for social harmony. All norms are social norms. Social norms are efficient mechanisms to achieve social benefits (e.g. social order and regulation, cooperation, and retribution, maximizing well-being, etc.). The norms must be unconditional, clear, and universal (for everyone), but not eternal because society changes and develops and culture is flexible to human time and needs.

“In modern Western societies, the functioning of social systems of norms was critically analyzed by Michel Foucault in the 1970s; his work is often reduced either to the thesis of a massive normalization of individual behavior or to the power exercised under the regime of the norms instead of according to laws. Foucault defined the norm as a mix of legality and nature, prescription, and constitution. Different groups, communities, and societies have different norms with different functions. Therefore, regarding Foucault’s perspective, one could question whether there are no norms, but only the simple and virtual normative use.” (Barroso, 2020a, p. 1269).

Values and norms vary between cultures. Some cultures value individualism, while others emphasize collective needs. In a different perspective, Giddens highlights the relative character of culture as a way of life. For Giddens, culture refers to the ways of life of a society, including how their members dress, their marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies, and leisure pursuits. Giddens presents an example of this disparity of values between cultures: most British students would be outraged if they found a classmate copying in an exam, but Russian students would be intrigued by this notion of outrage from their British colleagues.

In Britain’s culture, copying from a colleague goes against the fundamental values of individual achievement, equal opportunities, hard work, and respect for the rules; in Russian’s culture, the mutual help between colleagues in an exam is a reflection of how much the Russians value equality and the collective resolution of problems in face of authority.

If we think about our reaction to this example, what does it reveal about our culture's values?

Within a society or community, values can be contradictory. For example, some groups or individuals may value traditional religious beliefs, while others may prefer progress and science. The modern age is marked by change and is full of global movements of people, goods, and information and, therefore, there are many cases of cultural values in conflict.

Many social habits and behaviors are rooted in cultural norms. Simple gestures, movements, and expressions are strongly influenced by cultural factors. For example, the smile. All forms of culture contain selected, channeled, and manifested values, norms, and standards, which are expressed in the composition of certain social ideas and behaviors.

Values and norms are dynamic, evolutionary, or fluctuating, just like the culture in which they are integrated; values and norms are always changing in the culture in which they are fundamental ingredients. Values and norms are not perpetual (they change because the world is constantly changing). Many norms that we now take for granted in our lives contradict values that until a few decades ago were shared by many. For example, having sex before marriage. Cultural values and norms can change spontaneously or deliberately.

A consequence or inevitability of this dynamic characteristic of values and norms, as well as culture itself, is the existence of cultural diversity. It is not just cultural beliefs that vary from culture to culture; the diversity of social behaviors and practices also vary. For example, dogs treated as domestic animals in Europe and sold as a delicacy in China, according to Giddens, represent a culture shock between West and East. Another example: children of twelve years old are considered too young to be married in modern Western cultures, but in other cultures, marriages are arranged between children of these ages.

The different types of social behavior are aspects of the cultural differences that distinguish societies. The difference of social behaviors confronts cultural uniformity (monoculturalism) and cultural homogeneity (e.g. Japan) with cultural diversity (multiculturalism) and cultural heterogeneity (e.g. USA). The world is constantly changing, and the current trend seems to accept an emergence of culturally mixed societies (population made up of groups from different cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds): communities of subcultures. This is the case in London, New York, Paris, and many metropolises in modern societies, where many subcultural communities live side by side (black people from the West Indies, Pakistanis, Bangladeshi Indians, Italians, Greeks, Portuguese people, Chinese people, etc.).

Because of the dynamism of values and norms, on the one hand, and culture, on the other hand, the question of cultural relativism arises, for example: Does relativism imply judging all customs and behaviors as equally legitimate? Are there universal standards that all should follow?

From the perspective of cultural relativism, there are different cultural patterns for each culture. As a result of this premise, we have:

- Different cultures have different social and moral codes: if one code determines what is correct in the respective culture, another code does the same in another culture.
- There is no single cultural standard, but different customs: one cannot say that customs are correct, because it would imply a standard independent of what is right to judge things.
- If all standards are determined by a culture, our own social and moral code has no special status.
- Objectivity and universality of truth and social and moral codes are relative.

Another important issue concerning the culture is the subculture.<sup>79</sup> Culture plays an important role in perpetuating norms and values and offers opportunities for creativity and change. Subcultures and countercultures<sup>80</sup> can promote alternative points of view to the dominant culture. Social movements and groups that share the same lifestyles are forces of change in societies. Subcultures offer people the possibility to express themselves and act according to their opinions, aspirations, and values.

The issue of ethnocentrism<sup>81</sup> also arises from a comprehensive approach to culture. All cultures have their pattern of behavior, which seems strange to people from other cultural contexts. For example, traveling is contact with another culture (language, habits, customs, and modes of behavior). Cultures may be difficult to understand when viewed from the outside. It is not possible to understand beliefs and practices if we separate them from the whole, from the complete system that are the cultures of which they are part. On the contrary, one must understand a culture according to its own meanings and values. According to Giddens:

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<sup>79</sup> Smaller and more specific cultures formed and based on other larger and more complex cultures, with which they establish a split or demarcation.

<sup>80</sup> Groups that reject most of the current norms and values in a society.

<sup>81</sup> Judging a culture taking as a measure of comparison another culture that is considered superior or better and that, as a rule, is the one to whom the one who makes the value judgment belongs.

“Sociological concepts relevant to ethnic conflicts on a general level are those of ethnocentrism, ethnic group closure and resource allocation. Ethnocentrism is a suspicion of outsiders combined with a tendency to *evaluate* the culture of others in terms of one’s own culture. Virtually all cultures have been ethnocentric to some degree, and it is easy to see how ethnocentrism combines with stereotypical thought discussed above. Outsiders are thought of as aliens, barbarians or morally and mentally inferior. This was how most civilizations viewed the members of smaller cultures, for example, and the attitude has fueled innumerable ethnic clashes in history.” (Giddens, 2009, p. 641).

Associated with ethnocentrism is acculturation.<sup>82</sup> In an increasingly globalized world, ethnocentrism is a phenomenon and a process that demonstrates:

- Diversity and cultural relativism (there are cultures and cultures).
- Difference between more “strong” and influential cultures and others that are smaller and simpler.
- Flexibility and adaptation of the human being to the culture (mainly the tendency towards new or different cultures).
- The permanent human capacity to accept new standards, values, and norms, even in adulthood.

In an increasingly globalized world, ethnocentrism can assume greater or lesser expression, considering that the means and technologies of communication facilitate and promote both the homogenization or uniformity of mediation and connectivity of social relations, as well as feelings of intolerance, populism, and extremism against the cultural difference.

### 3.3.3. Popular culture and mass culture

Popular culture is the set of cultural products or artifacts, images, ideas, objects, and styles that are easily accepted (coinciding with the preferences of most people, as they are undemanding and of immediate satisfaction products), globally and quickly disseminated. What can explain the enormous popularity of a movie like *Titanic* or an artist like Madonna? What can explain this enormous popularity is:

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<sup>82</sup> Acculturation is the process by which an individual or human group belonging to a given culture comes into permanent contact with a different culture (supposedly considered “superior”, stronger, or dominant) and adapts to or removes cultural elements from it.

- The large-scale dissemination and promotion of the “product” or “brand” (besides being a pop artist, Madonna is a brand, a cultural symbol).
- The simplicity and immediacy of the consumption of the cultural product, like a fast-culture or light-culture.
- The sumptuousness and spectacle of its production and marketing work in the orchestration of the presentation of the product in the market.
- The reproduction of captivating ideas and values in line with current fashion.

To understand the concept of “popular culture”, James W. Carey (2009, p. 29) places the word “popular” in the context of certain objects and practices that involve all strata of the population, while the term “culture” refers expressive artifacts (words, images, and objects) that assume and convey meanings. In general, popular culture is associated with popular entertainment provided by certain forms of expression of music, cinema, or literature.

If culture is uniform, homogenized in the contemporary globalized world, then it is also massified. If the level of quality is undemanding and attracts or seduces the majority of consumers of cultural products (music, cinema, literature, etc.), that culture is popularized and prevails, in a global way, regardless of the radical differences between cultures. It is like cultural imperialism that installs itself over everything and everyone, based on the assumption of globalization of “one world, one culture”. Popular culture has a hybrid identity. As Giddens exemplifies, a black and urban citizen of South Africa today can remain strongly influenced by the traditions and cultural perspectives of his tribal roots, but simultaneously adopt a cosmopolitan taste and lifestyle (in clothing, leisure, etc.) that result from globalization.

Mass culture is the set of behaviors, myths, and representations produced and disseminated according to an industrial technique (content disseminated by the media). As a rule, modern mass cultures are neither traditional nor elitist, because they do not live in the past nor are exclusive to a high-status social minority, respectively. Modern mass cultures produce everything on a large scale and for everyone. Therefore, they are popular, commercial, and homogenizing. According to McQuail (2010, p. 71), mass culture is:

- Non-traditional form and content.
- Intended for mass consumption.
- Mass-production and mass-reproduction.
- Pejorative image.

- Commercial.
- Homogenized.

If we understand mass culture as a weakening factor of the cultural ties that unite people to their traditions, mass culture weakens the intermediary institutions in society (e.g. the family or the school), diluting their role and overlapping these institutions. For example, courts<sup>83</sup> are traditional social institutions and important for the normal and harmonious functioning of collective life. However, when people turn to social networks to put pressure on judicial decisions in certain mediated and politicized processes, this practice is popularized and becomes a habitual form of culture, which is harmful. Justice must not be done in the public square, which today is converted into a virtual dimension, the social networks. In a democratic Estate of law, the appropriate place to judge and make justice is the court and in a way that is immune to popular pressure.

Mass culture refers to all products manufactured for the market, including art, media products, and all the expressions of culture. Culture is no longer the privilege of some but the prerogative of all. Regarding the media products, today there is not a single audience, but there are different audiences for both television and the press. The typical genres of mass culture on television are soap operas and series, everything that maintains the consumption habits of these cultural products, which are also commercial.

Mass culture is spread by the media (press, radio, cinema, television).<sup>84</sup> Therefore, the media have a role in shaping culture, by disseminating and marketing typical products of that culture. Media products (not just soap operas and series, but also news programs) are products formatted to become popular, i.e. to meet the requirements that were previously

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<sup>83</sup> In Portugal, for example, the courts are one of the organs of sovereignty, they administer Justice on behalf of the people exercising judicial power, which is fundamental alongside legislative power (exercised by the Assembly of the Republic) and executive power (exercised by the Government when applying and enforcing the law).

<sup>84</sup> Mass culture could be the result of the particular action of the mass media, according to Gabriel Cohn (1973, p. 99), in technologically advanced societies with a high degree of urbanization. On its social substrate, mass culture implies mass society and, on the interactive plane, mass communication.

mentioned regarding the movie *Titanic* and the artist Madonna. The power of the media in mass culture rests on the following aspects:<sup>85</sup>

- Information.
- Persuasion and influence.
- (Re-) structuring and (re) definition of society and its cultural values.
- Arbitrary granting of social status and legitimacy through media notoriety.
- Attraction and direction of public attention.

Regarding the power of the media in mass culture, George Gerbner develops the theory that culture communicates through its media production, maintaining or changing the consensus on its values. Thus, the characteristics of the media constitute the patterns of cultural production, which are absorbed by media audiences, without being aware of them. As Fiske states:

“Gerbner thinks that the important characteristics of the media are the patterns that lie under the whole output, not the individual television programme. These patterns are absorbed gradually by the viewers, without their ever becoming consciously aware of them.” (Fiske, 1990, p. 143).

In analyzing the content of the media, Gerbner supports the theory of the relationship between the mass media system and culture. It is the relationship of cultivation, according to which the media cultivate attitudes and values in the culture in which they operate.<sup>86</sup>

The power of the media is positively recognized by the information they transmit to the public. Being informed about what happens in the world is important because it is knowing what is going on around. However, if the information is power, knowledge is even more. Knowledge is solid and developed, while information is increasingly based on the globalization of information and communication, i.e. in an instantaneous, ephemeral, and superficial character that does not clarify in-depth and substitutes for the knowledge and meaning of factuality.

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<sup>85</sup> These five aspects coincide with the five functions of the media in society (to inform, persuade, educate, socialize, and distract/entertain), which will be addressed later in Subchapter 3.4.1.

<sup>86</sup> The media cultivate attitudes and values in culture; they do not create them, because they must already be there; “but they nurture, propagate, and help the culture to preserve and adapt its values, to spread them among its members, and thus to bind these members with a shared consensus, an intersubjectivity” (Fiske, 1990, p. 150).



The power of persuasion and influence is achieved by the attribution of status and legitimacy to the media by the public, who, due to the lack of media literacy and the ability to distinguish and make critical judgments, accept without questioning what is presented to them. Sometimes audiences even consider what appears on television to be only the real thing. The power of persuasion and influence rests on popular issues that form public opinion, shaping attitudes and behaviors of conformism and mimicry of media audiences.

If the media are a social institution, alongside other social institutions, it is because they are important and they can play a unique and necessary role in society, such as informing and clarifying or socializing and educating. For this, the media must follow and cultivate the social values and moral principles that are esteemed in the culture in which they are integrated.

Indeed, the mass media are factors of socialization, normalization, social cohesion, and reproduction of cultural values. In addition to the traditional and institutional factors of socialization (e.g. family, school, belonging groups, etc.), the mass media have the advantage of reaching a wide audience. Therefore, the media field must be scrutinized:

“The journalistic activity is necessarily regulated by codes of ethics that guarantee the guidance of important practices such as confirming the sources of information, ensuring the contradiction, following objectivity and impartiality, or seeking the truth; otherwise, moral principles and fundamental social values of society, such as truth, will be violated. Therefore, the media production must be also governed by norms, scrutinizing what can and should be published. Although there are areas in media where it is difficult to implement such norms, it is necessary to introduce ethical guidelines for blogs and other social media, for example, which have become increasingly popular and influential, enabling anybody to produce and publish content on the web. Introducing norms in new areas might regulate their use and prevent offensive or deviant actions.” (Barroso, 2020a, p. 1270).

The media have status and legitimacy that are given by their audiences, but they also arbitrarily grant (following the editorial criteria they choose) social status and legitimacy to anonymous people (e.g. on reality shows) through the airtime and exposure they give them, increasing their media notoriety, i.e. making them popular.

The power of the media in terms of attracting and directing the attention of audiences is compromised due to certain editorial interests (more formal and rigorous or more spectacular and sensationalist style adopted by the media) and commercial (competitive, in a war audience). The adoption of a more spectacular and sensationalist style is more in line with the collective interests of popular culture. The media, the content (entertainment and

information programs) and the audiences are all interconnected, as they are all popular. The power of the media is also distracting, i.e. it is the power to distract audiences with entertainment programs or even the simple cultivation of the apparatus and the informative spectacle (in the news) that causes a sensation.

### 3.4. Mass communication

The expression “mass communication” has too many meanings to be understood simply and accurately. The same happens with its terms in isolation, “communication” and “mass”, mainly the latter term, which is loaded with values and ambiguities (McQuail, 1983, p. 35). Mass communication is a process of asymmetric social interaction, through the unidirectional production and transmission of standardized information on a large scale, to broad and anonymous audiences, by specific institutions, means, and techniques.

The mass media, now equipped with technological resources, make this social process of transmitting information to broad, diverse, and anonymous audiences not only possible but also effective. In addition to being a process and a resource to specific means, mass communication is a social phenomenon, i.e. it occurs in the public sphere and involves the social system where it is integrated. Consequently, the mass media has a long reach and a great impact, which defines its own power.

Mass communication (or mass media) represents the set of techniques (transmission networks, equipment, and means) that make all informational messages available to a very wide audience. The term “mass media” designates the set of mass communication or media as efficient instruments (technically able) for simultaneous, rapid, and generalized dissemination of content on a large scale, that is, for an indiscriminate number of individuals. Due to this role of the mass media, there are mediatized societies, i.e. societies pierced by the influences of the media and mass information and communication flows.

Mass communication means the entire process of producing and transmitting information (sounds, images, data, etc.) capable of simultaneously or in a very short time reaching a large mass of individuals in different special situations, argues Lucia Demartis (2006, p. 168). The mass media are instruments that, to use a McLuhan expression, allow the potential of the human body to be extended to enable extensive communication, which goes beyond spatiotemporal bonds, thus managing to convey the same information to masses of individuals (Demartis, 2006, p. 168). The expression “mass media” is commonly used concerning the press, cinema,

advertising, and electronic media (radio, television, and computer networks), which transmit information in real-time to different audiences thousands of kilometers apart from each other.

Since the beginning, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mass communication has raised concerns and studies about the influence on the public's behaviors and attitudes. First, the influence of traditional media (press, radio, and television, as well as cinema and advertising), then, the influence of modern media (the new digital and interactive media). Whether traditional or modern, the mass communication system involves:

- Production, distribution, and reception (consumption) of information on a large scale.
- Fast, immediate, and ephemeral transmission of information.
- Unidirectional flow (normally without feedback, but with the possibility of studying audiences).
- Asymmetric, impersonal, and anonymous relationship between the media and its audiences.
- Relationship based on market logic (competition for audiences).
- Standardized content (secondary concern with the quality criterion) and general or popular (which please all audiences), with a current/popular language level.
- The predominance of entertainment functions (even in informational content, presented with more spectacle).
- Mass audiences (homogenized and malleable), which are: large numbers of people, dispersed, anonymous and non-interactive, unorganized, and without participation and initiative in the media field (increasingly passive audiences).
- Technical means of communication and production (“information industry”), that is, information as capitalizable and marketable merchandise.

According to McQuail and Windahl, in *Communication Models—For the Study of Mass Communication*:

“The ‘sender’ in mass communication is always part of an organized group and often a member of an institution which has functions other than communication. The ‘receiver’ is always an individual but may often be seen by the sending organization as a group or collectivity with certain general attributes. The channel no longer consists of the social relationship, means of expression and sensory organs, but includes largescale technologically based distribution devices and systems. These systems still have a social component, since they depend on law, custom and expectation. The message in mass communication is not a unique and transitory phenomenon, but a

mass-produced and infinitely repeatable symbolic structure, often of great complexity. Of particular significance in mass communication are: the public and open nature of all communication; the limited and controlled access to 'sending' facilities; the impersonality of the relationship between sender and receiver; the imbalance of the relationship between them; the intervention of institutionalized arrangements between sender and receiver. In reality, there is no single universal form of the mass communication process and the diversity of the reality accounts in part for the multiplicity of possible models to represent the whole or parts of it." (McQuail & Windahl, 1993, p. 6).

In contrast to interpersonal communication, mass communication is usually understood as the practice of "providing leisure entertainment and information to an unknown audience by means of corporately financed, industrially produced, state-regulated, high tech, privately consumed commodities in the modern print, screen, audio and broadcast media", i.e. newspapers, magazines, cinema, television, radio, and advertising, clarifies John Hartley (2004, p. 138). The following Table 3-2 summarizes the main differences between these two forms or modalities of communication:

Mass communication	Interpersonal communication
Mass consumption of the media makes relationships impersonal.	Personal relationships (proximity between the sender and the receiver).
Unilateral direction: transmission and diffusion of communication.	Bilateral direction: reversibility of information exchanges.
The vast and unknown audience, without feedback and without knowledge of reactions or effects (except when there is an audience study).	Restricted public, known and sometimes present, with immediate and direct reactions.

**Table 3-2:** Distinction between mass communication and interpersonal communication.

The phenomena of communication and the massification of societies are interdependent. Communication is a social phenomenon that is becoming increasingly global, massifying societies by the forms and contents of the communication. In *Networking the World, 1794-2000*,<sup>87</sup> Mattelart states:

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<sup>87</sup> Originally published in French as *La Mondialisation de la Communication*, by Presses Universitaires de France (1996).

“The internationalization of communication was spawned by two forms of universalism: the Enlightenment and liberalism. Two projects, at times opposed and at others convergent, both aimed at the construction of an unrestricted global arena, were trying to materialize: on the one hand the great democratic republics of the revolutionary utopia; on the other, the universal mercantile republic of classical economics. [...] The invention of communication as an ideal occurred at a time when the prevailing ideas were those of modernity and the perfectibility of human societies. It was thus the product of a belief in the future. The Enlightenment thinkers prepared for its emergence by advocating trade as a creator of values.” (Mattelart, 2000, pp. 1-2).

Since the Enlightenment and liberalism, freedom of thought and freedom of expression have been established and spread as human rights. The invention of communication as an ideal occurred under the sign of the ideas of modernity and perfection of human societies, i.e. it is the result of hope for the future, according to Mattelart (2000, p. 2). With the long and gradual development of the means and techniques of communication, societies and cultures come closer and even resemble themselves, because “communication reduces distances not only between two points but also between social classes” and, therefore, “improving communications necessarily promotes equality and democracy” (Mattelart, 2000, pp. 16-17). Thus, “the nineteenth century was the age of the invention of news and the ideal of instantaneous information” (Mattelart, 2000, p. 23), which still not only prevails but still has more notoriety. “In the struggle against underdevelopment, communication became synonymous with modernization” (Mattelart, 2000, p. 49). The information, communication, and culture industries emerge. Societies become global and communication technologies contribute to this. Both societies and communication are interconnected and form the same gigantic networked system.

### **3.4.1. Functions of mass communication**

Following the aspects mentioned previously in Subchapter 3.3.3. regarding popular culture and mass culture, to which the media contribute, the following five functions of mass communication are usually recognized:

- a) To inform: seek, edit, and transmit information to the respective target audiences (e.g. news).
- b) To persuade and influence, transmitting content to be accepted without reservation by the audience, shaping the ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, or acting (e.g. public/political speeches, opinions, comments, clarifications, or awareness campaigns).

- c) To educate, disseminating knowledge for learning (e.g. distance learning).
- d) To socialize, communicate to live together, or fraternize (e.g. campaigns against AIDS or promoting the recycling habits).
- e) To distract/entertain: entertainment programs (e.g. soap operas, series, reality shows).

As a rule, a television program, for example, can simultaneously perform more than one of these functions or even all five, as they are not incompatible; they are cumulative.

### **3.4.2. Three social functions of the media for Lazarsfeld and Merton**

According to Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton, the media perform three relevant social functions:

- i) The status conferral function.
- ii) The enforcement of social norms.
- iii) The narcotizing dysfunction.

In the first function enunciated by Lazarsfeld and Merton, “the mass media confer status on public issues, persons, organizations and social movements” (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2002, p. 20). Thus, the media give prestige and increase the notoriety of individuals and groups, legitimizing their status.

“The mass media bestow prestige and enhance the authority of individuals and groups by legitimizing their status. Recognition by the press or radio or magazines or newsreels testifies that one has arrived, that one is important enough to have been singled out from the large anonymous masses, that one’s behavior and opinions are significant enough to require public notice.” (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2002, pp. 20-21).

As for the second function, the media serve to reaffirm social norms, revealing to the public the deviations from such norms. The media exposes abnormalities to the public and, as a rule, this disclosure calls, to a certain extent, a public action against what had been tolerated privately. The media can, for example, subject ethnic discrimination to severe pressure, demanding public attention on this procedure which is contrary to the rules of non-discrimination.

“In a mass society, this function of public exposure is institutionalized in the mass media of communication. Press, radio and journals expose fairly well-known deviations to public view, and as a rule, this exposure forces some degree of public action against what has been privately tolerated. The mass media may, for example, introduce severe strains upon ‘polite ethnic discrimination’ by calling public attention to these practices which are at odds with the norms of non-discrimination. At times, the media may organize exposure activities into a ‘crusade’.” (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2002, p. 22).

Regarding the third function, the constant exposure to a large flow of information can serve to narcotize rather than energize the reader, listener, or viewer.

“Scattered studies have shown that an increasing proportion of the time of Americans is devoted to the products of the mass media. With distinct variations in different regions and among different social strata, the outpourings of the media presumably enable the twentieth century American to ‘keep abreast of the world’. Yet, it is suggested, this vast supply of communications may elicit only a superficial concern with the problems of society, and this superficiality often cloaks mass apathy. Exposure to this flood of information may serve to narcotize rather than to energize the average reader or listener. As an increasing need of time is devoted to reading and listening, a decreasing share is available for organized action.” (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2002, p. 22).

The increasing amount of time dedicated to the consumption of media content takes time away from organized action. The citizen confuses the knowledge of the problems of the day with the action concerning them.

### 3.4.3. Characteristics of contemporary mass discourses

The emergence of technological forms of mass communication raises questions about the possibilities of manipulating information by those who own or control the media. The possible manipulation of information and transmitted content has direct effects on the public. Considering the current discourses of the mass media, a set of peculiarities is identified. Media discourses are:

- Totalitarian, because they give the illusion of possible interaction, dialogue, or feedback that does not happen, and they are based on sensationalist and arrogant appearances or deviations about truth and factuality.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Regarding media totalitarianism, Leonardo Acosta (1979, p. 141) underlines: “The terms ‘mass communications’ and ‘mass media’ which emerged in the United

- Hyperbolic, because they use style, content, forms, and technical resources that amplify messages.
- Tautological, because they repeat forms and contents/ideas as a strategy of greater assimilation and evidence of certain messages.
- Ideological or rhetorical; they convey particular ideas or interests (opinions mixed or camouflaged with information).
- Immediate, because they obey the impositions of the time factor, which makes them instantaneous speeches, i.e. superficial and sudden flashes.
- Ephemeral, because they have a reduced permanence (the information that the media transmit are disposable, fragmented, and superficial) and do not allow time for maturation or reflection of what is news.

Mass media has an inherent power, that of the ability to disseminate and share information, being even called “the fourth power”. This power can manifest itself generically in two ways, following two models of the media<sup>89</sup> (Espinár, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 97):

Domination model	Pluralist model
Mass media is controlled by other institutions.	It does not establish a unified and homogeneous elite under the media.
Dissemination of an interested and limited vision.	They ensure mutual independence.
Reduction of the critical capacity of audiences (citizens become spectators).	Pluralistic and competitive content for audiences.
Audiences led to accept the proposed view.	Audiences can resist persuasion.
Legitimation of the established power structure.	Liberalism and free market for communication.

**Table 3-3:** Distinction between the domination model and the pluralist model.

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States are misleading in more than one sense. In the first place, such media do not really constitute a vehicle of human communication, for communication implies a dialogue, an exchange, and the mass media speak, but do not permit a response.”

<sup>89</sup> These two opposing models of media power are also presented by McQuail (cf. 2010, p. 88).



The power of the media appears to be indisputable, whether for good or evil, i.e. journalism has an inherent power, which is to amplify a particular discourse that produces widespread effects in society, whether to make informed, critical, and vigilant citizens, denouncing the truth of the facts, either to make formatted, uncritical and passive citizens.<sup>90</sup> An example of the first situation is the Watergate case, which occurred between 1972 and 1974, demonstrating the excellence of journalistic investigation (the skills of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, journalists of *The Washington Post*) searching for truth and denouncing illegalities, even against adversities and the instituted powers.<sup>91</sup> An example of the second situation is sarcastically evoked by Oscar Wilde, in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891), according to which:

“In old days men had the rack. Now they have the press. That is an improvement certainly. But still it is very bad, and wrong, and demoralising. Somebody—was it Burke?—called journalism the fourth estate. That was true at the time, no doubt. But at the present moment it really is the only estate. It has eaten up the other three.” (Wilde, 2018, p. 26).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> In this second case, citizens cannot even be called as such, because the concept of “citizen” does not presuppose formatted, uncritical, and passive publics of the media.

<sup>91</sup> On the Watergate case, which resulted in the resignation of Richard Nixon from the function of US President in 1974 for being involved in political espionage through wiretapping at the Democratic Party headquarters in Washington, located in the offices of the building named Watergate, see the book *All the President's Men*, written by the journalists who carried out the investigation (Woodward & Bernstein, 1974). This work gave rise to the 1976 film *All the President's Men*, directed by Alan J. Pakula.

<sup>92</sup> There are countless representations of good and bad practices of journalism in cinema that serve the purpose of the Sociology of Communication: to reflect on the role and social influences of journalism. These cases are frequently reported in the cinema, namely *Citizen Kane* (1941), by Orson Welles, which characterizes the prepotency of tycoons in the media field, with private and divergent interests to those of the public and informational service of journalism, and *Spotlight* (2015), by Tom McCarthy, who shows, based on a real case, how the journalistic investigation should proceed to discover the truth even against powerful institutions, such as the Catholic Church. About the professional culture of journalism, which is idiosyncratic (there is a journalistic *ethos*), rich in myths, symbols, and social representations, Nelson Traquina (2007, p. 162) uses films to exemplify: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), by John Ford; *Deadline U.S.A.* (1952), by Richard Brooks; *His Girl Friday* (1940), by Howard Hawks; Billy Wilder's *The Front Page* (1974); and *Switching Channels* (1988), by Ted Kotcheff.

Almost inevitably and necessary, the production of any public discourse (news, newspaper article, book, work of art, etc.) takes on moral responsibility, because it influences the masses for good or evil. This extraordinarily happened with Oscar Wilde and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2008), which stirred the morality of Victorian society in the United Kingdom during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, it was Edmund Burke (a British politician and writer) who used the expression “the fourth power” in 1790 for the first time to condemn the French Revolution, as attests by Francis Balle (2003, p. 103): in 1840, Balzac appropriated this formula, in the same article in the *Revue parisienne* where he launched his famous diatribe “If the press did not exist, there was no need to invent it...”. Balle adds that in June 1978, Aleksandr Soljenitsyne, when addressing to Harvard University students, sent this warning to Western democracies: the press has become the most powerful force in the United States, it potentially surpasses the three other powers (Balle, 2003, p. 103).

The power of communication takes a dimension of a “mediacracy”, according to the expression and title of a book (1984) by François-Henri de Virieu, or “watchdog”, in Serge Halimi’s terminology (Balle, 2003, p. 103). Whatever the expression, the power associated with the field of mass communication is recognized, since the effects and influences caused by what is transmitted are vast. The power of the media lies in the ability to influence and persuade.<sup>94</sup> The development of mass communications, combined with scientific and technological advances, leads to the improvement of techniques for transmitting and receiving messages. Does

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<sup>93</sup> On the controversy surrounding Oscar Wilde and the confrontation between the aesthetic dimension and the moral dimension of the work of art, cf. *Oscar Wilde—Art and Morality: A Defence of “The Picture of Dorian Gray”*, by Stuart Mason (2010).

<sup>94</sup> Regarding the film *Citizen Kane*, the influence and persuasion of the media is exemplified in the scene in which Charles Foster Kane, the protagonist, says that the public will think what he says to think (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 31). In this film directed by Orson Welles himself (1941), several journalism lessons can be extracted to reflect on the intervention and the positive and negative influence of the mass media in society. Namely: what is reported in the media does not always correspond to the truth; the mass media practice sensationalism with certain headlines chosen on purpose to cause impact and sell more newspapers; the media are companies with commercial interests and sometimes they even form economic empires with powerful influences, such as that of Charles Foster Kane himself, a character played by Orson Welles and supposedly based on the press magnate William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951).

this improvement also contribute to the existence of more informed, enlightened, literate, demanding, and participative citizens?

### 3.4.4. Media imperialism

The concept of “media imperialism” was highlighted in the 1960s-70s, in a context of the world’s division between two powers (the USA and the then USSR) and of the process of colonization and decolonization, depending on the case. The concept points to the power of the media,<sup>95</sup> as professional structures and specialized industries in the production and transmission of media products, and their social and cultural effects and influences.

“The mass media are one of the most influential institutionalized means whereby this general process [the media imperialism] is organized and achieved, and the term media imperialism is often used to highlight their specific role.” (O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske, 1994, p. 74).

For this focus, the models (the domination and the pluralist models) of media implementation previously discussed and the most recent and technological process of globalization of the media are not alien. Consequently, media imperialism cannot be separated from the media as a social institution, which plays an active and influential role in societies, nor from its activities and practices in the production and dissemination of media content that are nonetheless commercial products or commodities for mass consumption. According to Leonardo Acosta:

“The mass media, from the press to television, were developed for the first time in the United States, the paradise of monopoly capital and modern financial imperialism. The mass media and their final product, so-called ‘mass culture’, assume a more important role every day, as an ideological-industrial complex devoted to the justification and perpetuation of the capitalist system, and in particular, the North American financial-political-military complex that constitutes the core of yankee imperialism.” (Acosta, 1979, p. 141).

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<sup>95</sup> The power of the media lies not only in the communicational aspect (production and diffusion of media content or products), but also economic (capitalist basis) and political (transmission and cultivation of ideology, politicized opinions, and partial comments from opinion leaders, many of them political party supporters in the media).

Media imperialism admits domination and formatting of the media (namely through the transmitted contents, the defined agenda, and the adopted editorial style) over society and culture. Since the media field is integrated into the broader field of culture, media imperialism and cultural imperialism have similar roots (Boyd-Barrett, 2020, p. 14). Nelson Traquina (2000, p. 17) recognizes that the hypothesis of the existence of a causal relationship between the media agenda and the public agenda had already been suggested in the 1920s by Walter Lippmann's book *Public Opinion* (1922). In capitalist societies, the dominant class creates useful cultural systems for the transmission of fundamental values to perpetuate domination (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 98). In this context, the media are responsible for social and cultural identity.

The cultural imperialism plays a fundamental social, communicational, ideological, political, and economic role. In the words of Herbert Schiller (quoted by Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 106), cultural imperialism could be defined as follows: the set of processes by which a society introduces itself within the modern world system and forms its management by inducing fascination, pressure, force or corruption, shaping social institutions to match the values and structures of the dominant center of the system or to become its promoter.

Consequently, the concepts of "cultural imperialism" and "media imperialism" are associated. The concept of "cultural imperialism" refers to the "imposition of American or western values upon non-western societies, largely through the export of mass media products" (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 58). Whatever the type of imperialism, this term is subjacent to the idea of empire and domination, i.e. a dominator and a dominated.

Media imperialism is the result of agenda-setting, the action of the media in the process of extending cultural imperialism (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 106). The following remark of Carl Bernstein's article "The idiot culture", one of the journalists responsible for investigating the Watergate case, is an example:

"Reporting is not stenography. It is the best obtainable version of the truth. The really significant trends in journalism have not been toward a commitment to the best and the most complex obtainable version of the truth, not toward building a new journalism based on serious, thoughtful reporting. Those are certainly not the priorities that jump out at the reader or the viewer from Page One or 'Page Six' of most of our newspapers; and not what a viewer gets when he turns on the 11 o'clock local news or, too often, even network news productions. 'All right, was it really the best sex you ever had?' Those were the words of Diane Sawyer, in an interview of Maria Maples on 'Prime Time Live,' a broadcast of ABC News (where 'more Americans get their news from... than any other source'), Those words

marked a new low (out of which Sawyer herself has been busily climbing). For more than fifteen years we have been moving away from real journalism toward the creation of a sleazoid info-tainment culture in which the lines between Oprah and Phil and Geraldo and Diane and even Ted, between the New York Post and Newsday, are too often indistinguishable. In this new culture of journalistic titillation, we teach our readers and our viewers that the trivial is significant, that the lurid and the loopy are more important than real news. We do not serve our readers and viewers, we pander to them. And we condescend to them, giving them what we think they want and what we calculate will sell and boost ratings and readership. Many of them, sadly, seem to justify our condescension, and to kindle at the trash. Still, it is the role of journalists to challenge people, not merely to amuse them. We are in the process of creating, in sum, what deserves to be called the idiot culture. Not an idiot subculture, which every society has bubbling beneath the surface and which can provide harmless fun; but the culture itself. For the first time in our history the weird and the stupid and the coarse are becoming our cultural norm, even our cultural ideal. [...] I do not mean to attack popular culture. Good journalism is popular culture, but popular culture that stretches and informs its consumers rather than that which appeals to the ever descending lowest common denominator. If, by popular culture, we mean expressions of thought or feeling that require no work of those who consume them, then decent popular journalism is finished. What is happening today, unfortunately, is that the lowest form of popular culture—lack of information, misinformation, disinformation, and a contempt for the truth or the reality of most people's lives—has overrun real journalism. Today ordinary Americans are being stuffed with garbage.” (Bernstein, 1992, pp. 24-25).

According to this excerpt, the noble role of the mass media in shaping public opinion (“the best obtainable version of the truth” about what is the public interest) is replaced by what Carl Bernstein calls the triumph of the idiot culture. There is an obvious difference between what the public should know and what the public wants to know, i.e. between information (rigorous clarification of the facts) and entertainment (distraction from the important). However, both ways are linked to journalistic criteria that determine what to publish for the public interest (public service of information) or the interest of the public (entertainment). Therefore, it is quite relative and subjective what the news is; it depends on the choices of an editorial line, although the manuals of traditional journalism refer to absolute and fundamental criteria, such as actuality, public interest, objectivity, and relevance. These criteria should preside over the selection of what happens and its transformation into the news.

### 3.5. Questions for review and reflection

1. Why is journalism called “the fourth power”?
2. What can or should the mass media do for the organization, regulation, and normalization of society and their social values?
3. Are there universal cultural patterns that all human beings should follow?
4. Should we call “real” the images we see on television?
5. What explains the enormous popularity of a movie or song?
6. What characterizes being a mass society or a mass culture?
7. When does mass culture arise? Is mass culture the product of 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism? Is it a response to consumers’ unconscious and conspicuous desires?
8. Is mass culture good or bad? What are its advantages and disadvantages? What benefits and losses mass culture bring?
9. The development of mass communications, combined with scientific and technological advances, leads to the improvement of techniques for the transmission and reception of messages. Does this improvement also contribute to the existence of more informed, enlightened, literate, demanding, and participative citizens?
10. Does the Internet promote a mass culture?
11. Why cultures are different from society to society?
12. Is it more positive or negative we become a world-culture, i.e. we belong to culture on a global scale?



## CHAPTER FOUR

# MCLUHAN: THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA AND TECHNICAL PROSTHESES

“The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life.”  
(McLuhan, 1967, p. 8).

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) is known for his works *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962); *Understanding Media* (1964) and *The Medium is the Message* (1967). He follows a conceptual framework based on the theory and epistemology of mass communication, criticizing the excessive dependence on the new communication technologies and the loss of human faculties caused by these new communication technologies.

McLuhan’s works contribute to understanding modern times defined by the development of media and technology, as well as their consequences, such as the creation of a “global village” and an “information age”. McLuhan is a pioneer in the study of the effects of mass communication. He seeks to identify the logic of the media, i.e. the typical way the media operate in the most technologically developed societies. Thus, his model to understand the so-called media logic can be labeled as historical-evolutionary or technical-anthropological of communication (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 134). McLuhan’s model is not concerned with the technical effectiveness of communication, like Shannon and Weaver’s communication model, but with the effects of technology on societies and human faculties.

With the emergence of electronic forms of information and communication (of which the media are an example), social structures, interactions, and behaviors change and become more widespread. With this development, the so-called electronic forms are also questioned regarding the problem of manipulating information. The media are the causes of these social transformations, but they are also the consequence.



If the media already influence people, manipulating information increases the problem of media influences and effects, which are thus essentially negative. It is this context of social transformation that also drags the human being towards an inevitable change. In this sense, McLuhan warns about the role of the media as technical prostheses and massifiers of societies and forms of communication. According to McLuhan's *Understanding Media—The Extensions of Man*:

“There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone, or a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in ‘high definition.’ High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, ‘high definition.’ A cartoon is ‘low definition,’ simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the car is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience. Naturally, therefore, a hot medium like radio has very different effects on the user from a cool medium like the telephone.” (McLuhan, 1994, pp. 22-23).

Consequently, McLuhan establishes a media typology, according to his possibilities, between hot and cold media:

Cool media	Hot media
They do not impose clear marks; their messages are more subtle, inviting those who receive them to participate in the understanding of the meaning.	They convey clear and precise messages, which are imposed on the public's spirit like the brand of red-hot iron.
Examples: television, telephone, speech, and ideographic writing.	Examples: alphabetic writing, the press, radio, cinema.
They are inclusive: they allow completeness and more sensory participation to the understanding of messages.	They are exclusive: they do not require the information to be supplemented by the hearings; they allow less participation.
They transmit less developed information because they are completed by the receiver.	They transmit more treated information; not much effort is required from the receiver.
They stimulate various human senses to understand the messages.	They extend a single elementary sense in “high definition”.

**Table 4-1:** McLuhan's two types of media: “cool media” and “hot media”.

McLuhan's typology does not include, for obvious historical reasons, the Internet as a means of communication. It would be impossible to classify the Internet in this binary typology because the Internet is a hybrid medium, a mixture of all media. The classification of the Internet depends on the use and the communicational experience that is made of this medium at a given moment, since the Internet incorporates radio, films, and television and distributes them through a special technology (McQuail, 2010, pp. 53-54). Thus, this typology, already outdated due to the evolution of the media,<sup>96</sup> maintains that the media are hot (when they mobilize only one sense, e.g. the press or radio, with little public participation) and are cold (less expressive and more suggestive, e.g. the telephone or television, when they request more user participation (Balle, 2003, p. 93).

This typology can have a pedagogical aspect, warning about the effects exerted by the media on human senses, to the point that McLuhan admonished for this situation, saying "Mind your media men!".

#### 4.1. The three cultures or galaxies of evolution

Depending on the effects of technology and mass media, McLuhan presents an evolutionary theory of societies and cultures according to factors that promote technical and technological development. For McLuhan, the evolution of communication systems defines three cultures or galaxies for the evolution of humanity or social life:

"In the electronic age which succeeds the typographic and mechanical era of the past five hundred years, we encounter new shapes and structures of human interdependence and of expression which are 'oral' in form even when the components of the situation may be non-verbal. This question is raised more fully in the concluding section of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. It is not a difficult matter in itself, but it does call for some reorganization of imaginative life. Such a change of modes of awareness is always delayed by the persistence of older patterns of perception. The Elizabethans appear to our gaze as very medieval. Medieval man thought of himself as classical, just as we consider ourselves to be modern men. To our successors, however, we shall appear as utterly Renaissance in character, and quite unconscious of the major new factors which we have set in motion during the past one hundred and fifty years. Far from being deterministic, however, the present

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<sup>96</sup> As McQuail (2010, p. 54) recognizes: "It is much less easy to distinguish these various media from each other than it used to be. This is partly because some media forms are now distributed across different types of the transmission channel, reducing the original uniqueness of form and experience in use."

study will, it is hoped, elucidate a principal factor in social change which may lead to a genuine increase of human autonomy. Peter Drucker writing on 'The Technological Revolution' of our time in *Technology and Culture* (vol. II, no. 4, 1961, p. 348) states: 'There is only one thing we do not know about the Technological Revolution—but it is essential: What happened to bring about the basic change in attitudes, beliefs, and values which released it? 'Scientific progress', I have tried to show, had little to do with it. But how responsible was the great change in world outlook which, a century earlier, had brought about the great Scientific Revolution?' *The Gutenberg Galaxy* at least attempts to supply the 'one thing we do not know.' But even so, there may well prove to be some other things!" (McLuhan, 1962, p. 3).

Each culture or galaxy is characterized by different forms and structures of social interaction. They are evolutionary stages of civilizational existence that tend towards the predominance and complexity of technology in collective life. These three cultures are:

Oral or acoustic culture	Typographic or visual culture	Electronic culture
Non-literate or pre-alphabetical societies (without writing).	Gutenberg galaxy featuring literate societies.	Marconi galaxy: velocity and instantaneity.
Oral word is the means of communication <i>par excellence</i> .	Privilege is attributed to writing and reading.	Electronic means of communication.
Traditional and tribal society.	Enhancement of the sense of sight.	Sensory integration. End of visual supremacy.
The use of natural organs of expression and senses.	The birth of the alphabet ends the oral expression.	Entering the era of globalization.

**Table 4-2:** McLuhan's three cultures or galaxies of technological evolution.

Culture is not a civilization. Culture manifests itself as a way of thinking, feeling, acting, communicating, etc.; it is the set of techniques for the adjustment and adaptation of the human species to the environment and social interaction. It is based on a shared understanding of the meanings that incorporate the structures of the meaning of everything that surrounds the community to which one belongs and is integrated, or with which one identifies in terms of cultural standards. Meaning structures characterize cultures because they function as matrices where interpretable meanings are inscribed to be followed, as they are important for integration, participation, identity, and social interaction.

The concept of “civilization” is much more agglutinating than that of culture. A civilization can include several cultures. A civilization is guided by a certain ideal of collective progress at all levels: intellectual, moral, social, cultural, political, technical, and scientific. It is a human overlay on the primitive or natural state of barbarism.

However, these three cultures proposed by McLuhan correspond to three worlds or three civilizational configurations: the oral (a logosphere, the predominance of the oral word), the printed (a graphosphere, the predominance of writing or the printed word) and the electronic (a videosphere, the predominance of audiovisuality). For Régis Debray, in *Viet et Mort de l'Image: Une Histoire du Regard en Occident*, these three cultures are summarized as follows:

1. Logosphere, which follows the invention of writing and it is the domain of the word, i.e. what was truly and absent; the suspicion is focused on the visible.
2. Graphosphere, which is built from the press, i.e. the visible has regained its dignity, but as a contingency that pursues or regulates a need logically accessible through discourse or abstraction.
3. Videosphere, where the concealment proves the false or the inconsistent and the suspicion focuses on the unobservable; what is not visible does not exist (Debray, 1994, p. 360).<sup>97</sup>

In McLuhan’s perspective, the study of the media allows us to conclude:

- An evolutionary vision of societies.
- Cultures spread and transformed by communication techniques.
- Social changes are caused by the evolution of communication techniques.<sup>98</sup>
- Each medium has its own characteristics and effects.
- The same message transmitted by different media results in different consequences and effects on the public.

On the one hand, the means and techniques of electronic communication are numerous, on the other hand, the uses of these means and techniques are increasingly intense, as well as the effects. A new technique always brings a new way of thinking.

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<sup>97</sup> For further development on these three cultures, the logosphere, the graphosphere and the videosphere, see Régis Debray’s *Cours de Médiologie Générale* (1991).

<sup>98</sup> Writing, the press, and electronic media had the effect of creating mutations in the foundations of social life. The means applied to transmit a message has a specific effect, even more important than the message itself.

McLuhan's main ideas focus on the harmful influences of the media, combined with technological developments, on individuals and societies. The media have a decisive influence on the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. The emergence of a "retribalized" world society under the influence of the media is anticipated. People and societies change with the transformation of technologies. All technology is associated with the extension of a sense (e.g. the book is the extension of the eye, the radio is the extension of the ear). The media are prostheses, technological extensions of individuals. The technical modifications of the media change social context and the mode of perception. It is like a changing individual and collective psychism. The mode and means of communication are more crucial than the message; the medium is now the message: before communicating a message, the vehicle of communication expresses a certain relationship with the world and becomes another message.

The widespread use of new technological means of communication and information affects perception and changes cultural structures, says McLuhan. This affection can be more obviously diagnosed today. For example, the frequent use of mobile and technological means and permanent network interconnection in contemporary societies.

Access to information is becoming easier and simpler; it is always and everywhere available to everyone. The new technological means disseminate information with increasing speed and spectrum.

## 4.2. The global village

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan explores the concept of "global village". The meaning attributed to this expression is that the place definitively loses its restricted position and becomes global, due to the technological development of the media. By being interconnected electronically, the world becomes a global village.

The idea of technological globalization had already been explored in 1945 by Arthur C. Clarke, when he refers to communication satellites, in an article published in *Wireless World* (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. 19). Therefore, the idea of satellite communication is originally used by Arthur C. Clarke to point out the potential of satellites for communication worldwide. In a book entitled *How the World Was One—Beyond the Global Village*,<sup>99</sup> Arthur C. Clarke starts by saying in the Foreword:

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<sup>99</sup> Original title in English first published in 1992.

“Much of Europe and Japan was still in ruins when, two years after the end of World War II, the famous historian Arnold Toynbee gave a lecture at London University’s Senate House entitled ‘The Unification of the World’. I cannot recall what prompted me to attend, and all I remember of the talk is its basic thesis; that developments in transport and communications had created—or would create—a single planetary society. In November 1947, that was an unusually far-sighted view; the phrase ‘global village’ still lay a decade in the future, and Marshall McLuhan had yet to herald the dawn of electronic culture.” (Clarke, 1993, p. 11).

The transistor and the microchip guaranteed this dawn of electronic culture, as Arthur C. Clarke admits, even though the world is still far from being unified. Arthur C. Clarke recognizes that Toynbee was right, because, “except for a few dwindling tribes in equally dwindling forests, the human race has now become almost a single entity, divided by time zones rather than the natural frontiers of geography” (Clarke, 1993, p. 11).

“The same TV news networks cover the globe; the world’s markets are linked by the most complex machine ever devised by mankind—the international telephone/telex/fax/data transfer system. The same newspapers, magazines, fashions, consumer goods, automobiles, soft drinks may be found anywhere between the North and South Poles; and at a World Cup Final, at least 50 per cent of the males of the species will be found sitting in front of a TV set, probably made in Japan. [...] The present global society has been largely created by the two technologies of transportation and communication, and it could be argued that the second is the more important. One can imagine a planet (I generously present the idea to my fellow science-fiction writers) where long-distance travel was extremely difficult, or indeed impossible. But if the inhabitants of such a world had developed efficient communications, they might still consider themselves members of a single society.” (Clarke, 1993, pp. 11-12).

Despite the linguistic, religious, and cultural barriers that still sunder nations and divide them into yet smaller tribes, Arthur C. Clarke considers that the unification of the world has passed the point of no return. “Our civilization could not exist without efficient communications”, says Arthur C. Clarke (1993, p. 17), because “we find it impossible to imagine a time when it took a month to get a message across the Atlantic and another month (if the winds were favorable) to receive the reply”. International trade, cultural exchanges, or international news could not flourish or exist under these circumstances. Consequently, Arthur C. Clarke (1993, p. 219) concludes: “The long-heralded global village is almost upon us, but it will last for only a flickering moment in the history of mankind. Before we even realize that it has come, it will be superseded—by the global family”.

The expression “global village” serves to describe a changing and closer world, where everything and everyone are closer to each other due to the developments and transmissions of satellite communication. Through satellites, everyone in the world receives the same messages and sees the same images simultaneously. For this reason, McLuhan warns of the negative effects (flattener or cylinder-compressors of cultural differences) of the massification of societies and communication. McLuhan insists on the implications of the progress of technique and technology in mass communication. However, this progress is notorious in some aspects:

- The ratio of inhabitants in the world to radio and television sets has increased exponentially in recent decades.
- The contact power (individuals covered by messages) of electronic media is high.
- Audience levels (or listening rate) are also high.
- There are television programs broadcast to different continents via satellite and with more than one billion viewers.

McLuhan sees, long before the heyday of consumerism and the use of communication technological devices, the preponderant role of the media:

“By putting our physical bodies inside our extended nervous systems, by means of electric media, we set up a dynamic by which all previous technologies that are mere extensions of hands and feet and teeth and bodily heat-controls—all such extensions of our bodies, including cities—will be translated into information systems. Electromagnetic technology requires utter human docility and quiescence of meditation such as befits an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull and its nerves outside its hide. Man must serve his electric technology with the same servo-mechanistic fidelity with which he served his coracle, his canoe, his typography, and all other extensions of his physical organs. But there is this difference, that previous technologies were partial and fragmentary, and the electric is total and inclusive. An external consensus or conscience is now as necessary as private consciousness. With the new media, however, it is also possible to store and to translate everything; and, as for speed, that is no problem. No further acceleration is possible this side of the light barrier.” (McLuhan, 1994, pp. 57-58).

For McLuhan, there is a fusion process between the human being and the technological device, in which the human dimension loses natural and inherent potentialities due to the inorganic and insensitive character of the machine. Technologies are extensions or prostheses of the human body that, in addition to creating dependency, weaken the human’s innate and natural qualities.

### 4.3. The medium is the message

In *Understanding Media—The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan emphasizes the importance of communication media and technologies supports: the contents are modified according to the means that transmit them (the technologies to the detriment of the contents).

“The electric technology is within the gates, and we are numb, deaf, blind, and mute about its encounter with the Gutenberg technology, on and through which the American way of life was formed. It is, however, no time to suggest strategies when the threat has not even been acknowledged to exist. I am in the position of Louis Pasteur telling doctors that their greatest enemy was quite invisible, and quite unrecognized by them. Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the ‘content’ of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as ‘content’. [...] The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance.” (McLuhan, 1994, pp. 17-18).

The idea that “the medium is the message” is based on the importance of the media technology on the contents, i.e. on the influence of the medium on the message. For McLuhan, communication supports, and technologies are decisive: the contents are modified according to the means that transmit them. There is an interference of the media in human sensations. The media are extensions or technical prostheses. The sensory impact of the media on people and societies is inevitable. The electronic means of communication thus create a global village.

If in today’s globalized societies the idea of the “global village” and the medium’s predominant role on the message is properly applied, it is concluded that, despite the effects of the media on societies and people (beyond social changes produced by technological advancement), we are in the age of electronic information, where mass communication is associated, for better or for worse, with the modernization of societies. According to McLuhan:

“The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and reevaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing—you, your family, your neighborhood, your education,



your job, your government, your relation to ‘the others’. And they’re changing dramatically. Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication. The alphabet, for instance, is a technology that is absorbed by the very young child in a completely unconscious manner, by osmosis so to speak. Words and the meaning of words predispose the child to think and act automatically in certain ways. The alphabet and print technology fostered and encouraged a fragmenting process, a process of specialism and of detachment. Electric technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement. It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of media.” (McLuhan, 1967, p. 8).

What characterizes a medium of communication are the changes, influences, and effects that the medium has on its audiences and society in general. The media modify the public’s perception of the world. With the change of world’s perception brought about by the means, the world itself, and what people are also changes. If the medium is technological (e.g. television, mobile phone, or computer), more repercussions it causes. For McLuhan, according to the previous excerpt, societies are more shaped by the nature of the media through which people communicate than by the contents of communication, which are increasingly electronic. The medium is the message; by extension, the medium is also the anesthesia of the senses, perceptions, and other human capacities.

For McLuhan, a mass media message cannot be considered content, but only an altered or transformed psychic message, that is, a set of practical results of communication technology on human sensitivity. McLuhan advocates a technological determinism, not only in this thesis that the medium is the message but also in the definition of the concept of “technical prosthesis” as an extension of the human body and its senses. It is not the ideological effects of media action that interest McLuhan; it is the technological effects resulting from the transformation of human sensations and perceptions.

#### 4.4. Questions for review and reflection

1. What is the relationship between McLuhan’s evolutionary thesis of cultures and the idea of “technical prostheses”? How does the technological development process affect societies and individuals?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the technological development of the media?
3. To what extent can a means of communication be the message itself? If the “medium is the message”, according to McLuhan, what does

it mean or how are the elements of the mass communication process structured?

4. Are societies more shaped by the nature of the media through which people communicate or by the content of the communication?
5. In a golden age of technique, electronics, and communication, are we more creative and communicative?
6. How does society change? What is the contribution of communication and technology in changing society?



## CHAPTER FIVE

### MCQUAIL: THE ROLE AND EFFECTS OF THE MEDIA IN SOCIETIES

“A key question that follows on from the preceding discussion is whether or not mass communication should be viewed primarily as a cause or as an effect of social change.”  
(McQuail, 2010, p. 91).

According to Denis McQuail (1935-2017), contemporary societies are characterized by the predominance and the influence of information flows. As a result, they are information societies and have, in general, the following fundamental attributes (McQuail, 2010, p. 107):

- The predominance of information industry: accelerated production, editing, and dissemination of information.
- Large volume of information and many information flows.
- Increasing interconnectivity.
- Interactive (virtual) social relationships.
- Integration and convergence of activities (massification of technological/digital uses and customs).
- Growth and interconnection of networks (globalization of network communication).

The relations between the media field and the social field are close. There are reciprocal influences and the two fields overlap. The media are, in this perspective, a social institution and play varied and necessary roles.

If McLuhan insists on the effects of technological media in all areas of human life, referring to cognitive, psychological, sensory, motor effects, etc., McQuail embarks on the social dimension of media as institutions with fundamental social functions. The effects of the media are the positive or negative consequences that result from the use, consumption, or social contact of the media. In particular, the effects result from the peculiar

activity of producing and transmitting information, regardless of whether the content produced and transmitted to the public (information, knowledge, or entertainment) has been strategically adapted, modified, or oriented to certain media interests.

In this Chapter 5, about the role and effects of the media in societies, the approach of Enric Saperas presented in his book *The Cognitive Effects of Mass Communication* is also relevant, when he states that the expression “effect of mass communication” is an attempt to group the set of consequences resulting from the activity of the broadcasting institutions, where a set of professionals specializing in the narration of events that take place in the environment develops their work. As a consequence of the communicative activity, the effects presuppose the concretization of the communication process, i.e. the effects imply the production and transmission of a communicative stimulation (a message with strategically oriented content) carried out by an institutional communicator and the execution of an impact on an audience (Saperas, 1987, p. 19).

Saperas highlights the cognitive effects of the media, considering that these effects result from the transmission of information. This is not a simple and innocuous transmission of information; it is a transmission of a certain content capable of triggering an action or reaction in the public.

## 5.1. Media as an institution of society

According to McQuail, the media are a social institution, comparable to other social institutions (politics, government, laws, religion, economics, etc.) and they have useful and irreplaceable functions, acting in the public sphere. “Media institutions have gradually developed around the key activities of publication and dissemination” (McQuail, 2010, p. 70). The media are specialized in the production and dissemination of information and meanings about the events and contexts of social life. Therefore, the study and understanding of the media’s role in society are relevant, not only to understand the influences and relationships between the media, messages, and societies but also to recognize social values and the effects of messages and content of the media.

McQuail’s *Mass Communication Theory* point of view is that the media constitute a separate social institution, i.e. an institution within society, with its own rules and practices, but subject to definitions and limitations in the context of the larger society. The media are dependent on society, although they have some scope to influence independently and are gaining influence as their autonomy, range of activities, economic meaning and informal power grow. For McQuail, it is a potential spiral and a process of self-

realization, led by the ever-increasing social, cultural, and political relevance. Thus, McQuail (2010, p. 71) refers to the institution of media in society, based on:

- The core activity is the production and distribution of information and culture.
- Media acquire functions and responsibilities in the ‘public sphere’ that are overseen by the institution.
- Control is mainly by self-regulation, with limits set by society.
- Boundaries of membership are uncertain.
- Media are free and in principle independent of political and economic power.

The influence of information and its flows and uses in societies is reflected, for example, on the Internet as a generalized means of communication, i.e. a medium with the following essential features pointed out by McQuail (2010, pp. 53-54):

- Computer-based technologies.
- Hybrid, non-dedicated, flexible character.
- Interactive potential.
- Private and public functions.
- Low degree of regulation.<sup>100</sup>
- Interconnectedness.
- Ubiquity and de-locatedness.
- Accessible to individuals as communicators.
- A medium of both mass and personal communication.

Following the McQuail’s perspective, the concept of “mass media” describes the means of communication that operate on a large scale over the societies, reaching and involving their members (citizens, general public) to a greater extent of social involvement. This term refers to familiar and traditional means of communication, i.e. long-established media (e.g. newspapers, magazines, films, radio, television, and music), but it also has an ill-defined frontier. New kinds of media are incorporated into this concept; they are more individual, diverse, multiform, and interactive (e.g. the Internet).

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<sup>100</sup> McQuail (2010, p. 53) argues that “the Internet as such does not exist anywhere as a legal entity and is not subject to any single set of national laws or regulations”, but “those who use the Internet can be accountable to the laws and regulations of the country in which they reside as well as to international law”.

## 5.2. The rising of the mass media

According to McQuail, there are three factors for the rise of the media in society:

- 1) The Protestant Reformation.
- 2) Democratic movements.
- 3) Capitalist industrialization.

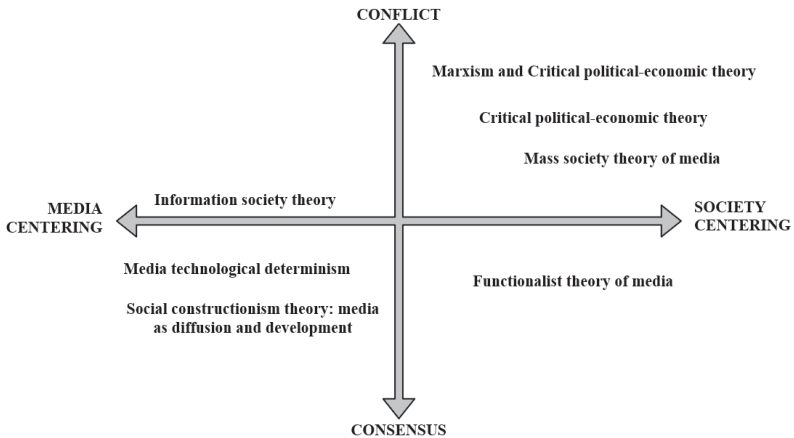
Regarding 1), it must be considered that, in the Catholic Church of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, people blindly trusted priests about what the Bible taught. In 1517, Martin Luther protested certain Church practices, claiming that people would have more personal contact with the Bible. In 40 years, Luther's new form of Christianity (Protestantism) was established in half of Europe, and the Bible became the first "media" product in the West and the best-selling book. The spread of the Bible and other books was only possible due to technological improvements in papermaking and printing (e.g. the "invention" of the press by Gutenberg). More books were produced in the 50 years following the printing of the Gutenberg's *Bible* in 1450 than in the previous thousand years (McQuail, 2010, p. 38).

Regarding 2), from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the ordinary citizen of France, the USA, and some other countries demanded and obtained representation in their respective governments. At the same time, ordinary citizens wanted to be literate and have access to school institutions, which were previously restricted. Democratic governments, in turn, depended on educated citizens and, as a result, encouraged mass literacy and the growth of a free press (McQuail, 2010, pp. 38-39).

As for 3), modern industries demanded an educated workforce capable of handling numbers. They also needed fast means of communication to conduct their business efficiently. The media have become a source of profit and mass communication has been big business (McQuail, 2010, p. 40).

## 5.3. Theories about the role of the media in society

McQuail refers to seven fundamental media-society theories to understand the role of the media in society. These theories present different positions and common aspects.



**Figure 5-1:** Perspectives regarding the role of the media in society.<sup>101</sup>

The conceptual positioning of perspectives or theories according to each advocate about the role of the media in society is represented above in Figure 5-1. This figure shows the diversity of positions (positive or negative; comprehensive or critical) that the media raise about the role they play in societies. The distribution of these seven perspectives addressed follows what each one defends to be the role of the media in society, i.e. the media as social modelers and the media as mirrors of society (horizontal axis), on the one hand, and the media as factors of conflict or the media as factors of consensus (vertical axis), on the other hand.

### 5.3.1. Mass society theory of media

The mass society theory is in line with the model of media domination, mentioned above regarding the characteristics of current mass discourses. This theory assumes that societies are massified due to the development of industrialization, including the media industry. According to McQuail:

“The theory emphasizes the interdependence of institutions that exercise power and thus the integration of the media into the sources of social power and authority. Content is likely to serve the interests of political and economic power holders. The media cannot be expected to offer a critical or an alternative definition of the world, and their tendency will be to assist in

<sup>101</sup> Source: adapted from McQuail (2010, pp. 94-108).



the accommodation of the dependent public to their fate. [...] Mass society theory gives a primacy to the media as a causal factor. It rests very much on the idea that the media offer a view of the world, a substitute or pseudo-environment, which is a potent means of manipulation of people but also an aid to their psychic survival under difficult conditions. [...] Mass society is, paradoxically, both 'atomized' and centrally controlled. The media are seen as significantly contributing to this control in societies characterized by largeness of scale, remoteness of institutions, isolation of individuals and lack of strong local or group integration." (McQuail, 2010, p. 94).

For McQuail (2010, p. 95), the mass society theory argues that:

- Society is organized centrally and on a large scale.
- The public becomes atomized.
- Media are centralized, with the one-way transmission.
- People come to depend on the media for their identity.
- Media are used for manipulation and control.

This theory is pessimistic; it is more properly a disease's diagnosis of our time than a social theory, mixing elements of critical and political thinking with nostalgia for a golden age of community and democracy. As a media theory, it strongly invokes control images and views the direction of influence as a downward flow. The theory postulates that the media will be controlled or managed in a monopolistic way and will be an effective means of organizing people in masses such as audiences, consumers, markets, voters. The mass media are usually the voice of authority, providing an opinion, instruction, and psychic satisfaction. They establish a dependence relationship on the part of ordinary citizens, regarding not only opinions but also their identity and conscience.

### **5.3.2. Marxism and Critical political-economic theory**

Although Marx did not come to know and consider the media as a means of mass communication, McQuail mentions a Marxist view of modern media based on the ideas defended by Marx. From a Marxist perspective, there are conflicts in the connections between media, society, and culture. The essence of the Marxist position assumes "that whoever owns or controls the media can choose, or set limits to, what they do" (McQuail, 2010, p. 80).

"While Karl Marx only knew the press before it was a true mass medium, the tradition of Marxist analysis of the media in capitalist society is still of some relevance. [...] The question of power is central to Marxist interpretations of mass media. While varied, these have always emphasized the fact that ultimately they are instruments of control by and for a ruling

class. [...] Marxist theory posits a direct link between economic ownership and the dissemination of messages that affirm the legitimacy and the value of a class society. These views are supported in modern times by evidence of tendencies to great concentration of media ownership by capitalist entrepreneurs [...] and by much correlative evidence of conservative tendencies in content of media so organized [...] Revisionist versions of Marxist media theory in the twentieth century concentrated more on ideas than on material structures. They emphasized the ideological effects of media in the interests of a ruling class, in 'reproducing' the essentially exploitative relationships and manipulation, and in legitimating the dominance of capitalism and the subordination of the working class." (McQuail, 2010, pp. 95-96).

The media conform to an industry and a capitalist type of productive relations and factors of production (materials, technology, and labor). They are owned by a class with monopoly/capital and are organized to serve the interests of that class, exploiting materially workers (extracting the added value of labor) and consumers (generating excessive profits). They work ideologically by spreading world ideas and views of the ruling class, denying access to alternative ideas that can lead to change or a growing awareness on the part of the working class and its interests. They also avoid mobilizing that awareness towards active and organized political opposition. The Marxist perspective on the role of the media in society maintains that according to McQuail (2010, pp. 95-97):

- The media are the property of the privileged or dominant class, the bourgeois.
- The media act in the interest of their class.
- The media promote a false conscience of the working class.
- The access to the media is denied to political opposition.

For Marxism, power unbalances social relations, because power is not distributed symmetrically by social classes. As the media are powerful and an instrument of control at the service of a privileged and dominant class, they can disseminate content that is of interest to those who own it. Thus, the media have a negative role in societies.

### **5.3.3. Functionalist theory of media**

The functionalist theory of media understands that there is a set of fundamental needs to be guaranteed for the perfect functioning of society, such as the continuity of values, the social order, the integration, adaptation, and socialization of individuals, etc. From the perspective of functionalism,

society is a whole, a broad social system made up of distinct parts that make it work because each part performs a specific and mutually dependent function. The ideal point of the social system is the situation of balance between the parts and the perfect functioning of the system, satisfying needs when fulfilling the respective functions.

Some of these needs are guaranteed by the media, as they are part of the social structure; they have relevant functions, and society is seen as an organized and dynamic system of interconnected parts.

“Functionalist theory explains social practices and institutions in terms of the ‘needs’ of the society and of individuals. Society is viewed as an ongoing system of linked working parts or subsystems, each making an essential contribution to continuity and order. The media can be seen as one of these systems. Organized social life is said to require the continued maintenance of a more or less accurate, consistent, supportive and complete picture of the working of society and of the social environment. It is by responding to the demands of individuals and institutions in consistent ways that the media achieve unintended benefits for the society as a whole.” (McQuail, 2010, p. 98).

The media guarantee the fulfillment of functions in society, which were previously mentioned (to inform, persuade, educate, socialize, and entertain). These five functions can be added the function of surveillance and control of the social order and that of establishing relations between social institutions.

According to McQuail (2010, p. 100), the structural functionalism claims that the media are essential to society. The media promote social integration and cooperation, mobilization, and the continuity of culture and values. Furthermore:

- The media are an institution of society.
- The media perform needed tasks of order, control, and cohesion.
- The media are also necessary for adaptation and change.
- Functions are recognizable in the effects of the media.
- Management of tension.
- There are unintended harmful effects classified as dysfunctions.

In view of functionalism, the role of the media is positive. The media guarantee indispensable conditions for any society.

### 5.3.4. Critical political-economic theory

According to McQuail (2010, p. 97), the perspective of the critical political-economy theory on the role of the media in society argues that:

- Economic control and logic are determinants.
- Media structure always tends towards monopoly.
- Global integration of media ownership develops.
- Contents and audiences are commodified.
- Real diversity decreases.
- Opposition and alternative voices are marginalized.
- Public interest in communication is subordinated to private interests.
- Access to the benefits of communication is unequally distributed.

“Political-economic theory is a socially critical approach that focuses primarily on the relation between the economic structure and dynamics of media industries and the ideological content of media. From this point of view, the media institution has to be considered as part of the economic system, with close links to the political system. The consequences are to be observed in the reduction of independent media sources, concentration on the largest markets, avoidance of risks, and reduced investment in less profitable media tasks (such as investigative reporting and documentary filmmaking). We also find neglect of smaller and poorer sectors of the potential audience and often a politically unbalanced range of news media.” (McQuail, 2010, p. 96).

### 5.3.5. Social constructionism theory: media, diffusion, and development

Social constructionism is based on the idea of society as a reality created, continually recreated, and reproduced by human beings. This theory attributes a general emphasis on the possibilities for action, choices, challenge, and change in the understanding of social reality (McQuail, 2010, p. 100). Social reality must be made and give meaning (be interpreted).

For the perspective of social constructionism or media as diffusion and development theory, the media serve as agents of development, because they disseminate technical knowledge; encourage individual change and mobility; disseminate democracy (e.g. clarify political ideas during the elections); promote consumption needs, and support literacy, education, health, demographic control, etc. McQuail (2010, p. 101) summarizes the main propositions of social constructionism:

- Society is a construct rather than a fixed reality.
- Media provide the materials for reality construction.

- Meanings are offered by the media and can be negotiated or rejected.
- Media selectively reproduce certain meanings.
- Media cannot give an objective account of social reality (all facts are interpretations).

According to McQuail's *Mass Communication Theory*:

“The general idea that mass media influence what most people believe to be reality is of course an old one and is embedded in theories of propaganda and ideology (for instance, the role of the media as producing a ‘false consciousness’). The unthinking, but unceasing, promotion by media of nationalism, patriotism, social conformity and belief systems could all be interpreted as examples of social construction. Later critical theory argued for the possibility of such ideological impositions being contested and resisted, emphasizing the possibilities for reinterpreting the hegemonic message. Even so, the emphasis in critical theory is on the media as a very effective *reproducer* of a selective and biased view of reality. Aside from the question of ideology, there has been much attention to social construction at work in relation to mass media news, entertainment and popular culture and in the formation of public opinion. In respect of news, there is now more or less a consensus among media scholars that the picture of ‘reality’ that news claims to provide cannot help but be a selective construct made up of fragments of factual information and observation that are bound together and given meaning by a particular frame, angle of vision or perspective. The genre requirements of news and the routines of news processing are also at work. Social construction refers to the processes by which events, persons, values and ideas are first defined or interpreted in a certain way and given value and priority, largely by mass media, leading to the (personal) construction of larger pictures of reality.” (McQuail, 2010, p. 101).

Is it just a general and old idea the influence of the mass media about what most people believe to be reality? Is it embedded in theories of propaganda and ideology? Is the influence subjective? Isn't unquestionable, whether for good (to encourage behaviors and attitudes towards the social norm) or evil (to encourage social deviations)?

### 5.3.6. Media technological determinism

The theory of media technological determinism points out that, as McQuail (2010, p. 101) emphasizes, “there is a long and still active tradition of searching for links between the dominant communication technology of an age and key features of society”. For McQuail (2010, p. 103), the main propositions of this theory are:

- Communication technology is fundamental to society.
- Each technology has a bias to a communication form, content, and use.
- The sequence of invention and application of communication technology influences the direction and pace of social change.
- Communication revolutions lead to social revolutions.

### 5.3.7. Information society theory

Several authors began early to diagnose in modern societies the predominance and overload of a new dimension (the information) in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The predominance justifies the designation of “new information age” or “information society”. The information society is defined by information overload.

Alvin Toffler is one of the authors who diagnosed information as a key element in societies since the 1950s when an accelerated pace of social and technological changes began. In *Future Shock* (1970) Toffler warns of the rapid dimension of information, which appears in societies so quickly that it causes drastic and unprecedented changes. Societies become increasingly complex and technological, with large and rapid flows of information. “Information surges through society so rapidly, drastic changes in technology come so quickly that newer, even more instantly responsive forms of organization must characterize the future” (Toffler, 1970, p. 143).

The shock of the future is marked by the development and deepening of information and media technology. Toffler became a more distinguished author for the three-wave theory of modernizing societies. According to Toffler’s *The Third Wave*, these the waves are:

- 1) The invention of agriculture in the Neolithic, which transformed the nomadic hunters and gatherers into sedentary farmers, causing people to gather in ever larger places (Toffler, 1981, p. 9).
- 2) The industrialization of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which benefited from scientific advances and the development of technology (Toffler, 1981, p. 13).
- 3) The information, from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, since “all civilizations also require an ‘info-sphere’ for producing and distributing information” (Toffler, 1981, p. 32).

Today these three revolutions or striking waves in the history of mankind and in the immediate process of social modernization are confirmed. Since this Toffler’s interpretation, societies are moving towards the hegemony of information, in which individuals start to play a more

active role in the process of massification of societies and of communication and information itself. Toffler (1981, p. 11) calls these individuals *prosumer*, a combination of producer and consumer, i.e. one is the producer of what one consumes, and which was previously produced by others. These are the cases of bloggers and youtubers.

In a similar perspective, Pierre Lévy refers in *Becoming Virtual–Reality in the Digital Age*:

“Not only is the consumer a coproducer of the information he consumes but he is also a cooperative producer of the virtual worlds in which he evolves and an agent of market visibility for those who exploit the traces of his actions in cyberspace. The most valuable products and services in the new market are interactive, that is, in economic terms, the production of added value is shifted to the consumer or, rather, the notion of consumption should be replaced by that of the *coproduction* of merchandise or interactive services. Just as the virtualization of text implies the growing confusion between the roles of reader and author, the virtualization of the market highlights the convergence of consumption and production.” (Lévy, 1998, pp. 80-81).

Seeking not to make predictions, but analyses of the present, Toffler makes accurate inferences to understand the development of society in technological terms. Although the analyses and inferences are situated in an uncertain domain, such as that of technological development, Toffler achieves approximate approaches to how social changes occur. For example, communication through computers, virtual reality, or diversity<sup>102</sup> in all fields, including communication. Toffler’s *The Third Wave* refers to:

“In all previous societies the info-sphere provided the means for communication between humans. The Third Wave multiplies these means. But it also provides powerful facilities, for the first time in history, for machine-to-machine communication and, even more astonishing, for conversation between humans and the intelligent environment around them. When we stand back and look at the larger picture, it becomes clear that the revolution in the infosphere is at least as dramatic as that in the technosphere—in the energy system and technological base of society.” (Toffler, 1981, p. 177).

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<sup>102</sup> The diversity and the abundance of everything (including choices) are characteristic of Toffler’s third wave (cf. Toffler, 1981, p. 177).

The revolution in information technologies and the impact of computerization and virtualization of social actions lead to structural transformations in societies and cultures, which are now digital. In this sense, McQuail (2010, p. 104) asserts that “the term ‘communications revolution’, along with the term ‘information society’, has now almost come to be accepted as an objective description of our time and of the type of society that is emerging.”

For the perspective of an information society theory, there are main propositions pointed out by McQuail (2010, p. 107) as follows, i.e. the new media technologies lead to a society where information predominates and is marked by these aspects:

- Information work replaces industrial work.
- Production and flow of information accelerate.
- Society is characterized by increasing interconnectivity.
- Disparate activities converge and integrate.
- There is an increasing dependency on complex systems.
- Trends to globalization accelerate.
- Constraints on time and space are much reduced.
- Consequences are open to alternative interpretations, both positive and negative.
- There are increased risks of loss of control.
- Information society theory is an ideology more than a theory.

“What is it that alerts us to the fact that we are living in an information society?”, asks Hartley (2004, p. 114). His brief and concise answer is that “the use, storage and distribution of information have been pivotal to social structures throughout history”.

However, “if all societies are reliant upon information as the determinant of power, can we claim that this era is the information society and that previous centuries were not?” (Hartley, 2004, p. 114). For some authors and researchers, continues Hartley, it is the proliferation of information-based markets that define the information age (and the corresponding rapid increase in the amount of information-based products) that define the information age and this situation is recent, because we now have computers for processing information, mobile telephones for communicating, fax machines for transmitting documentation, computer games for entertainment (Hartley, 2004, p. 114), and other technological means to receive and transmit information in an easier, simpler and immediate way. Information is important for all societies, but the difference is that today information is technological, i.e. it is produced, transmitted, and received



instantly through new technological devices, whose uses modify collective habits and lifestyles.

#### **5.4. Effects of mass communication**

The mass media provoke effects. Through the transmitted content (e.g. TV programs showing violence) and the way they are transmitted (e.g. with more emphasis, spectacle, repetition, and sensationalism), the influence of the media increases. The messages change when they are transmitted by the media, becoming more spectacular, in a way to be more attractive and seduce more the target audiences. As McLuhan says, the media elicit effects from the content transmitted and the ways in which they operate. When a message or information is encoded, it is no longer the same, as it undergoes a modification process caused precisely by the means that provide its enjoyment (Demartis, 2006, p. 171).

The effects of the media are numerous, for example:

- Creation of companies specialized in the management, regulation, and evaluation of content and audiences.
- Acceleration of cultural dissemination processes.
- Impact on the everyday uses of written and spoken language.
- Change in the family structure (e.g. lesser role of parental authority).
- Increased visibility of material goods and the consequent emergence of new needs, changing desires, and purchasing behaviors.
- Promotion of fame, status, and authority.

It is in this context of the effects of mass communication that McQuail presents three periods of influence of the media in society:

1° period (1930-1945)	2° period (1945-1960)	3° period (from 1965)
Immediate and massive influence.	Limited (and indirect) effects.	Complex (long-term) effects.
The idea that the media have a strong impact on audiences prevails.	Effects are produced according to types of communication, audiences, and context.	Cumulative and cognitive effects.
Media influences explained by Hypodermic Theory. <sup>103</sup>	Media influences explained by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's Two Step Flow Theory. <sup>104</sup>	Media influences explained by McCombs & Shaw's Agenda-setting Theory (1972). <sup>105</sup>
The media are the main instruments of persuasion; they form public opinion and mobilize the masses.	Individuals are selective and interpersonal communication has more influence.	The media can provoke changes in people's ways of thinking.
E.g.: propaganda messages.	E.g. the influence role of opinion leaders.	E.g. themes discussed in election campaigns.

**Table 5-1:** Three periods of media influence, according to McQuail.

In these three periods, the influences of the media are different, depending on what characterizes each period and according to the factors existing at each moment.

<sup>103</sup> The Hypodermic Theory states that each element of the public is reached, in a personal and direct way, by the messages of the mass media (Wolf, 1992, p. 18). This theory presupposes the existence of a mass society, where everyone is an atom, i.e. everyone is isolated and reacts in isolation to the impulses and stimuli that are the messages of the mass media.

<sup>104</sup> The theoretical basis of this Two Step Flow Theory is the works *The People's Choice* (1944) by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, on voting and the formation of public opinion during the presidential elections of the USA in 1940, and the work *Personal Influence* (1955), by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld. For further development on this communication model, read *Teorie delle Comunicazioni di Massa*, by Mauro Wolf (1992, pp. 44-50).

<sup>105</sup> Theory that defends that the mass media presents to the public a list of subjects on which it is necessary to shape opinion and discuss. The public's understanding of a large part of social reality is provided by the mass media (Wolf, 1992, p. 128). Thus, the public includes or excludes from their knowledge the issues depending on whether they are reported by the mass media.

### **5.4.1. Immediate and massive influence (1930-1945)**

In this period, the media has an immediate, intense, and prescribed effect on audiences. This period was marked by the Hypodermic Theory, according to which the media are known to directly propagate messages in people's heads. At this point, studies on the behavioral effects of persuasion campaigns appear.

The idea of ideological domination also characterizes this period. Critical members of the Frankfurt School (Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, and Friedrich Pollock) theorized the idea that the media (or "cultural industry") are instruments of dissemination of the dominant ideology. Its influence consists in uniformity of the frames of thought and behavior, towards the acceptance of the capitalist system.

### **5.4.2. Limited effects (1945-1960)**

After the 1950s, the development of the media (press, radio, and television) is accompanied by important social changes in the field of mass communication: the development of advertising and marketing; the proliferation of the telephone, fax, and electronic resources; the development of political communication and business communication (with the emergence of the profession of communication director); the revolution in social relations; decline in traditional authority (couple, family, school, company). Communication relations are extended at all levels.

In this context, the Sociology of Communication or Media Sociology appears pertinently as an area of study, in face of the advent and development of mass media. The resulting and natural concern about the influence of the media in society also motivates the emergence of the Sociology of Communication, as well as the various models of communication that sought to understand the social circulation of communication.

In this period of limited and indirect effects, the influence of the media is explained by the Two Step Flow Theory, also known as the "two-level" (or "two-step broadcast") communication model. This theory argues that the media do not act directly on audiences. The influence of the media is mediated by opinion leaders. This model proposes two stages of receiving mass communication. The influences transmitted by the media first reach opinion leaders and then they transmit them to their groups, over which they exert influence.

At first, the objective is to remove the public from the manipulations of propaganda. Then, the problem is to find the effectiveness of the election

campaigns. Concerns focus on propaganda during the war and through television and radio. It was necessary to study the influence of the media on the public. The effectiveness of the media can only be analyzed in the social context in which they operate. More than the content they spread, the influence depends on the characteristics of the surrounding social system. Attention is given to analyzing the decision-making process during an election campaign, buying, or expressing an opinion, etc. The investigation was organized based on socio-economic, religious, age problems, and other sociological factors in the predisposition of voting guidelines: the degree of interest, motivation, and participation/exposure in the campaign.

### 5.4.3. Complex effects (from 1965)

This period is characterized by the recognition of the importance of television over public opinion. The technique also raises concerns to the point that Harold Innis and McLuhan recognize that the media have a decisive influence on the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan states that human being changes as technologies also change. The concept of “technical prosthesis” emerges.

One perspective on the effects of mass communication is the agenda-setting,<sup>106</sup> which argues that the mass media produce effects on public opinion just by paying attention to some subjects and neglecting others, because “people will tend to know about those things which the mass media deal with and adopt the order of priority assigned to different issues” (McQuail & Windahl, 1993, p. 104).

“The best known of the more recent proponents of the agenda-setting hypothesis are the American researchers Malcolm McCombs and Donald Shaw. They wrote ‘Audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it. For example, in reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media apparently determine the important issues. In other words, the mass media set the ‘agenda’ of the campaign. This ability to affect cognitive change among individuals is one of the most important aspects of the power of mass communication.’” (McQuail & Windahl, 1993, p. 104).

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<sup>106</sup> Nelson Traquina (2000, p. 13) says that the concept of “agenda-setting” was first exposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 when the paradigm in effect in *communication research* clearly pointed to an idea about the power of the media, more reassuring to society in general: that this power was reduced and its effects limited.

In *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, James W. Carey (2009, p. 1) considers that “today the mass media are inescapable and people feel slightly less alive when unhooked from long lines of news and entertainment”. It is like the protagonist of *Midnight Cowboy*, Joe Buck, who was never far from a television set and wasn’t sure that life was continuing when the flickering image was not present (James Leo Herlihy quoted by Carey, 2009, p. 1). “Modern communications have drastically altered the ordinary terms of experience and consciousness, the ordinary structures of interest and feeling, the normal sense of being alive, of having a social relation” (Carey, 2009, p. 1). This situation happens because:

- There are more and more forms and means of communication, namely electronic and easy and immediate access (visualization).
- The media have a predominant and absorbing role in everyday life.
- The media produce and disseminate a mass culture.
- The effects of the media are complex.

Regarding the role of communication in the construction, or symbolic production of reality and its social effects, James W. Carey considers:

“One of the major problems one encounters in talking about communication is that the noun refers to the most common, mundane human experience. There is truth in Marshall McLuhan’s assertion that the one thing of which the fish is unaware is water, the very medium that forms its ambience and supports its existence. Similarly, communication, through language and other symbolic forms, comprises the ambience of human existence. The activities we collectively call communication—having conversations, giving instructions, imparting knowledge, sharing significant ideas, seeking information, entertaining and being entertained—are so ordinary and mundane that it is difficult for them to arrest our attention. Moreover, when we intellectually visit this process, we often focus on the trivial and unproblematic, so inured are we to the mysterious and awesome in communication.” (Carey, 2009, p. 19).

This excerpt underlines that communication phenomena and processes can become so familiar that we are not even aware of their occurrence.

## 5.5. Public opinion and the public sphere

The concepts of “public opinion” and “public sphere” are mutually implicated. There is no public opinion without a public sphere. Public opinion and the public sphere are both public, i.e. they are not and could not be private. Public opinion is born out of the public debate in the public

sphere and about “the public thing”. If it is an opinion, it is always debatable and volatile; it is based more on value judgments (subjectivities) and less on factual judgments (objectivities). Public opinion (*doxa*) does not coincide with the truth (*epistémé*),<sup>107</sup> because an opinion is always flexible, subjective, relative, and inconsistent.

The *sine qua non* condition for public opinion to exist is the existence of modern age and society since public opinion presupposes a public sphere of free discussion, expression, and formation of opinions, i.e. a civil society distinct from the State. Consequently, the concept of “public opinion” takes on a relevant role and practical significance in the construction and maintenance of modern and developed societies. Public opinion (as a source of authority and social pressure/force) can represent the support and legitimization of formal political power.

Public opinion is a process of communication between citizens. Public opinion depends on the possibility of public discussion, as mentioned. The possibility of discussion depends on the availability and flexibility of the factors of public communication, the media, and public meetings in a social sphere.

In a political sense, public opinion represents the set of opinions on matters of collective interest and is expressed in a free and public way by citizens (as a rule, not belonging to the government or instituted power) who claim to their opinions the right to influence actions, people or the government itself. Interest groups have their goals and the pursuit of these goals leads them to try to manipulate or condition public opinion.

Public opinion is formed by most anonymous opinions on a given subject that this majority considers relevant. It is an opinion among many others; an opinion related to matters of public nature and general interest. Public opinion is analyzed as a concrete social fact, given its importance in society. An opinion is a set of beliefs about a subject or fact on which a value judgment is formed.

Public opinion is a powerful social force capable of influencing the image of a government, company, institution, or public figure. Public opinion is a system of forces and tensions that results in a set of consensual opinions. Thus, the context in which public opinion is expressed is due to:

- The social controversy of collective interest (the subject of public interest).

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<sup>107</sup> The terms *doxa* and *epistémé* are both Greek and antonyms. While *doxa* means “opinion” and a lower degree of cognition, *epistémé* means “true knowledge” and “body of organized knowledge”, as is the scientific knowledge (Peters, 1967, p. 40 and 59).

- Freedom of opinion and expression.
- Means of public communication.
- Public space for discussion and opportunity for discussion.
- Dominant collective decision or opinion.

We are only facing a public opinion when the opinion on a given subject represents the public. In the emergence and discussion of a topic, different opinions can arise associated with certain numerous subgroups: they are the currents of opinion. For public opinion or a current of opinion to exist, a general statement or a statement by most members of the group in a certain direction is required. Otherwise, we will be faced with a series of opinions instead of public opinion.

Public opinion is considered as an objective reality that represents either the consensus or the average of the individual opinions on a subject in geographical space and time. As an objective reality, public opinion is not a sum of opinions. Public opinion has a remote origin. When it emerged in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., public opinion created a new and singular form of sociability (the public) and had rapid social expansion and adherence, defining a context of Western modernity. Gabriel Tarde's model characterizes the audiences by the following fundamental traits:

- a) A symbolic character, an internal cohesion of a spiritual order.
- b) A very extensive network of social interdependencies, which dispense the physical ties of the direct presence of the public.
- c) A communicational structure, i.e. a regular flow of information through which the themes or issues that mobilize the public to circulate and in which individuals (members of the public) are called upon to exercise regular judgment (Esteves, 2012).

Regarding a) and b), Tarde argues, in *L'Opinion et la Foule*,<sup>108</sup> that:

“[The public] is like a purely spiritual collectivity, like a spread of physically separate individuals and whose cohesion is entirely mental. [...] But not all communications from spirit to spirit, from soul to soul, have as a necessary condition the approximation of bodies. This condition is less and less fulfilled when current of opinions take shape in our civilized societies. It is not in meetings of men in the streets or in the public square that these social rivers originate and develop, these great raptures that today take the firmer

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<sup>108</sup> Original title in French, from 1901.

hearts by storm, the most resistant reasons and make parliaments or governments consecrate laws or decrees.” (Tarde, 2005, pp. 5-6).<sup>109</sup>

Concerning c), in the same book Tarde refers to the communicational structure and role as follows:

“This transformation of all groups into audiences is expressed by a growing need for sociability that makes regular communication of members imperative through a continuous stream of information and common excitement. It is therefore inevitable.” (Tarde, 2005, p. 23).<sup>110</sup>

The origin of public opinion is remote, but Classical Greek Antiquity assumes itself as an important and crucial antecedent phase. In Greece of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the agora<sup>111</sup> appears as a “meeting place” in public squares. The agora is the center of social life, where democracy is born. To participate in this public space for discussion, rationality is a criterion. The ideal of the *pólis* (city) is developed from a model of participation in the public sphere. In this democratic context, city-states are developed with organizational autonomy.

In 1922, the journalist, writer, and political commentator Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) published his book *Public Opinion*, where he addressed the relations between the media and political, economic, and social powers. Lippmann focuses on the conscious or unconscious influence of the media on people and concludes that an important competence of the public is to judge the political results and to monitor the application of the chosen or adopted ideological programs.

“The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be explored, reported, and imagined. Man is no Aristotelian god contemplating all existence at one glance. He is the creature of an evolution who can just about span a sufficient portion of reality to manage his survival, and snatch what on the scale of time are but a few moments of insight and happiness. Yet this same creature has invented ways of seeing what no naked eye could see, of hearing what no ear could hear, of weighing immense masses and infinitesimal ones, of counting and separating more items than he can individually remember. He is learning to see with his mind vast portions of the world that he could never see, touch,

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<sup>109</sup> My translation from the consulted Portuguese edition of Tarde’s *A Opinião e as Massas* [*Opinion and the Crowd*] (cf. Tarde, 2005).

<sup>110</sup> My translation from Tarde’s Portuguese edition.

<sup>111</sup> A place of assembly for the people in ancient Greece.



smell, hear, or remember. Gradually he makes for himself a trustworthy picture inside his head of the world beyond his reach. Those features of the world outside which have to do with the behavior of other human beings, in so far as that behavior crosses ours, is dependent upon us, or is interesting to us, we call roughly public affairs. The pictures inside the heads of these human beings, the pictures of themselves, of others, of their needs, purposes, and relationship, are their public opinions. Those pictures which are acted upon by groups of people, or by individuals acting in the name of groups, are Public Opinion with capital letters.” (Lippmann, 1998, p. 29).

Lippmann is interested in pertinent issues that still relevant today. For example:

- How do people form ideas about what happens in the world?
- How do people select a part of the messages they receive?
- How do the public process messages and how do they relay them?
- How do people inform themselves, make judgments, and act accordingly?

Lippmann concludes that public opinion is vulnerable, influenced, and based on stereotypes with an emotional charge. Public opinion is the result of groups of interest’s actions. One of Lippmann’s arguments in his book *Public Opinion* is that democratic theory asks citizens too much since they cannot be expected to act as legislators, to be active and to be involved in all important matters (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 35). Citizens find too many difficulties to form their opinion in a rational and democratic way. They are busy with their own personal affairs, with the problems of their daily lives and they have no time to devote to political affairs. Lippmann argues that no individual could be informed about daily affairs or have an opinion on each subject. Therefore, he concludes that the influence of the media on citizens is largely inevitable and unconscious.

One of the most important contributions in Lippmann’s book is to show the way people are informed and later form the judgments that guide their actions in the modern world, i.e. how people develop their conceptions, how they select a part of the messages that reach them, how they process them and how they transmit them (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 36).

Public opinion is always the opinion on a given subject of general or public interest (a common good or *res publica*) for society, representing the expression of the public. It is an opinion that becomes public (it is spread among most citizens) and is of the public (the majority of citizens), according to its own designation. In this sense, public opinion is republican,

as Nietzsche refers to the use of ancient rhetoric in the public sphere in an essay entitled “Description of Ancient Rhetoric” from 1872-73:

“[Rhetoric] is an essentially republican art: one must be accustomed to tolerating the most unusual opinions and points of view and even to taking a certain pleasure in their counterplay; one must be just as willing to listen as to speak; and as a listener one must be able more or less to appreciate the art being applied.” (Nietzsche, 1989, p. 3).

In the ancient rhetoric that Nietzsche speaks of in this essay and in the new rhetoric of the mass media’s discourses in contemporary societies, opinions are adapted and prepared to be effective, aesthetic, and persuasive. In modern industrialized and mass societies (without traditional differentiating cultural elements), public opinion acquires importance and a strength to manifest and exert pressure. The development of public opinion (e.g. the mechanisms for the formation and expression of public opinion) accompanies the development of the mass media. There are ways of listening to public opinion, namely:

- Referendum: citizens’ right and the popular vote by the electorate whether to approve a specific legislative act about an issue or matter of public interest.
- Universal suffrage by secret vote: an instrument that citizens use during periods of democratic elections.
- Opinion poll: technique or instrument of public opinion assessment by questioning a representative sample, especially as the basis for forecasting the results of the voting.

Opinion polls should be analyzed as a source of piecemeal information. As the polls may not be representative or objective, they depend on who makes it (according to certain objectives and according to a certain methodology) and who interprets and comments on their results. In other words, they sometimes depend on the interests and objectives underlying their elaboration.

### **5.5.1. Mechanisms for making public opinion**

There are factors at the origin of the public opinion movements: events, public interest, periods of crisis, emotion, etc. According to Cazeneuve (1999, pp. 191-197), the mechanisms for forming public opinion are:

- Rumors.
- Stereotypes.
- Groups and their rules.

- Opinion leaders.
- Psycho-sociological mechanisms of information selection.

For Cazeneuve (1999, pp. 192-193), rumors are:

- The oldest and most primitive way of forming collective opinions.
- Interpersonal mechanisms that bypass official information and are abundant in periods of social trust crisis.
- Based on events about which information is scarce.
- Correspond to deformations of reality and certain psycho-sociological mechanisms (e.g. fear, desire, prejudices, etc.) intervene.
- Associated with important and ambiguous events.
- Explain and relieve emotional tensions.
- Characteristics of mass societies.
- End when the situation that gave rise to it is no longer problematic.

Stereotypes are another mechanism for forming public opinion. Walter Lippmann introduced the word “stereotype” in his book *Public Opinion* (1922), defining it as a mold from which it is possible to reproduce countless examples: it allows us to reproduce the same mental attitudes towards similar situations. A perfect stereotype, according to Lippmann (1998, p. 98), precedes the use of reason; it is a form of perception, it imposes a certain character on the information of our sense before the information reaches the intelligence. A stereotype is an oculus through which the world is seen as a deformed world.

The stereotype is a classifying concept, to which an intense affective tone of pleasure or displeasure is always linked. The stereotype is reduced to a word, such as “black”, “Jew”, “capitalist”, “communist”, etc. The mass media are usually vehicles and reinforcers of stereotypes by disseminating information using, in a voluntary or involuntary way, certain terms and expressions.

A main characteristic of the stereotype is schematism, in which the qualities of the person being spoken are reduced to one. Simplification allows retention by memory. It encompasses many different individuals in one concept. But the selection of quality that is maintained obeys an affective semantics, with mechanisms such as those already described for projection, identification, rejection.

Another characteristic of the stereotype is persistence; it affirms the persistence of the group, its cohesion, and identity. The stereotype is one of the factors that make up social perception; it is elaborated by a group to characterize itself or define another group. Based on the previous function,

the stereotype also presents the group with an idealized image of itself. The idealization rules follow affective and effective mechanisms.

The stereotype is situated on the plane of fantasy. As it is a type of social attitude, it is a fantasy that can lead to action. Racial and nationalist prejudices, which feed on stereotypes, come to be expressed through violent actions. The greater the number of stereotypes that comprise a culture, the more monolithic the manifestations of public opinion will be.

According to Lasswell, political prejudices, electoral preferences, the needs that are linked to them, are often formulated in an extremely rational way, but they grow in an extremely irrational way. The stereotype is a mental construction that approaches reality; it is elaborated from characteristics that are considered real.

As for groups and their norms, the whole human group has its own geographical, ethnic, cultural characteristics. These traits are passed down from generation to generation. They are formed according to several factors. However, the type of behaviors that make a group unique results from the peculiar way in which individuals in a human group solve their problems over time.

Collective life leads to the development of rules and procedures that, mirroring accepted values, contribute to meeting the needs of the community. Collective life is a life in a state of culture. Culture represents the expression of a group and achieves everything that is socially learned and shared. All groups have their own rules that influence the behavior of their members.

Regarding opinion leaders, these are people who stand out in the community for their social status. Their position depends on the current social values in the community. Contact with opinion leaders is important for the group to be influenced and adopt the desired behavior. The type of individual who is considered a guide or opinion leader varies by community.

The fundamental function of the opinion leader is to be a catalyst and transmitter of opinions: to provoke group reactions, to catalyze and transmit opinions to the group. But there are other roles for opinion leaders. Monique Augras (1980, p. 42) underlines that communication within each group is important and, therefore, all personal relationships are transmitting information processes and the group (as a whole) acts as a recipient of information for its members and source of information for external groups. In this perspective, the formation of opinions is influenced not only by affective involvement linked to greater or lesser action but also by the amount, orientation, and meaning of information received. The leader plays a privileged role in this process. The leader provokes reactions in the group, catalyzes them, and transmits the information back to the group, causing

new reactions in a chain mechanism. Although the leader may be a demagogue, transmit biased information, or manipulate the opinion for some benefit, he has influence and shapes group opinions (Augras, 1980, p. 43).

### **5.5.2. Benjamin Constant: the liberty of ancients vs. moderns**

Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) emphasizes a fundamental issue to characterize modern societies in relation to the old ones: the individual rights of liberty in relation to collective interests. Constant argues that the “liberty of the ancients” (in ancient republics) is constituted more by active participation in collective power and less in individual interests. To guarantee participation, it is necessary for citizens to sacrifice part of their interests.

Is individual liberty a value of representative democracy? Is representative democracy limited by values, such as that of individual liberty?

“However, as several of the other circumstances which determined the character of ancient nations existed in Athens as well; as there was a slave population and the territory was very restricted; we find there too the traces of the liberty proper to the ancients. The people made the laws, examined the behavior of the magistrates, called Pericles to account for his conduct, sentenced to death the generals who had commanded the battle of the Arginusae. Similarly ostracism, that legal arbitrariness, extolled by all the legislators of the age; ostracism, which appears to us, and rightly so, a revolting iniquity, proves that the individual was much more subservient to the supremacy of the social body in Athens, than he is in any of the free states of Europe today. It follows from what I have just indicated that we can no longer enjoy the liberty of the ancients, which consisted in an active and constant participation in collective power. Our freedom must consist of peaceful enjoyment and private independence. The share which in antiquity everyone held in national sovereignty was by no means an abstract presumption as it is in our own day. The will of each individual had real influence: the exercise of this will was a vivid and repeated pleasure. Consequently the ancients were ready to make many a sacrifice to preserve their political rights and their share in the administration of the state. Everybody, feeling with pride all that his suffrage was worth, found in this awareness of his personal importance a great compensation. This compensation no longer exists for us today. Lost in the multitude, the individual can almost never perceive the influence he exercises. Never does his will impress itself upon the whole; nothing confirms in his eyes his own cooperation. The exercise of political rights, therefore, offers us but a part of the pleasures that the ancients found in it, while at the same time the progress of civilization, the commercial tendency of the age, the

communication amongst peoples, have infinitely multiplied and varied the means of personal happiness. It follows that we must be far more attached than the ancients to our individual independence. For the ancients when they sacrificed that independence to their political rights, sacrificed less to obtain more; while in making the same sacrifice, we would give more to obtain less. The aim of the ancients was the sharing of social power among the citizens of the same fatherland: this is what they called liberty. The aim of the moderns is the enjoyment of security in private pleasures; and they call liberty the guarantees accorded by institutions to these pleasures." (Constant, 1988, pp. 316-317).

The "liberty of the moderns" consists of guaranteeing a sphere of individual autonomy in face of political power, reducing the political intervention of citizens to the periodic choice of representatives, generally professional politicians. The objective of the moderns is the security of their private well-being, calling liberty to the guarantees that the institutions grant to that well-being. The "liberty of the moderns" corresponds to the peaceful enjoyment of private independence.

In turn, the "liberty of the ancients" consists in the right of citizens to intervene directly in collective decisions concerning the *pólis*. The purpose of the ancients is to share social power among all citizens, calling it liberty. The "liberty of the ancients" corresponds to active and constant participation in the collective power. The "liberty of the ancients" is positive as political participation. It aims to share social power.

### 5.5.3. The Spiral of Silence Theory

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1916-2010) presented this theory in the 1970s, alongside the media and public opinion. The Spiral of Silence Theory breaks with the theory of the limited effects of the media and argues that:

- People are gregarious and are afraid of isolation.
- People feel uncomfortable assuming a position alone and, therefore, they use social integration.
- People are attentive to which circulate in society, namely what the majority says and thinks.
- Opinions result from the relationship between the media, interpersonal communication, and individual perception.
- People communicate in society; they enter into interaction processes and influence reciprocally with the information conveyed by the media.
- The need for changes arises naturally.

How do the Spiral of Silence is produced? If the changes go in the direction of people's opinions, they express their opinions; if the opinions of the majority go the other way, people tend to be silent. When people observe the opinions that arise, they go in that direction; otherwise, a spiral of silence is formed.

What is the role of the media in the Spiral of Silence? The media tend to highlight the dominant opinions, reinforcing them while they stifle minorities. Public opinion is confused with the opinions expressed by the media. Divergent opinions are not expressed, because they are not considered or highlighted by the media.

In *Mass Communication Theory*, McQuail (2010, p. 536) says that "the concept of the 'spiral of silence' derives from a larger body of theory of public opinion that was developed and tested by Noelle-Neumann". In *Communication Models—For the Study of Mass Communication*, McQuail and Windahl claim:

"In general terms, the theory of the spiral of silence concerns the interplay between four elements: mass communication; interpersonal communication and social relations; the individual expression of opinion; and the perception which individuals have of the surrounding 'climate of opinion' in their social environment. The theory derives from fundamental social-psychological thinking concerning the dependence of personal opinion on what others (are perceived to) think. Noelle-Neumann has stated the main assumptions of the theory as follows: 1. Society threatens deviant individuals with isolation. 2. Individuals experience fear of isolation continuously. 3. This fear of isolation causes individuals to try to assess the climate of opinion at all times. 4. The results of this estimate affect behavior in public, especially the open expression or concealment of opinions. She adds that this fourth assumption connects all the preceding ones and between them they are 'considered responsible for the formation, defense and alteration of public opinion'. Basically what the theory proposes is that, in order to avoid isolation on important public issues (like political party support), many people look to their environment for clues about what the dominant opinion is and which views are gaining strength or are in decline. If one believes one's own personal views are amongst those in decline, one is less inclined to express them openly. As a result, the views perceived to be dominant appear to gain even more ground and alternatives decline further." (McQuail & Windahl, 1993, p. 116)

The Spiral of Silence Theory asserts that society threatens with isolation anyone who deviates from consensus. For this reason, individuals are afraid (unconsciously, in most cases) of being isolated by society and, therefore, inhibit themselves from expressing their divergent opinions and tend to conform to the opinion of the majority.

## 5.6. Techniques of communication and influence

Information is treated in different ways depending on the strategies and interests involved and may take the form of a communiqué or dispatch (an official report of convenient information, with particular interests) or a report about facts (true information, with no particular interests, but with relevant public interest). In the latter case, the information is news; in the former case, information is worked according to the conveniences of those who prepare and disseminate it, as is the case with advertising, propaganda,<sup>112</sup> and public relations.

Advertising, propaganda, and public relations are three types of strategic communication techniques, i.e. three distinct applications of communication as a persuasion technique, rather than as an information technique. Communication applied to advertising, propaganda and public relations strategies is operational, it is suitable if it has practical results: allowing people to “do X”, as Baudrillard recognizes in *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*:

“Communication is a matter not of speaking but of making people speak. Information involves not knowledge but making people know. The use of the construction ‘make’ plus infinitive [in French, the auxiliary *faire* plus infinitive–*Trans.*] indicates that these are operations, not actions. The point in advertising and propaganda is not to believe but to make people believe. ‘Participation’ is not an active or spontaneous social form, because it is always induced by some sort of machinery or machination: it is not acting so much as making people act (an operation resembling animation or similar techniques).” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 46).

These most common strategic communication techniques are very distinct from each other and they are characterized as follows:

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<sup>112</sup> The term “propaganda” and the action it implies came about when Pope Gregory XV created the *Congregato Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) in 1622, at a time when the Catholic Church was in decline, losing faithful and aggravating the institutional image due to the actions of the Holy Inquisition.



	<b>Advertising</b>	<b>Propaganda and counter-propaganda</b>	<b>Public Relations</b>
<b>Direction of communication</b>	Unilateral communication (without feedback). Inside out.	Unilateral communication (without feedback). All directions.	Bilateral communication (with or without feedback). All directions.
<b>Sender</b>	Sender identification is required by law.	It does not always identify the sender.	Sender identified.
<b>Target Audience</b>	Consumers, opinion leaders, digital influencers.	Undetermined: who identifies or is interested in the messages.	Undetermined: all those who are subject to the action.
<b>Proximity to the public</b>	Null.	Mixed.	
<b>Communication referent</b>	Sender's activities, products, services.	Ideals and values underlying the senders.	
<b>Media used</b>	Mass media.	Mass media and interpersonal means.	
<b>In the media</b>	Clearly identified and paid for.	Concealed or manipulated.	Concealed or manipulated.
<b>Message steps</b>	Attention, interest, desire, memory, action, and repetition. <sup>113</sup>	Attention, interest, and imposition. <sup>114</sup>	Attention, interest, information, and motivation.
<b>The veracity of the message</b>	Hyperbolic and can lie by default.	Sensationalist and can lie by strategy.	Follows the truth or convenience.
<b>Communication objectives</b>	To disclose, suggest, or instill the purchase or consumption of a brand, product, or service.	To impose and promote a political, religious, social, or economic ideology.	To manage communication and a good image with a favorable climate ("goodwill").
<b>Communication durability</b>	Discontinuous: circumstantial objectives.	Continuous: it monitors the life cycle of the company, institution, or organization.	
<b>Results or effects</b>	Immediate.	Immediate.	Short, medium, and long term.

<sup>113</sup> The acronym AIDMAR. For some authors, it is just the acronym AIDA, i.e. attention, interest, desire, and action.

<sup>114</sup> The acronym AII: it draws attention, arouses interest, and imposes ideas (cf. Lampreia, s./d., p. 79).

<b>Competition</b>	Loyal, without direct reference.	Aggressive opposition.	Similar activity.
<b>Regulation</b>	Advertising code, depending on the laws of each country. <sup>115</sup>	It is not governed by any specific code or legislation.	It is governed by the so-called Athens Code. <sup>116</sup>
<b>Example</b>	Omissions or hyperboles (e.g. “The most delicious X on the market”, omitting that X contains animal fat).	Ideologies without observing the facts (e.g. “Vote X and don’t pay more taxes”).	Information with interests (e.g. “The brand X launches the product Y that you were waiting on the Z day”).

**Table 5-2:** Most notable differences between the communication in advertising, propaganda, and public relations (Source: adapted from Lampreia, s/d).

These three communication techniques are planned strategies for applying communication; they are conscious uses of communication to achieve certain goals. They are coordinated forms of communication applied in certain situations and follow plans. From the objective of whoever implements this strategy to the effect achieved on the information, attitudes, or behavior of the recipients, several steps follow.

In advertising, the messages produced and strategically disseminated are a factor influencing the way of seeing (by the “strength” of the content and its form) products, images, ideas, words, tastes, needs, etc. Advertising is an aesthetic and commercial instrument (a mechanism of mass influence) and, in addition, it instigates attention, interest, desire, memory, action, and repetition (AIDMAR) of consumption practices of products, brands, goods, and services. Advertising is a strategic communication channel and an applied and multiform communication technique, especially in a visual, implicit, and rhetorical dimension. It is manifested in several fields; it is omnipresent, and, for this reason, it is also influential in the system of production and reception of verbal or non-verbal (visual) messages.

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<sup>115</sup> In Portugal, for example, it is the *Advertising Code*, the Law n° 330/90 from October 23<sup>rd</sup>, which is amended by Law n° 66/2015, of April 29<sup>th</sup> (the 14<sup>th</sup> and the most recent version).

<sup>116</sup> The *Code of Athens* was adopted in 1965 and it was modified/improved in 1968 and 2009. It consists of a normalization of the ethical behavior of the International Public Relations Association’s members and it is recommended to all who practice Public Relations around the world.

In public relations, the communication models encompass four main or widely accepted genres to describe the evolution of the communication activity. Robert Heath summarizes them in the *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*:

“Four models are widely accepted to describe the evolution of public relations: the press agency or publicity model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetric model, and the two-way symmetric model. The earliest, which is the press agency or publicity model, is described as one-way communication in which truth is not an essential component. The public information model focuses on publicity, however, to the extent that disseminating truthful information is central to the practice. The two-way asymmetrical model tries to persuade and relies on feedback from stakeholders. On the other hand, the two-way symmetric model is considered the most sophisticated form of practice because it focuses on mutual understanding, mediation, and two-way balanced flow of information.” (Heath, 2005, p. 713).

The practice of public relations has naturally evolved over the past few years. Now, it is more attentive to details in relation to the consideration by the consumer/public that were previously discolored. The following Table 5-3 summarizes and distinguishes these four models, demonstrating this kind of turning of attention to the consumer/public:

<b>Press agency or publicity model (circa 1900)</b>	<b>Public information model (circa 1920)</b>	<b>Two-way asymmetric model (from 1920)</b>	<b>Two-way symmetric model (from 1960)<sup>117</sup></b>
Unidirectional communication.	Unidirectional communication.	Bidirectional communication.	Bidirectional communication: it changes both sides.
Closed system.	Closed system.	Open system.	Open system.
The model maintains the <i>status quo</i> .	The public has the right to be informed (Ivy Lee) in this model.	The model uses research on the public to persuade it better.	The model responds to public needs (e.g. complaints, suggestions).

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<sup>117</sup> Model introduced by James Grunig.

Persuasion and propaganda function.	Dissemination of information not always with persuasive intent.	Primary function at the service of the organization.	Communication, balance, sharing, and initiative of interests. It breaks the vision of manipulation of the public and organization's benefit.
Incomplete or manipulated information.	The veracity of the information is considered important.		

**Table 5-3:** The four communication models of public relations.

The two-way symmetric model of public relations is the ideal, the most ethical. In *The Public Relations Handbook*, Alison Theaker characterizes it as follows:

“This model is sometimes described as the ‘ideal’ of public relations. It describes a level of equality of communication not often found in real life, where each party is willing to alter their behavior to accommodate the needs of the other. While the other models are characterized by monologue-type communication, the symmetric model involves ideas of dialogue. It could lead an organization’s management to exchange views with other groups, possibly leading to both management and publics being influenced and adjusting their attitudes and behaviors. Communication in this model is fully reciprocal and power relationships are balanced. The terms ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ are not applicable in such a communication process, where the goal is mutual understanding.” (Theaker, 2005, pp. 15-16).

The two-way symmetric model proposed by James Grunig has implications in the social responsibility of modern companies. The two-way symmetric theory is a normative theory of public relations, a model for achieving excellent communication. The concept of “symmetry” implies a balance of interests between the organization and its public. The actions are managed, and their effectiveness is evaluated. Everything is done according to the ethical and political framework of the organization. This model defines communication as an operation to manage. For this model, problem-solving is the main concern of communication.

## 5.7. Communication approaches and studies

The most prominent and most developed approaches or studies on mass communication present peculiar perspectives, demonstrating and justifying the relevance of the media in societies. These approaches are pertinent due

to the technological developments of the media, which become more effective and influential, and the increasingly larger and more complex effects of the media in societies.

### 5.7.1. The Mass Communication Research: audience study

As the media develop and begin to have an audience and to exert influence in the 1930s in the United States, studies and research on mass communication begin to generate a useful, differentiated, and independent body of knowledge in a serious and systematic way (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 18). Thus, traditions or currents of study and research about the social phenomenon of mass communication emerged.

“The first of these traditions received different designations, such as Mass Communication Research, positivist research, functionalist research, dominant paradigm, empirical sociology, North American sociology of communication. All of these terms refer to the research that was developed in the United States in a predominant way, with a positivist, empiricist and quantitative character, oriented towards the solution of practical problems of communication and with a beginning strongly linked to functionalist sociology.” (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 19).<sup>118</sup>

Mass Communication Research is current research on mass communication, which developed essentially in the USA, starting in the 1930s. The motivation for this research group is the social influences and pressures exerted by the mass media (first, radio, then television) on audiences. The various influences and pressures on the opinions, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, or actions of the audiences stimulate studies of an empirical and quantitative nature of the audiences. The objective is to know the number and characteristics of the media audiences, namely the consumption of the mass media products, and to direct the audiences to the advertising companies, which in this way can adapt the advertising message to the characteristics of the different audiences (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 20).

The research on mass communication focuses the study of audiences, the effects of the media, the formation of public opinion, the techniques of persuasion and political propaganda, through a direct practical application with empirical guidance (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 22).

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<sup>118</sup> My translation from the consulted original Spanish edition of the book *Introducción a la Sociología de la Comunicación [Introduction to Sociology of Communication]* (Alicante: Publicaciones Universidad de Alicante).

The most prominent representatives of this research group are Harold Lasswell, Kurt Lewin, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Carl Hovland.

On Lasswell's contribution and the impact of propaganda on mass communication, Armand Mattelart and Michèle Mattelart state in their *Histoire des Théories de la Communication*:

“The first piece of the Mass Communication Research conceptual device dates from 1927. It is the book by Harold D. Lasswell (1902-1978), entitled *Propaganda Techniques in the World War*, which uses the experience of the 1914-1918 war, the first ‘total’ war. The means of diffusion appeared as indispensable instruments for the ‘governmental management of opinions’, both of the allied populations and those of the enemies and, more generally, the communication techniques, from the telegraph and the telephone to the cinema, passing through radiocommunications, have advanced considerably. For Lasswell, propaganda and democracy go hand in hand. Propaganda is the only means of eliciting the masses; it is, moreover, cheaper than violence, corruption or other governance techniques of this style. As a simple instrument, it is neither more nor less moral or immoral than ‘the crank of a water pump’. It can be used for both good and bad purposes. This instrumental vision enshrines a representation of the omnipotence of the media, considered as instruments of ‘circulation of effective symbols’. The general idea that prevails in the postwar period is that the defeat of the German armies is due, in large measure, to the propaganda work of the allies. The audience is seen as an amorphous target that blindly obeys the stimulus-response scheme. The media is supposed to act according to the ‘hypodermic needle’ model, a term created by Lasswell himself to designate the direct or undifferentiated effect or impact on atomized individuals.” (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997, p. 28).<sup>119</sup>

Functional theorists, who embodied Mass Communication Research, have in common with the Frankfurt School theorists the concern about the industrialized, homogenizing, and productivist (and uncritical) culture created by the media. As a current of thought about the media and its effects on society, sociological functionalism focuses on a theoretical commitment based on empirical data. The main differences between these two main approaches to studying and understanding communication and its effects on societies are summarized in the following Table 5-4:

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<sup>119</sup> My translation from the consulted Spanish edition *Historia de las Teorías de la Comunicación [History of Communications Theory]* (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós).

Mass Communication Research	Frankfurt School
USA (from the 1930s).	Europe (1924-32).
Research group.	Thinking group.
Background: verification of the role of the media in the social, economic, and political structure.	Proposal: reformulation of Marxist thinking and attention to the influence of capitalism on culture.
Harold Lasswell; Kurt Lewin; Paul Lazarsfeld.	Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Löwenthal, Erich Fromm, Franz Neumann, Friedrich Pollock, Jürgen Habermas, etc.
Functionalist approach: a perspective on the role and functioning of the media within society and over the masses.	Structuralist approach: a dialectical perspective on reality as a social totality.
Applied approach and empirical analysis (e.g. audience quantification).	Critical approach (to the modern society of mass culture).

**Table 5-4:** Differences between the two main approaches of communication: Mass Communication Research and Frankfurt School.

According to this table and the following Subchapter 5.7.2., it is deduced that the Frankfurt School's critical theory represents the counter-current of much communication research, as Wolf (1992, p. 71) points out.

### 5.7.2. The Frankfurt School: mass society criticism

The Frankfurt School is a Marxist-inspired group of critical and social thinking. This intellectual movement emerged in 1924 and was diluted in 1932. The Frankfurt School recovers Marx's thinking, mainly about the question of the influence and massification of modern capitalist societies in the cultural field.

The Frankfurt School was formed by dissident Marxists aggregated to the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt: Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Löwenthal, Erich Fromm, Franz Neumann, Friedrich Pollock, and, later, Jürgen Habermas, etc. The Frankfurt School criticizes modern societies and mass cultures. For this critical thinking group, the cultural industries control and damage modern culture, covering all areas (cinema, television, popular music, radio, press, etc.). They warn of the danger of diffusion of cultural industries. These industries limit the development of individuals' capacities

to think in a critical and independent way (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 24).

As a Critical Theory, it rebels against “mass culture”, through which art becomes a commodity or even disappears. This movement focuses on the “superstructure” (mechanisms that determine personality, family, and authority), according to Marx’s lexicon.<sup>120</sup> The Frankfurt School moves away from the deterministic analysis of economic infrastructure and focuses on the cultural superstructure, i.e. it insists on the fact that ideology becomes the main instrument for the domination of consciences, allowing to dispense with explicit coercion and providing the legitimations of the political and economic system” (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 24).

For the Frankfurt School, the culture industry<sup>121</sup> is primarily responsible for the massification of society, culture, art, and knowledge. Thus, this group of critical thinking denounces the destructive capacity of capitalism, which is responsible for the stagnation of political, critical, and cultural awareness. The context in which the Frankfurt School appears is marked by mass culture as an important instrument for the success of the capitalist monopoly:

“The universal, commercialized, mass culture was the chief means by which this success for monopoly capital had been achieved. The whole system of mass production of goods, services and ideas had more or less completely sold the system of capitalism, along with its devotion to technological rationality, consumerism, short-term gratification, and the myth of ‘classlessness’. The *commodity* is the main ideological instrument of this process since it seems that fine art and even critical and oppositional culture can be marketed for profit at the cost of losing critical power.” (McQuail, 1983, p. 62).

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<sup>120</sup> The term “superstructure” belongs to the lexicon of *The German Ideology*, by Marx and Engels (1998, p. 98). Bottomore (2001, p. 45) explains that this term is used in *The German Ideology* “where a reference is made to ‘the social organization evolving directly out of production and commerce’”, and it is related to the concept of “infrastructure”. It is a metaphor, as they are terms that refer to a building, but serve to represent the idea that the economic structure of society (the infrastructure) conditions the existence, the State, and the social consciousness (the superstructure).

<sup>121</sup> Adorno (2001, p. 98) confesses that the expression “culture industry” replaced the term “mass culture” and it was probably used for the first time in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* written by Adorno and Horkheimer and published in 1947.



In the essay “The schema of mass culture”, Adorno (2001, p. 61) criticizes what he calls the “commercial character of culture”. When people do not adhere spontaneously to mass culture, they are “obliged” to, and today anyone who is incapable of being and living in this prescribed fashion and effortlessly reproduce the formulas, conventions, and judgments of mass culture as if they were his own, is socially threatened:

“Formerly the supposed penalty merely lay in not being able to participate in what everyone else was talking about. Today anyone who is incapable of talking in the prescribed fashion, that is of effortlessly reproducing the formulas, conventions and judgements of mass culture as if they were his own, is threatened in his very existence, suspected of being an idiot or an intellectual. Looking good, make-up, the desperately strained smile of eternal youth which only cracks momentarily in the angry twitching of the wrinkles of the brow, all this bounty is dispensed by the personnel manager under threat of the stick. People give their approval to mass culture because they know or suspect that this is where they are taught the mores they will surely need as their passport in a monopolized life. This passport is only valid if paid for in blood, with the surrender of life as a whole and the impassioned obedience to a hated compulsion. This is why mass culture proves so irresistible and not because of the supposed ‘stultification’ of the masses which is promoted by their enemies and lamented by their philanthropic friends.” (Adorno, 2001, p. 92).

In another essay from 1967 and entitled “Culture industry reconsidered”, Adorno reveals the origin of the term “culture industry”:

“The term culture industry was perhaps used for the first time in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which Horkheimer and I published in Amsterdam in 1947. In our drafts we spoke of ‘mass culture’. We replaced that expression with ‘culture industry’ in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art. From the latter the culture industry must be distinguished in the extreme. The culture industry fuses the old and familiar into a new quality. In all its branches, products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan.” (Adorno, 2001, p. 98).

For Adorno, the masses are the ideology of the culture industry, even though the culture industry itself could scarcely exist without adapting to the masses. The culture industry impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves.

“The culture industry turns into public relations, the manufacturing of ‘goodwill’ per se, without regard for particular firms or saleable objects. Brought to bear is a general uncritical consensus, advertisements produced for the world, so that each product of the culture industry becomes its own advertisement.” (Adorno, 2001, p. 100).

As a critical theory, the Frankfurt School is a movement of critical and social intervention concerning the perversities of industrialized and mass societies. The Frankfurt School’s members argue that the analysis of the mass media must be carried out within the broadest analysis of the industrial and post-industrial social system, in which they (the media) participate as an important part. Therefore, the analysis of the mass media appears as inherent to a specific aspect of the individual-society relationship, i.e. to the mechanisms of manipulation of the individual conscience through which the capitalist system imposes itself on the individual conscience, says Lucia Demartis (2006, p. 173). Modern man renounces his individual freedom and becomes an easy prey for consumerist fashions; he prefers the economic well-being and standardizes his behavior with those of the masses. The consequence is the emergence of conformism and mimicry, which are typical of today’s societies (Demartis, 2006, p. 173). Thus, one of the primary functions of the mass media is to spread the values of consumption, indicating how desirable, beautiful, and necessary is a given commodity to be consumed. Accordingly, the industrial society can perpetuate itself, while creating a consensus in individuals. This social consensus ensures the maintenance of industrial society.

The impact of the Frankfurt School on the so-called “culture industry” is central to the criticism of mass culture. According to Giddens:

“Members of the Frankfurt School of critical theory [...] were highly critical of the effects of mass media on the population and culture. The Frankfurt School was established in the 1920s and ‘30s, consisting of a loose group of theorists inspired by Marx who nevertheless saw that Marx’s views needed radical revision. Among other things, they argued that Marx had not given enough attention to the influence of culture in modern capitalist societies. Members of the Frankfurt School argued that leisure time had effectively been industrialized. Their extensive studies of what they called the ‘culture industry’—such as the entertainment industries of film, TV; popular music, radio, newspapers and magazines—have been very influential in the field of cultural studies. They argued that in mass societies, the production of culture had become just as standardized and dominated by the desire for profit as other industries. The concept of a mass society suggests that cultural differences have become levelled down in the densely populated developed societies, where cultural products are targeted at the largest possible audience. In a mass society, the leisure industry was used to induce appropriate

values amongst the public: leisure was no longer a break from work, but a preparation for it. Members of the Frankfurt School argued that the spread of the culture industry, with its undemanding and standardized products, undermined the capacity of individuals for critical and independent thought. Art disappears, swamped by commercialization—‘Mozart’s Greatest Hits’, for example, or student posters of the great works of art—and culture is replaced by simple entertainment.” (Giddens, 2009, pp. 749-751).

The products of the culture industry paralyze the imagination and spontaneity. They are made in such a way that their proper apprehension requires not only promptness of instinct, observation skills, and specific competence. However, they are also made to prevent the spectator’s mental activity (Wolf, 1992, p. 76). They are products built on purpose for relaxed and non-compromising consumption, i.e. the spectator must not act in his own head, as the product prescribes all reactions, as Adorno and Horkheimer justify in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

In *Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture*, Adorno denounces the influence and manipulation of messages from the mass media at the service of a culture industry, just like television does:

“But the heritage of polymorphic meaning has been taken over by cultural industry inasmuch as what it [television] conveys becomes itself organized in order to enthrall the spectators on various psychological levels simultaneously. As a matter of fact, the hidden message may be more important than the overt, since this hidden message will escape the controls of consciousness, will not be ‘looked through,’ will not be warded off by sales resistance, but is likely to sink into the spectator’s mind.” (Adorno, 1957, p. 479).

Television manipulates the public through the reality/visual illusion effects of its latent and moving messages, which pretend to say one thing and say another. They are ideological messages. The manipulation of the public is intended and achieved by the culture industry as dominance over societies (Wolf, 1992, p. 79). The viewer knows beforehand how the story of a film or book (as light products of the culture industry) ends. In short, for the critical theory of the Frankfurt School:

- The starting question is the analysis of the mass-market and economic system.
- Society is understood as a whole, an integrated system, or structure.
- The individual is not separated or opposed to society; he is under the power of a society that monopolizes and manipulates him.
- The mass-market imposes standardization of tastes, needs, uses, and customs, promoting stereotypes, and offer low quality of products

for consumption.

- The culture industry is born in the masses and it massifies art and culture.
- The mass media are cultural industries with harmful effects; the media does not benefit the public with the non-fulfillment of their social functions.
- The structure and content of the media reflect the strategy of manipulation of the cultural industry.
- The products of the culture industry have low quality, but they satisfy individuals because people are undemanding and uncritical.

Adorno and Horkheimer create the concept of “dialectic of enlightenment” to criticize the instrumental reason,<sup>122</sup> which supplants the objective reason and admits order in the world and meaning for human life. The Frankfurt School highlights the fundamental role that ideology plays in the communicational dimension in modern societies, since the media would be the vehicles that propagate ideologies of the dominant classes, imposing them on the popular classes by persuasion, manipulation, or camouflage.

### 5.7.3. Cultural Studies

In *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies—The Key Concepts*, John Hartley (2004, p. 49) summarizes that the cultural studies are the study of:

- a) The nexus between consciousness and power (culture as politics).
- b) The identity-formation in modernity (culture as ordinary life).
- c) The mediated popular entertainment culture (culture as text).
- d) The expansion of difference (culture as plural).

Cultural Studies is a theoretical model that focuses on communication and its effects on societies. Emerging in the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Marxist thinkers Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, Cultural Studies places the media at the heart of society, interrelating them to institutions and individuals (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 129). The contribution of this approach is the intellectual framework necessary to understand the cultural dimension in which individuals and institutions are involved, in which the media are included. For this reason, Cultural Studies are a cultural approach (a “logic [dialectic] of culture”) (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 129).

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<sup>122</sup> The reason that governs and privileges the search only for what can be useful or operational for the individual himself.

While the receiver is understood by the Critical Theory as being disappeared in the masses where he is inserted, Cultural Studies considers the receiver as someone with idiosyncratic characteristics and peculiar needs, endowed with cultural and cognitive capacities; he is not an abstraction, he is a concrete being with a cultural repertoire to which it draws when he receives, selects or interprets and assimilates the messages that are sent to him by the media.

For Cultural Studies, communication and culture are closely interrelated. To communicate is not to manipulate, as Critical Theory generally understands, but it is an always renewed symbolic exchange. Cultural Studies focused on the relationships between the social structure, the historical context, and the action of the media, with the aim of determining how to assign meaning to quotidian reality in shared practices (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p 131).

Cultural Studies focuses mainly on the analysis of a specific social process, which is related to the attribution of meaning to reality, the evolution of a culture, shared social practices, a common area of meanings, states Wolf (1992, p. 94). The concept of “culture” encompasses both the meanings and values that arise and diffuse in social classes and groups, as well as the effective practices through which these meanings and values are expressed and in which they are contained (Wolf, 1992, p. 94). In relation to such definitions and ways of life (collective structures), Wolf adds that the mass media play an important role, insofar as they act as active elements of those same structures.

Culture is understood as a set of meanings, values, experiences, uses, and customs adopted by a given society, while the media are conceived as dynamic elements in the cultures in which they operate. In this context, the Sociology of Communication must expose and understand the dialectic between the social system and the transformations of the cultural system (Wolf, 1992, pp. 94-95), i.e. the structures and processes by which the mass media (as a social institution) maintain and reproduce social and cultural stability.

However, Cultural Studies and Critical Theory are close; both recognize the existence of a dominant cultural system acting on the audience through the mediation or interposition of the mass media (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 131). An ideological role played by the mass media on culture, audience, and individuals is recognized. Orthodox information flows are disseminated and circulate in culture. These flows convey preferential and ideologically codified meanings through the media. Contrary to Critical Theory, a minimum degree of individual freedom is advocated to apprehend the meanings. The audience is differentiated, and a part of that audience can

recognize and interpret in its own way the conveyed meanings, i.e. the audience may follow a heterodox way. The reactions of individuals to the content they receive from the media (e.g. from a television program) are heterogeneous.

## 5.8. Questions for review and reflection

1. What points us to the fact that we are living in an information society?
2. Are the media the cause or the effect of social change?
3. What are the fundamental traits of public opinion, according to Gabriel Tarde's characterization of the audiences?
4. What are the main perspectives mentioned by McQuail regarding the role of the media in society?
5. How to explain the emergence of a more enlightened public opinion? Is this public opinion a cause or a consequence of the media?
6. What is the relationship between the formation of public opinion and the massification of societies?
7. How to differentiate the socialization process and the moral influence or indoctrination of the media?
8. How do audiences shape ideas about what happens in the world? How do audiences select a part of the messages they receive? How do audiences process these messages and how do they relay them? How does a person get information, judgments, and act accordingly in an information society?
9. What is the responsibility of the media in forming a spiral of silence?
10. What does the Frankfurt School defend and criticize? What is the Frankfurt School's perspective on the media and the process of massification of societies?
11. Do the media increase or decrease social compliance?
12. Do the media strengthen or weaken social institutions?
13. Do the media benefit or hinder the civic and intellectual production of its audiences?
14. Do the media clarify or control and manipulate public opinion?



# CHAPTER SIX

## LUHMANN: THE SOCIETY AS A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

“Communication happens only if somebody understands it at least roughly or perhaps even misunderstands it; in any case, somebody must understand enough so that communication can continue.”  
(Luhmann, 2013, p. 54).

Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998) emphasizes the relationship between communication and society. Society is a system of which communication is a part. Communication is essential and works to affirm the system itself. As Luhmann (2013, p. 210) recognizes in *Introduction to Systems Theory*, the system depends on communication. In this perspective, Luhmann attributes more importance to the social system than to the individuals (agents of communication) that integrate the system. Communication is the most fundamental element or device in the systems. Without communication, systems do not develop nor are they systems. A system is characterized by dynamism. Communication gives dynamism to the system and regulates social relations in the system. Luhmann understands “social systems as symbolically constituted and bounded entities produced through human communication, and as constituting the frameworks of meaning within which people live their lives” (Scott, 2007, p. 166).

### 6.1. The improbability of communication

Luhmann’s perspective on communication is cybernetic and problematizing: cybernetic<sup>123</sup> because it favors the conduct and regulation of the communication process in the system; problematizing because it focuses on the obstacles in the communication process (e.g. the improbability of

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<sup>123</sup> According to the original Greek term *kubernetikê*, art or technique of piloting, governing, driving.



communication). Luhmann examines the conditions for the improbability of communication and the need for possible adjustments.

These conditions of the improbability of communication presuppose types of selectivity. Communication is a selective process that regulates social relations; it is a selection at three different levels:

1. Selections in the production of informative content (e.g. idiosyncrasy, the individualism of conscience).
2. Selection in the transmission or diffusion of informative content (e.g. predisposition during the transmission, the decision of what is transmitted).
3. Selection in the reception of informative content (e.g. context, interests).

The improbability of communication is a problem. Communication only happens and continues as a process if there is any (minimal) understanding. “Communication happens only if somebody understands it at least roughly or perhaps even misunderstands it; in any case, somebody must understand enough so that communication can continue”, says Luhmann (2013, p. 54). For example, when the communication process begins, there is the question of the improbability of understanding communication at the outset. This improbability of understanding is justified by the natural condition of the sender, who is an individual with inherent subjectivities. What one wants to convey, choosing for that purpose the terms and modes that are considered most appropriate or that are the result of idiosyncrasies (selection level 1) is sometimes different from what is transmitted (selection level 2) and it is also different from what the recipient receives (selection level 3). On the other hand, “communication functions only if a consciousness is present, which is to say, if there is somebody who pays attention to the process of communication”, argues Luhmann (2013, p. 196), and “this is not always noted in the communication”. In the essay “The improbability of communication”, Luhmann starts by saying:

“Without communication there can be no human relations, indeed no human life. Communication theory cannot therefore be confined to examining only certain sectors of life in society. It is not enough to engage in exhaustive discussion of particular techniques of communication, even though, because of their very novelty, such techniques and their consequences are attracting special attention in contemporary society. It is equally inadequate to begin with a discussion of concepts.” (Luhmann, 1981, p. 122).

The importance of communication is elevated for social relations and for the social system itself. “Without communication there can be no social

systems” (Luhmann, 1981, p. 124). However, most paradoxical after this recognition is the approach that is developed about communication as a problem. Luhmann considers that communication is improbable, although we experience and practice communication every day; we cannot live without communication (Luhmann, 1981, p. 123). The improbability of communication is double adversity:

- i) It is difficult for communication to happen because communication is not probably (communication is a problem).
- ii) The improbability of communication is a problem and has become imperceptible, which is another adversity.

When communication becomes imperceptible, an additional effort is required: to overcome a series of difficulties and problems of communication for communication to happen and be able to produce the intended and expected results:

“The first improbability is that, given the separateness and individuality of human consciousness, one person can understand what another means. Meaning can be understood only in context, and context for each individual consists primarily of what his own memory supplies. The second improbability relates to the reaching of recipients. It is improbable that a communication should reach more persons than are present in a given situation. The problem is one of extension in space and time. [...] The third improbability is the improbability of success. Even if a communication is understood, there can be no assurance of its being accepted.” (Luhmann, 1981, pp. 123-124).

Luhmann’s perspective on communication is original and paradoxical: it differs from the general and simple tendency to understand communication as the transmission of information between a sender and a receiver. Communication involves a much more complex and problematic process. Communication is not a mere transmission nor is it taken for granted; communication is problematic and (imperceptibly) improbable.

## 6.2. Action, communication, and social systems

In Luhmann’s theory of communication, “sociality is not a special case of action; instead, the action is constituted in social systems by means of communication and attribution as a reduction of complexity, as an

indispensable self-simplification of the system” (Luhmann, 1996, p. 137).<sup>124</sup> In *Social Systems*, Luhmann reinforces the idea/problem that “communication and action cannot be separated (though perhaps they can be distinguished) and that they form a relationship that can be understood as the reduction of its own complexity”, since “the elementary process constituting the social domain as a special reality is a process of communication” (Luhmann, 1996, pp. 138-139). Communication is action; it is selective action, i.e. “communication is the processing of selection.” (Luhmann, 1996, p. 140). “Communication is a state of affairs that runs continuously, an operation that continuously reproduces itself” (Luhmann, 2013, p. 80).

In *The Reality of the Mass Media*, Luhmann begins by extolling the role of communication in society, stating: “whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media” (Luhmann, 2000, p. 1). This positioning reinforces the importance of communication and mass media in the social system that it builds. According to Luhmann (2013, p. 61), whatever happens in society is communication. In a way, the construction of the system by the media extends to public opinion, which is the result of communication (Luhmann, 2013, p. 115).

Luhmann presents a conception of public opinion emphasizing its negative social role. In his studies on mass communication, he considers that public opinion has lost its original meaning: it is no longer the result of rational discussion on topics of public interest by individuals integrated into civil society to become the coincidence of general attention on a topic, one that is considered more relevant than others due to different circumstances.

One of Luhmann’s main focuses of analysis has to do with public communication, about which it is important to know:

- How are the public opinion topics conceived?
- How do public opinion topics acquire priority interest?
- How do some public opinion topics replace other topics?

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<sup>124</sup> Luhmann distinguishes his concept of communication from Habermas’s theory of communicative action, namely in the issue concerning the consensus produced by the act of communication in Habermas’s theory (Luhmann, 2013, pp. 205-206). What comes after the consensus? Luhmann also disagrees with Habermas’s distinction between strategic action and communicative action, preferring to attribute more relevance to the temporal and sequential continuation of the communication process, which the author calls “autopoiesis” of communication, i.e. “the self-reproduction of life by those elements that have in turn been produced in and by the living system” (Luhmann, 2013, p. 43).

According to Luhmann, public opinion fulfills its function when it brings a topic to the public discussion (Espinara, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 44), considering that:

- There are always too many public opinion topics.
- There are priority topics.
- The selection of topics results from rules of attention.
- There is an order in the events that give rise to topics.

Therefore, Luhmann concludes that the media create and maintain public attention and dialogue on topics (Espinara, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 45), following the principle of agenda-setting. The media use mechanisms to select events, convert them into news and opinions, structure topics, and keep them on the agenda.

Luhmann's perspective constitutes a theory of society as a sociology of communication, based on the following assumptions:

- Societies are composed of people and systematic human relations.
- Societies are integrated by consensus and complemented by common opinions and objectives.
- Societies are geographically delimited regional units.

The systemic theory of communication is based on this presupposed. Consensus and complementarity are products of social processes and not constitutive elements: constitution and social integration do not occur by consensus, but through the creation of identities, references, values, and objects through communication processes.

Systems theory conceives complex reality as a system, whose elements interact according to a circularity model. In this system, all elements are mutually conditioned. The meaning of each singular element is not sought in the element itself but in the system of relations in which it is inserted (Demartis, 2006, p. 24). There are phenomena in the system in a reciprocal relationship. Systems are not static; they are dynamic, they are constantly evolving and interacting.

According to this theory, the social system is composed only of communications (messages and information). Systemic theory emerges as the best fit for the global society without communication frontiers, where the meaning of territorial societies disappears.

What are the social systems? Social systems are structures of communicative connections that produce and process information. The information is seen in the sense of "novelty" and not simply as any message transmitted or received. A message, a symbol, or a code becomes "information" when it has a selective effect on a system. A social system

consists of communications, interactions that contain information. Communications connect communications. The system stops when communication ends. Consequently, social systems are self-organizing and self-productive, a kind of autopoiesis.

In the essay “The concept of society”, Luhmann starts from the concept of “communication” and transposes the sociological theory from the concept of “action” to that of the “system”. His intention is to present the social system as an operationally closed system, constituted only by its own operations, which reproduces communications from communications (Luhmann, 1992, p. 73). He argues that only with the concept of “communication” can a social system be conceived as an autopoietic system, i.e. as a system of elements (namely communications) that it produces and reproduces through communications.

Luhmann elaborates a conception of society as an autopoietic system and characterizes the reproductive operation of the system as communication. For Luhmann, the concept of “communication” is a decisive factor in determining the concept of “society”. A society is defined depending on how communication is defined. He explains that the concept of “communication” cannot be reduced to a communicative action and register the agreement of other people, either as a mere effect of this action, as well as normative implication (in the sense of Habermas) nor can it be understood as transmitting information from one place to another. In the systems theory and communication theory, the concept of “communication” allows us to state that all communication can only be produced through communication (Luhmann, 1992, p. 74).

Mass communication has social effects because:

- The media have the power to influence the masses.
- There are multiple relations between the media and the social system (the field of politics, culture, economics, etc.).
- Greater importance is attached to studies on the media and their influences.
- The need to inquire about the effects of the media on the public is recognized.

However, the effects or influences of the media on society are neither mechanical nor uniform; they are indirect, diffuse, and differentiated. According to *The Society of Society*:

“Communication is also genuinely social, because in no way and in no sense can a ‘common’ collective conscience be produced: communication works without reaching a consensus in the full sense of a truly complete agreement. Communication is the smallest possible unit of a social system; that is, it is

this unit to which communication still reacts with communication. It is—and this is another version of the same argument—*autopoietic* insofar as it only occurs in a recursive relation with other communications and, therefore, only in a structure whose reproduction coincides with each of the communications.” (Luhmann, 2006, p. 58).<sup>125</sup>

Therefore, society is a communication system, in addition to being a social system of multiple and permanent relations between all its constituent elements.

### 6.3. Questions for review and reflection

1. What are social systems and what is the role of the media in these systems?
2. Do the mass media expand or reduce the possibility of open public debate?
3. How are the most relevant topics developed and how do they become priority interest topics?

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<sup>125</sup> My translation from the consulted Spanish edition *La Sociedad de la Sociedad* [*The Society of Society*] (Ciudad de México: Editorial Herder), based in the original title in German *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, published in 1997.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# HABERMAS: THE UNIVERSAL PRAGMATICS

“The world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere  
in appearance only.”  
(Habermas, 1991, p. 171).

“[...] within the framework of the manufactured public sphere  
the mass media are useful only as vehicles of advertising.”  
(Habermas, 1991, p. 217).

Habermas’s (1929-) work can be divided into five general research topics. In *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction*, James Gordon Finlayson gives a bigger picture of the extensive number of Habermas’s publications, by placing these five different parts of his work in the context of the whole project. To that end Finlayson (2005) begins by offering an outline of Habermas’s “entire body of mature work”, which is divided up into five research programs:

- 1) The pragmatic theory of meaning.
- 2) The theory of communicative rationality.
- 3) The program of social theory.
- 4) The program of discourse ethics.
- 5) The program of democratic and legal theory, or political theory.

Finlayson explains that, on the one hand, each program is relatively self-standing, and makes a contribution to a separate area of knowledge, on the other hand, each stands at the same time in a more or less systematic relation to all the others.

All these topics will be of Sociology of Communication’s interest, especially the topics 1), 2) and 4), which involve the dialectic between communication and society. Habermas’s conception of his own work of critical theory, in general, seen as an ongoing research program, consists of a general theory of communication or universal pragmatics, which follows



the next stage of serving as the basis for a general theory of socialization or theory of the acquisition of communicative competence, culminating in a theory of social evolution.

The expression “communicative action” is essential in Habermas’s perspective, as he explains in “Objectivist and Subjectivist Approaches to Theory Formation in the Social Sciences”:

“By communicative action I understand symbolically mediated interaction. It is governed by binding norms that define reciprocal expectations about behavior and that must be understood and acknowledged or recognized by at least two acting subjects. Social norms are enforced through sanctions. Their meaning is objectified in symbolic expressions and is accessible only through ordinary language communication.” (Habermas, 2001a, p. 12).

In an essay entitled “What is universal pragmatics?”, from 1976, Habermas also explains that the reason for universal pragmatics is the universal conditions of possible communicational understanding.

“The task of universal pragmatics is to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding [*Verständigung*]. In other contexts one also speaks of ‘general presuppositions of communication,’ but I prefer to speak of general presuppositions of communicative action because I take the type of action aimed at reaching understanding to be fundamental. Thus I start from the assumption (without undertaking to demonstrate it here) that other forms of social action—for example, conflict, competition, strategic action in general—are derivatives of action oriented to reaching understanding [*verständigungsorientiert*]. Furthermore, as language is the specific medium of understanding at the sociocultural stage of evolution, I want to go a step further and single out explicit speech actions from other forms of communicative action. I shall ignore nonverbalized actions and bodily expressions.” (Habermas, 1979a, p. 1).

Communicative action only reaches the proposed understanding under some assumptions and conditions, just like any other social action. Habermas (1979a, p. 2) explains that “anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated [or redeemed]”, and “insofar as he wants to participate in a process of reaching understanding”, he cannot avoid raising the following validity claims, i.e. he claims to be:

- a) Uttering something understandably.
- b) Giving [the hearer] something to understand.
- c) Making himself thereby understandable.
- d) Coming to an understanding with another person.

According to Habermas, the communicative action will be and remain acceptable and stable if these validity requirements are met:

“The speaker must choose a comprehensible [*verständlich*] expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true [*wahr*] proposition (or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully [*Wahrhaftig*] so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right [*richtig*] so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified.” (Habermas, 1979a, pp. 2-3).

The purpose of life in society (i.e. the sociability) and communicative practice (i.e. the communicability) is to reach an understanding and agreement based on shared knowledge and mutual trust. Habermas (1979a, p. 3) clarifies that the “agreement is based on recognition of the corresponding validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness”, but also recognizes the word “understanding” is ambiguous.

“In its minimal meaning it indicates that two subjects understand a linguistic expression in the same way; its maximal meaning is that between the two there exists an accord concerning the rightness of an utterance in relation to a mutually recognized normative background. In addition, two participants in communication can come to an understanding about something in the world, and they can make their intentions understandable to one another.” (Habermas, 1979a, p. 3).

All communicative actions must be guided by this normative background of universal pragmatics, following routines, roles, conventional forms of life, and communication for understanding. Otherwise, the individual action (including communicative action) would remain indeterminate.

“All communicative actions satisfy or violate normative expectations or conventions. Satisfying a convention in acting means that a subject capable of speaking and acting takes up an interpersonal relation with at least one other such subject. Thus the establishment of an interpersonal relation is a criterion that is not selective enough for our purposes.” (Habermas, 1979a, p. 35).

In “Reflections on Communicative Pathology”, Habermas (2001b, p. 155) presents communicative action and reason as a paradigmatic case of explicit action and reason that is oriented to reaching understanding. The communicative action is the action whose success depends on the recipient’s response to the validity claims made by the sender.

“Of course the concept of interpretation easily leads to the misconception that the activity of the communicative agent is in the first instance that of a cognizing subject who first interprets a situation and then goes about disseminating that interpretation socially. This misunderstanding can be avoided by (a) tying the concept of communicative action to the condition that participating subjects assume an attitude oriented toward reaching understanding rather than toward reaching success, and (b) tying mutual understanding to a consensus not only about truth claims, but also about sincerity—and rightness claims.” (Habermas, 2001b, p. 127).

Therefore, there are three universal validity claims (Habermas, 1984a, p. 99):

- 1) Intelligibility (of the expression).
- 2) Sincerity (of the intention expressed by the speaker).
- 3) Normative rightness (of the expression relative to a normative background).

According to “Reflections on Communicative Pathology”:

“[...] the communication can be systematically distorted only if the internal organization of speech is disrupted. This happens if the validity basis of linguistic communication is curtailed surreptitiously; that is, without leading to a break in communication or to the transition to openly declared and permissible strategic action. The validity basis of speech is curtailed surreptitiously if at least one of the three universal validity claims to intelligibility (of the expression), sincerity (of the intention expressed by the speaker), and normative rightness (of the expression relative to a normative background) is violated and communication nonetheless continues on the presumption of communicative (not strategic) action oriented toward reaching mutual understanding. This is only possible by splitting communication, by doubling it up into a public and a private process. We can examine how this happens by further looking at defense mechanisms. Since systematically distorted communication continues the thread of action oriented to reaching understanding, this disturbance may be culturally normalized under certain conditions.” (Habermas, 2001b, pp. 154-155).

“But when can a communication be considered undisturbed, not systematically distorted, or ‘normal’?”, asks Habermas (2001b, p. 131) in

“Reflections on Communicative Pathology”. To answer this question one must first clarify and understands what Habermas means by “the normalcy conditions of linguistic communication”.

The notion of “systematically distorted communication” is related to the successful completion of a speech act, i.e. what J. L. Austin calls a “misfire” by which the speech act fails. However, since systematically distorted communication threatens the desired actions oriented to reaching understanding, Habermas (2001b, p. 155) says that this disturbance may be culturally normalized under certain conditions. In “Reflections on Communicative Pathology”, Habermas (2001b, p. 155) adds that “systematically distorted communications express a potential for conflict that cannot be completely suppressed but is not supposed to become manifest”.

Communication has a double nature. If the communication is directed to the production of finalized conventions for the consensus before the constituted power, the internalization of codified ideological forms causes in the subject systematically distorted communication (Demartis, 2006, p. 24). Therefore, it is within the communicative relationship that the general implicit assumptions of rationality and truth must be apprehended. If these assumptions are explicit and understood, they allow us to distinguish distorted communication from authentic communication. As Habermas says in “Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures”:

“Rationalization means overcoming such systematically distorted communication in which the action-supporting consensus concerning the reciprocally raised validity claims—especially the consensus concerning the truthfulness of intentional expressions and the rightness of underlying norms—can be sustained in appearance only, that is, counter-factually.” (Habermas, 1979b, p. 120).

Habermas’s “Reflections on Communicative Pathology” justifies that:

“[...] we have to make explicit the normative content inherent in the notion of linguistic communication itself. The expression ‘undistorted communication’ does not add anything to mutual linguistic understanding [*Verständigung*], for ‘mutual understanding’ signifies the telos inherent in linguistic communication. I would like to establish the conditions of normalcy of linguistic communication by way of a conceptual analysis of the meaning of ‘mutual understanding’ because I assume that every speech act has an unavoidable, as it were, transcendentally necessitating basis of validity.” (Habermas, 2001b, p. 136).

The possibility of a “communicative action oriented towards understanding” is opposed to an “action oriented towards success” which

has its end in the pursuit of interests. The central concept of “communicational action” is associated with ethical practice. It highlights the criteria of social functionality. For Habermas, the weakening of the communicational relations praises ethics before the irresistible rise of logic of integrated systems, which are organized around technology and the market (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 116). With this possibility, Habermas proposes his own rationalism of the communicative action. This rationalism is exercised through discursive acts, by which the speakers can guide their actions towards a community sense. For this reason, ethics appears as a compass for the speaker to proceed with his practical and discursive choices.

### 7.1. Public sphere: the public and the private

The concepts of “public sphere” and “public” are polysemic. Habermas recognizes the difficulty in defining them but adds that both are underlying the idea of something (e.g. events or occasions) that become accessible to everyone, open to anyone who wants to participate, unlike those that are closed, private, or exclusive. The character of having publicity<sup>126</sup> helps to understand what the public sphere and the public are. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), Habermas develops an immanent criticism to the category of the public sphere, i.e. publicity, transparency, and openness:

“The subject of this publicity is the public as carrier of public opinion; its function as a critical judge is precisely what makes the public character of proceedings—in court, for instance—meaningful. In the realm of the mass media, of course, publicity has changed its meaning. Originally a function of public opinion, it has become an attribute of whatever attracts public opinion: public relations and efforts recently baptized ‘publicity work’ are aimed at producing such publicity. The public sphere itself appears as a specific domain—the public domain versus the private. Sometimes the public appears simply as that sector of public opinion that happens to be opposed to the authorities. Depending on the circumstances, either the organs of the state or the media, like the press, which provide communication among members of the public, may be counted as ‘public organs’.” (Habermas, 1991, p. 2).

By developing the concept of “public sphere”, Habermas intends to define the idea of spaces or environments where people enter and express

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<sup>126</sup> The quality of being open to public view, in the sense of something made public or that become public.

themselves freely to discuss topics of collective interest. In *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Charles Taylor says about Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*:

“A central theme of Habermas's book is the emergence in Western Europe in the eighteenth century of a new concept of public opinion. Dispersed publications and small group or local exchanges come to be construed as one big debate, from which the public opinion of a whole society emerges. In other words, it is understood that widely separated people sharing the same view have been linked in a kind of space of discussion, wherein they have been able to exchange ideas with others and reach this common end point.” (Taylor, 2004, p. 84).

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the concept of “public opinion” thus characterized by Habermas reveals the power structures associated with or underlying the public sphere, and it can thus lead to social change (Bell, Loader, Pleace & Schuler, 2005, p. 130). The concept of “public sphere” has an abstract, imprecise, and widespread meaning, but it serves for criticism and social action.

“According to Habermas, the ideals of the historical Enlightenment—liberty, solidarity, and equality—are implicit in the concept of the public sphere and provide the standard of immanent criticism. For example, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois society can be criticized for not living up to its own ideals.” (Finlayson, 2005, p. 9).

Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* defines the emergence of public reasoning outside the literary public of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe's coffee houses, the salons, and the table societies (Habermas, 1991, p. 30) and also portrays its gradual decline and disintegration. The advent of a set of freedoms (of the press, of thought, of expression and opinion, of action) was cemented by a political and social context favorable to the development of the public sphere, i.e. a space that is:

- Political and liberal, a central space in the *pólis* and center of social dynamics and collective political actions.
- Discursive, conducive to the production and expression of opinions.
- Social, fostering social interactions (sociability).
- Mediation, prone to the dissemination of ideas, ideals, values, criticisms, opinions, and information by the media.

In the most recent and sharp conceptions about public opinion, Habermas stands out for its complexity and pragmatism. By taking an interest in mass communication and about society and political participation,

*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* establishes the distinction between “public” and “private” to support the conception of public opinion as a manifestation of attitudes.

“For Habermas, the public sphere is an arena of public debate in which issues of general concern can be discussed and opinions formed, which is necessary for effective democratic participation and oils the wheels of the democratic process. According to Habermas, the public sphere developed first in the salons and coffee houses of seventeenth–and eighteenth-century London, Paris and other European cities. People would meet to discuss issues of the moment, with political debate becoming a matter of particular importance. Although only small numbers of the population were involved in the salon cultures, Habermas argues that they were vital to the early development of democracy primarily because the salons introduced the idea of resolving political problems through public discussion. The public sphere—at least in principle—involves individuals coming together as equals in a forum for public debate. However, the promise offered by the early development of the public sphere has not been fully realized. Democratic debate in modern societies is now stifled by the development of the culture industry. The spread of mass media and mass entertainment causes the public sphere to become largely a sham. Politics is stage-managed in Parliament and the mass media, while commercial interests triumph over those of the public. ‘Public opinion’ is not formed through open, rational discussion any longer, but through manipulation and control—as, for example, in advertising.” (Giddens, 2009, p. 750)

Habermas analyses the communicative conditions under which public opinion is formed in today’s societies, based on two dimensions for public opinion (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 41):

- a) Public opinion as a critical instance of citizens in relation to the institutions.
- b) Public opinion as a receptive instance for isolated citizens.

Habermas understands that communication is oriented to reaching understanding between speakers and argues that it is possible to extract rules of action with normative content (the universal discursive pragmatics) from the structure of language. Rules that condition certain ways of acting and that correspond to ethical actions and behaviors.

For Habermas, the public has a general interest and involves/affects each citizen as a member of society. The public sphere belongs to the sphere of social life, a sphere open to all individuals, in which public opinion can be constituted. Citizens are public assembled and agreed with freedom and rationality, without pressure, but with the guarantee to express and publish opinions freely.

Broad audiences require forms of mass communication, means of transfer, and influence (means of the public sphere). The function of the public opinion is, for Habermas, to legitimize the public domain through a critical communication process, based on argumentation principles and rationally motivated consensus principles (Espinar, Frau, González & Martínez, 2006, p. 43) in the public space of discussion.

## 7.2. Communicative action vs. strategic action

In the essay “Technology and science as ‘ideology’” Habermas starts from Weber’s concept of rationality and develops the idea of action rationalization as a communication practice.

“Max Weber introduced the concept of ‘rationality’ in order to define the form of capitalist economic activity, bourgeois private law, and bureaucratic authority. Rationalization means, first of all, the extension of the areas of society subject to the criteria of rational decision. Second, social labor is industrialized, with the result that criteria of instrumental action also penetrate into other areas of life (urbanization of the mode of life, technification of transport and communication).” (Habermas, 1989, p. 81).

Rationalization is the enlargement of social spheres, i.e. the rationalization of society, which depends on the institutionalization of scientific and technical progress and corresponds to the “technification” of the social, of instrumental action, of communication. Only when men communicate without coercion and each recognizes oneself in the other could the human race to recognize nature as another subject. In “Technique and science as ‘ideology’” Habermas criticizes the instrumental reason imposed by the mastery of technique:

“The superiority of the capitalist mode of production to its predecessors has these two roots: the establishment of an economic mechanism that renders permanent the expansion of subsystems of purposive-rational action, and the creation of an economic legitimation by means of which the political system can be adapted to the new requisites of rationality brought about by these developing subsystems. It is this process of adaptation that Weber comprehends as ‘rationalization’.” (Habermas, 1989, pp. 97-98).

With the emergence of the infrastructures of a society under the compulsion of modernization, Habermas (1989, p. 98) states that the traditional structures are increasingly subordinated to conditions of instrumental or strategic rationality, including vital spheres such as communication and information (the news network).



“Since the end of the nineteenth century the other developmental tendency characteristic of advanced capitalism has become increasingly momentous: the scientization of technology. The institutional pressure to augment the productivity of labor through the introduction of new technology has always existed under capitalism. But innovations depended on sporadic inventions, which, while economically motivated, were still fortuitous in character. This changed as technical development entered into a feedback relation with the progress of the modern sciences. With the advent of large-scale industrial research, science, technology, and industrial utilization were fused into a system. [...] Thus technology and science become a leading productive force, rendering inoperative the conditions for Marx’s labor theory of value.” (Habermas, 1989, p. 104).

Science and technique become “ideology” and compose a complex technical-scientific system subject to industrial production. According to Jean-François Dortier (2006, p. 247), the reason is not reduced, however, to its utilitarian dimension, as it also has a communicational purpose that resists in language and aspires to mutual understanding. Thus, communicative action arises, which is neither instrumental nor strategic. For Habermas, communicational action is a pertinent political concept, as it allows thinking about democracy and the participation of the individual in the public space based on discussion instead of domination.

In “What is universal pragmatics?”, Habermas clarifies that he does not intend to incorporate communicative action (the one that is oriented to reaching understanding) in other types of action. Communicative action and strategic action are different (Habermas, 1979a, p. 41). Strategic action (the one that is oriented to the actor’s success, identifying himself with modes of action that correspond to the utilitarian model of rational-propositional action) and symbolic action (the one that corresponds to modes of action linked to non-propositional systems of symbolic expressions, such as music or dance) differ from communicative action. Individual claims for validity are suspended (in strategic action, veracity; in symbolic action, truth).

In “Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel’s Jena Philosophy of Mind”, Habermas distinguishes strategic action from communicative action, stating:

“*Strategic action* is distinguished from *communicative actions* under common traditions by the characteristic that deciding between possible alternative choice can in principle be made monologically—that means, *ad hoc* without reaching agreement, and indeed must be made so, because the rules of preference and the maxims bidding on each individual partner have been brought into prior harmony.” (Habermas, 1973, p. 151).

In “Actions, Speech Acts, Linguistically Mediated Interactions and the Lifeworld” the distinction between communicative action and strategic action is understood as two variables of interaction, based on the rationality of speech acts and the reached understanding:

“Communicative action is, in other words, to be distinguished from strategic action insofar as the successful coordination of action does not rest on the purposive rationality of the respective individual plans for action, but rather on a rationality that manifests itself in the conditions for a rationally motivated consensus.” (Habermas, 1994, p. 52).

In communicative action, participants coordinate their communication plans among themselves through linguistic processes of understanding, while in strategic action this potential for communicative rationality remains to be explored, even when interactions are linguistically mediated, on the one hand, and participants coordinate their action plans with each other through a reciprocal exercise of influence, on the other hand.

The use of language expresses a claim of validity. The speaker wants to say something, but also wants to be understood by what he says and recognized by the underlying claim to be expressing a validity and a truth (cf. Habermas, 2003, p. 24; 1984a, p. 278). In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas (1984b, p. 181) reinforces the difference between communicative action and strategic use of language, based on the demand (strategic action) of the interlocutors for understanding and influence. Strategic action is one in which a speaker uses through a statement his interlocutor as a means to achieve a certain interest (and not just to communicate). There is only communicative action when the interaction is aimed at valid understanding and the participants in the dialogue unreservedly harmonize their illocutionary ends (they reach consensus).

As Habermas explains his understanding of communicative rationality in “Some Further Clarifications of the Concept of Communicative Rationality”:

“There is a peculiar rationality, inherent not in language as such but in the communicative use of linguistic expressions, that can be reduced neither to the epistemic rationality of knowledge (as classical truth-conditional semantics supposes) nor to the purposive-rationality of action (as intentionalist semantics assumes). This *communicative rationality* is expressed in the unifying force of speech oriented toward reaching understanding, which secures for the participating speakers an intersubjectively shared lifeworld, thereby securing at the same time the horizon within which everyone can refer to one and the same objective world.” (Habermas, 1998b, p. 315).

Habermas develops a global theory of social action: acting is considered in terms of an interaction that is based on rules of linguistic communication (Demartis, 2006, p. 23). For this reason, he is interested in the universal models of action that structure linguistic communication as a set of ways of saying and doing (pragmatic universals).

### **7.3. Questions for review and reflection**

1. Does the public sphere arise spontaneously or is it manufactured? What is the role of the media in shaping the public sphere?
2. How does general communication theory become universal pragmatics?
3. What is the universal pragmatics? What is the universal pragmatics' task or utility?
4. What are the validity claims of the communicative action?
5. What is the difference between communicative action and strategic action?
6. When can communication be considered undisturbed, not systematically distorted, or "normal"?
7. What is social action? What is communicative action?

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### GIDDENS: THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE WORLD

“[...] the market and (mass) media are dialectically interconnected; we live in a ‘society of the spectacle’ (Guy Debord) in which the media structure our perception of reality in advance and render reality indistinguishable from the ‘aestheticized’ image of it.”  
(Žižek, 1994, p. 15).

Industrialization, namely the invention and implementation of the steam engine, as well as the development of long-distance transportation, has given new impetus to the process of modernizing a social system on a global scale. With the steam engine and means of transport, it became possible for anyone to be in contact with other societies and cultures in a short time (Almeida, 1994, p. 40). Social life is now globalized; a unique society is created that coincides with the planet: a world-society. Thus, nothing that happens in the world is foreign to us (Almeida, 1994, p. 42). Once again, communication (communication systems on a planetary scale) is the decisive and determining factor for this complex and social phenomenon called globalization.

Globalization is a social, total, irreversible, and accelerated phenomenon. It is also a phenomenon that transforms all dimensions of life; it is visible in everyday uses and customs. As Anthony Giddens acknowledges, the world is on a supermarket shelf thanks to globalization. People no longer must wait for the season of their favorite fruits and vegetables and find them near to their homes from remote and exotic locations, even out of season. Before further developments on globalization, it is important to conceptualize and problematize some aspects, namely questions posed by Giddens:

- What is globalization?
- What are the causes of globalization?
- What are the assumed tendencies, factions, or perspectives about globalization and its implications?

- What is the relationship between globalization and communication phenomena?
- What are the risks and effects inherent to globalization?
- What are the roles of science and technology in today’s world? Without their roles would there be globalization?
- What is the contribution of the media in the “democratization of democracies”?

Giddens compares the globalization phenomenon and the supermarket. He says that a supermarket is a place that can tell us a lot about social phenomena of great interest to sociologists at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the dizzying pace of social change and the deepening of a global society:

“Take a close look at the array of products on display the next time you walk into a local shop or supermarket. The diversity of goods we in the West have come to take for granted as available for anyone with the money to buy them depends on amazingly complex economic connections stretching across the world. The store products have been made in, or use ingredients or parts from, a hundred different countries. These parts must be regularly transported across the globe, and constant flows of information are necessary to coordinate the millions of daily transactions.” (Giddens, 2009, p. 140).

The huge variety and quantity of products in Western supermarkets depends on complex economic and social ties that connect people and countries around the world. This also reflects the processes of social change on a large scale. For Giddens, the world we live in today has made us much more interdependent on other people, even though they are thousands of kilometers away. The term “globalization” is appropriate to refer to processes that increasingly intensify interdependence and social relations worldwide. Globalization is a social phenomenon with wide implications.

Giddens is clear and elucidative about what globalization is and what are their social implications. However, the meaning of the concept of “globalization” is also enlightened in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*:

“In popular and scholarly discourse, the term globalization is widely used to put a name to the shape of the contemporary world. In the realms of advertising, policy making, politics, academia, and everyday talk, globalization refers to the sense that we are now living in a deeply and increasingly interconnected, mobile, and sped up world that is unprecedented, fueled by technological innovations and geopolitical and economic transformations. As a way to name our contemporary moment, the

term globalization entered popular media and advertising in the early 1990s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet Union, enthusiasm accelerated for increasing international trade, deregulating national economies, privatizing the state, structurally adjusting developing-world economies, and increasing the transnationalization of corporations. Globalization was the new term that signaled this triumph of the capitalist market. As social science became increasingly focused on globalization, theories of globalization emphasized the transformations in labor, capital, state, and technology that have created a heightened sense of global interconnection or what has been called by the geographer David Harvey 'time-space compression'." (Lukose, 2008, pp. 330-331).

Giddens presents an interesting and accurate critical analysis of globalization. He is dedicated to the comprehensive study of this phenomenon, with several relevant works: *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971); *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990); *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives* (1999). Following social theory as a perspective of thought, Giddens recognizes the importance of studies on globalization and its multiple consequences.

To understand the concept of "globalization", Giddens associates the term with the idea of accelerated social transformation worldwide. The ideas of "the end of the world" and "the end of history" are perceived by the observation of a world in constant and fast transformation, which causes anguish when it is reflected more deeply. On the one hand, the theses of the historical development of Friedrich Hegel (the rational state as a superior state) and Karl Marx (the end of social classes caused by communism and the end of the division between labor and capital) are subjacent to these ideas of "the end of the world" and "the end of history", as well as the theses of Francis Fukuyama's "the end of history" presented in 1992 in *The End of History and the Last Man*,<sup>127</sup> on the other hand, the fictional conception of a society of control and surveillance based on the development of science and technology, culminating in a more stable, predictable and orderly society, in literary works such as *1984*, by George Orwell, and *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley. Such developments led Max Weber, in the essay "Science as a Vocation", to conclude by "disenchantment of the world", a form of dystopia, i.e. failure and disillusionment of utopias and ideologies that inspire social progress.

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<sup>127</sup> Fukuyama's thesis is based on a global consensus on the triumph and supremacy of democratic liberalism and the capitalist market, with the end of the Cold War and communism, leaving a single model for the world.

“Our age is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and above all, by the disenchantment of the world. Its resulting fate is that precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn from public life. They have retreated either into the abstract realm of mystical life or into the fraternal feelings of personal relations between individuals.” (Weber, 2004, p. 30).

The concept of “disenchantment of the world” characterizes modern societies of rationalism, considering this disenchantment process consubstantial to the development of societies, on the one hand, and disproportionate to the process of creating myths and idols, ephemeral celebrities fed by a popular and media culture, on the other hand (Barroso, 2013, p. 107). “Disenchantment” means the dilution of the values and traditions of the world, for the benefit of knowledge, technical/rational means and ends.

Weber’s idea is presented at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it is due to the rationality of societies (the idea of “dis-illusion”), the autonomy of the spheres of social action, the privatization of religion in modern societies. In *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives*, Giddens says:

“There are good, objective reasons to believe that we are living through a major period of historical transition. Moreover, the changes affecting us aren’t confined to any one area of the globe, but stretch almost everywhere. Our epoch developed under the impact of science, technology and rational thought, having their origins in seventeenth–and eighteenth-century Europe. Western industrial culture was shaped by the Enlightenment—by the writings of thinkers who opposed the influence of religion and dogma, and who wished to replace them with a more reasoned approach to practical life.” (Giddens, 2000, p. 1).

Returning to globalization as a current period of permanent and accelerated global social transformation, it is important to reflect on whether this phenomenon is new, whether it is a cyclical repetition or whether its beginning and its gradual development, which culminates in the form of the world where we live today, is ancestral.

Whoever does not consider globalization as a new phenomenon admits the first globalism or time of enlargement of the world to the “new world” with the maritime discoveries of 500 years ago, in which many lands and peoples were discovered and countless spices and other products belonging to local cultural identities were worldwide commercialized. It was an age of

intensification of a new type of global trade and with many products then unknown, which became everywhere.<sup>128</sup>

Now, the forms of social life altered by development are very different, but they have in common (with the admissible first globalism, i.e. the maritime discoveries 500 years ago) the radical opening or approximation of the world and its consequences in the world restructuring. In 1999, in the original edition of *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives*, Giddens admits that:

“We live in a world of transformations, affecting almost every aspect of what we do. For better or worse, we are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us. Globalization may not be a particularly attractive or elegant word. But absolutely no one who wants to understand our prospects at century’s end can ignore it.” (Giddens, 2000, pp. 6-7).

What is globalization? First, the word “globalization” is equivocal and polysemic, although it is known and used everywhere. Its meaning is not clear; however, it may refer to the idea that “we now all live in one world” (Giddens, 2000, p. 7). Globalization has been defined in contradictory terms. Essentially, it defines:

- Homogenization (uniformization or, for the most critical, Americanization)<sup>129</sup> of people’s needs, the use of technological communication devices, information disseminated by the mass media, etc.
- Worldwide process, scope, or applicability (i.e. involving the entire earth), in the sense of an extended “world market”, in which the space for production, consumption, and commercialization extends to a market that is the world.
- Cosmopolitanism, in the opposite sense of localism, with a global “identity” (as opposed to the most peculiar and singular cultural and local identities).

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<sup>128</sup> For example, Asian spices (pepper, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, or nutmeg) that were already in high demand in Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with the maritime discoveries, to the point of determining the will and need to define a specific commercial route for these products to globalize in consumption habits.

<sup>129</sup> Americanisation means the acculturation of local cultural identities in the face of American hegemony, industrialization, and economic liberalization. Thus, globalization is not a passing incident; it is a radical and permanent change in global forms and lifestyles.



McLuhan uses the term “global village” to refer to the expansion of the spatial dimension or scale from the local to the global. With the transformation of local villages into global villages, there is a large-scale standardization of lifestyles, including common motivations, interests, and objectives, as well as the transformation of communication systems. As Giddens says in *The Consequences of Modernity*:

“Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them.” (Giddens, 1996, p. 64).

What happens locally has far-reaching repercussions, just as big, distant, and large-scale events imply local events. Globalization is a geographical process, driven by space and time factors, which influence the development of societies. It results in an increased perception of the world as a whole and imposes a readjustment of thought and social action: from a national dimension to an international and global dimension.

The causes of globalization are diffuse, but globalization can be considered a consequence of modernity. The growth and advancement of information and communication technologies are relevant to globalization. They allow or favor information that flows more freely and quickly. According to Giddens, science and technology are also becoming globalized (i.e. becoming vast and extending to many fields) and making social knowledge and practices global. As we understand Giddens’ previous excerpt, he defines globalization as the intensification of interdependence and global social relations, i.e. the consequence of living in a “single world” where actions have repercussions on a wide scale:

“Globalization refers to the fact that we all increasingly live in one world, so that individuals, groups and nations become ever more *interdependent*. [...] globalization in this sense has been occurring over a very long period of human history and is certainly not restricted to the contemporary world. Nevertheless, current debates are much more focused on the sheer pace and intensity of globalization over the past 30 years or so. It is this central idea of an intensification of the globalization process which marks this short period out as rather different, and it is this sense of the concept that will concern us here. The process of globalization is often portrayed solely as an economic phenomenon. Much is made of the role of transnational corporations whose massive operations now stretch across national borders, influencing global production processes and the international distribution of

labor. Others point to the electronic integration of global financial markets and the enormous volume of global capital flows. Still others focus on the unprecedented scope of world trade, involving a much broader range of goods and services than ever before. Although economic forces are an integral part of globalization, it would be wrong to suggest that they *alone* produce it. The coming together of political, social, cultural and economic factors creates contemporary globalization. Intensified globalization has been driven forward above all by the development of information and communication technologies that have intensified the speed and scope of interaction between people all over the world. As a simple example, think of the last football World Cup. Because of global television links, some matches are now watched by *billions* of people across the world. The explosion in global communications has been facilitated by a number of important advances in technology and the world's telecommunications infrastructure. In the post-Second World War era, there has been a profound transformation in the scope and intensity of telecommunications flows. Traditional telephonic communication, which depended on analogue signals sent through wires and cables with the help of mechanical crossbar switching, has been replaced by integrated systems in which vast amounts of information are compressed and transferred digitally. Cable technology has become more efficient and less expensive; the development of fiber-optic cables has dramatically expanded the number of channels that can be carried. The earliest transatlantic cables laid in the 1950s were capable of carrying fewer than 100 voice paths, but by 1997 a single transoceanic cable could carry some 600,000 voice paths. The spread of communications satellites, beginning in the 1960s, has also been significant in expanding international communications. Today, a network of more than 200 satellites is in place to facilitate the transfer of information around the globe. The impact of these communications systems has been staggering. In countries with highly developed telecommunications infrastructures, homes and offices now have multiple links to the outside world, including telephones (both landlines and mobile phones), digital, satellite and cable television, electronic mail and the Internet. The Internet has emerged as the fastest-growing communication tool ever developed—some 140 million people worldwide were using the Internet in mid-1998. More than a billion people were estimated to be using the Internet by 2007. These forms of technology facilitate the compression of time and space: two individuals located on opposite sides of the planet—in Tokyo and London, for example—can not only hold a conversation in real time, but can also send documents and images to one another with the help of satellite technology. Widespread use of the Internet and mobile phones is deepening and accelerating processes of globalization; more and more people are becoming interconnected through the use of these technologies and are doing so in places that have previously been isolated or poorly served by traditional communications. Although the telecommunications infrastructure is not evenly developed around the world, a growing number of countries can now access international

communications networks in a way that was previously impossible; over the past decade or so, Internet usage has been growing fastest in those areas that previously lagged behind—Africa and the Middle East for example.” (Giddens, 2009, pp. 126-130).

Giddens claims that several factors are contributing to the increase of the globalization process: first, factors such as the end of the Cold War, the collapse of Soviet-style communist regimes, and the growth of regional and international forms of governance, created the conditions for closer ties between countries around the world; second, the spread of information technologies has facilitated the flow of information around the globe, encouraging people to adopt a global stance; third, multinationals have grown in size and importance, having formed production and consumption networks that span the entire world and link economic markets.

All domains of life are affected by globalization and there are implications for the way we live. Traditional institutions (such as the nation, family, work, tradition, nature, etc.) change in structural and functional terms. Globalization is a multiform phenomenon. In *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives*, globalization is not only the development of global culture; it is the development of new textures of experience in time and space and the transformation of everyday life.

What a citizen does in everyday life has global consequences and what happens at the global level has personal consequences. It is a very different world, constantly changing. Globalization affects everyone’s life experiences, mainly due to the impact of electronic means of communication. Globalization is a new agenda for the world.

## 8.1. Conceptualizing globalization

According to Giddens, the phenomenon of globalization, regardless of whether it is perceived in society through social transformations and demands for adaptation to cultural standards, does not raise a single nor consensual perspective. On the contrary, two extreme tendencies or factions<sup>130</sup> are recognized by Giddens regarding globalization:

- Skeptics, for whom “all the talk about globalization is only that—just

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<sup>130</sup> In *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives*, Giddens identifies and characterizes only these two tendencies or factions that take extreme positions: that of skeptics and that of radicals. A third tendency or faction, that of the transformationalists, is recognized by Giddens as the moderate and sensible one, with which the author most identifies.

talk”, because “whatever its benefits, its trials and tribulations, the global economy isn’t especially different from that which existed at previous periods” (Giddens, 2000, pp. 7-8).

- The radicals, for whom “not only is globalization very real, but that its consequences can be felt everywhere” in a global marketplace much more developed than in the past (Giddens, 2000, p. 8).

“The skeptics tend to be on the political left, especially the old left” and globalization is essentially a myth, i.e. “the notion of globalization, according to the skeptics, is an ideology put about by free-marketeers who wish to dismantle welfare systems and cut back on state expenditures” (Giddens, 2000, pp. 8-9). The skeptics tend to be on the political left, as Giddens recognizes. Left-wing political ideologies are generally against the capitalism and consumerism sustained in the process of globalization as a way of mass production, transaction, and consumption of more goods (products, brands, and global services) in a gradually mass society.<sup>131</sup>

What is the most reasonable tendency? Giddens (2000, p. 9) is closer to radicals, because “the level of world trade today is much higher than it ever was before and involves a much wider range of goods and services”. For Giddens (2000, p. 10), globalization is “not only new, but revolutionary”. However, both skeptics and radicals take extreme positions and, as such, hardly get assent:

“Yet I don’t believe that either the skeptics or the radicals have properly understood either what it [globalization] is or its implications for us. Both groups see the phenomenon almost solely in economic terms. This is a mistake. Globalization is political, technological and cultural, as well as economic. It has been influenced above all by developments in systems of communication, dating back only to the late 1960s.” (Giddens, 2000, p. 10).

In addition to these two extreme tendencies on conceptualizing globalization, Giddens (2009, p. 137) refers to a third one: the transformationalists. This one is a more moderate tendency, advocating a more sensible, reasonable, and acceptable perspective:

“Globalization has become a hotly debated topic. Skeptics think it is overrated and that current levels of interconnectedness are not unprecedented. Some skeptics focus instead on processes of regionalization

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<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, right-wing political ideologies is more likely to create social and economic inequalities, as well as to concentrate capital and widen the gap between the richest and the poorest.

that are intensifying activity within major financial and trade groups. Hyperglobalizers take an opposing position, arguing that globalization is a real and powerful phenomenon that threatens to erode the role of national governments altogether. A third group, the transformationalists, argue that globalization is transforming many aspects of the current global order, but that old patterns still remain. According to this view, globalization is a contradictory process, involving a multidirectional flow of influences that sometimes work in opposition to each other.” (Giddens, 2009, p. 149).

Regarding the tendencies of discussion on globalization and the different perspectives assumed, the following Table 8-1 is a synthesis:

Skeptics	Radicals or hyperglobalizers	Transformationalists
<p>The current levels of economic interdependence are not unprecedented.</p> <p>The current world economy is not sufficiently integrated to speak of a globalized economy.</p> <p>The growing regionalization is proof that the world economy has become less integrated.</p> <p>National governments continue to be key figures in the regulation and coordination of economic activity.</p>	<p>Globalization is a very real phenomenon, the consequences of which can be felt practically everywhere.</p> <p>Globalization is a process indifferent to national borders. It is producing a new global order, which derives from powerful flows of trade and production that cross borders.</p> <p>A process that leads to a world without borders, where market forces have more power than national governments.</p>	<p>Globalization is the driving force behind a wide range of changes that are currently changing modern societies.</p> <p>The global order is being transformed, but many of the traditional patterns continue to exist.</p> <p>The changes are not just confined to economies but are also being felt in other areas.</p>

**Table 8-1:** Three tendencies regarding conceptualizing globalization.

The above summary-table distinguishes what each tendency defends about globalization. The transformationalists perspective stands out from the two most extreme tendencies of skeptics and radicals, because the transformationalists is more reasonable and moderate, claiming what cannot

be denied: that the world is in permanent transformation and that transformation tends towards the globalization of all areas of life.

## 8.2. Globalization and communication

Globalization and communication are two social and total phenomena. In addition to this similarity, they are complementary, because there is no globalization without communication. Globalization has been influenced by the progress of communication systems since the 1960s. The best example is that of electronic and instantaneous communication that changes the framework of our social relations.

“Instantaneous electronic communication isn’t just a way in which news or information is conveyed more quickly. Its existence alters the very texture of our lives, rich and poor alike. When the image of Nelson Mandela may be more familiar to us than the face of our next-door neighbor, something has changed in the nature of our everyday experience. Nelson Mandela is a global celebrity, and celebrity itself is largely a product of new communications technology. The reach of media technologies is growing with each wave of innovation. It took 40 years for radio in the United States to gain an audience of 50 million. The same number was using personal computers only 15 years after the personal computer was introduced. It needed a mere 4 years, after it was made available, for 50 million Americans to be regularly using the Internet. It is wrong to think of globalization as just concerning the big systems, like the world financial order. Globalization isn’t only about what is ‘out there’, remote and far away from the individual. It is an ‘in here’ phenomenon too, influencing intimate and personal aspects of our lives.” (Giddens, 2000, pp. 11-12).

Globalization is not a simple process; on the contrary, it is a complex network of processes. “Globalization is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world” (Giddens, 2000, p. 13).

Television, for example, has played a major role in advancing globalization, by transmitting standardized content and formats, exported by the USA. The fall of communism and recent live wars transmitted by television (e.g. the Gulf wars in 1991 and 2003) amplify the global effects of the influences of the media on people, contributing to a mass society or a single world-society.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag (2003) questions the ability of the photography of war to communicate, signify, or sensitize something substantial. This question is important to understand the role of the press photograph as an ethical and practical activity to fulfill social functions (as to inform us about what happens in the world), as Baudrillard asks in the

1990s whether photographs in the news media could really show us the Gulf War (Barroso, 2020b, p. 33).

According to Baudrillard, it is the hypervisualization of the war. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard (1997, p. 28) states that it is “a sort of frisson of the real, or of an aesthetics of the hyperreal, a frisson of vertiginous and phony exactitude, a frisson of simultaneous distancing and magnification, of distortion of scale, of an excessive transparency”. Images of war are not different from war, but “they are not (or not any longer): to the routinized violence of war is added the equally routine violence of the images”, states Baudrillard (2005, p. 77) in *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*. War photographs in the press can assume a realism that characterizes them as hypotyposis of reality (Barroso, 2020b, p. 38), i.e. vivid and realistic descriptions of a situation.

“Globalization, of course, isn’t developing in an evenhanded way, and is by no means wholly benign in its consequences. To many living outside Europe and North America, it looks uncomfortably like Westernization—or, perhaps, Americanization, since the US is now the sole superpower, with a dominant economic, cultural and military position in the global order. Many of the most visible cultural expressions of globalization are American—Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, CNN.” (Giddens, 2000, p. 15).

For Giddens, globalization is a transversal phenomenon in terms of effects, but not in terms of benefits. Being more favorable to the capitalist and liberal economy positions, globalization does not bring the same benefits to other countries or economic regimes outside the framework of liberal, western, and capitalist economics. This idea is corroborated by Eric Hobsbawm. In *Globalization, Democracy and Terrorism*, Hobsbawm (2007) says that the impact of this globalization is most felt by those who least benefit from it. Paradoxically, the globalization is not global. The globalization of the free market generates more and more economic and social inequalities.

### 8.3. Risks of globalization

Globalization is not only democratic in the way it spreads throughout the world, but on the contrary, it shares its benefits and harms differently. Globalization carries ecological, financial, economic, etc. risks that are closely associated with innovation. The main risks of globalization are due to environmental issues, which are also global as Giddens mentions in *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives*:

“We face risk situations that no one in previous history has had to confront—of which global warming is only one. Many of the new risks and uncertainties affect us no matter where we live, and regardless of how privileged or deprived we are. They are bound up with globalization, that package of changes [...] Science and technology have themselves become globalized. It has been calculated that there are more scientists working in the world today than have been involved in the whole history of science previously. But globalization has a diversity of other dimensions too. It brings into play other forms of risk and uncertainty, especially those involved in the global electronic economy—itself a very recent development. As in the case of science, risk here is double-edged. Risk is closely connected to innovation. It isn’t always to be minimized; the active embrace of financial and entrepreneurial risk is the very driving force of the globalizing economy. What globalization is, and whether it is in any way new, are the focus of intense debate. [...] Globalization is restructuring the ways in which we live, and in a very profound manner. It is led from the west, bears the strong imprint of American political and economic power, and is highly uneven in its consequences. But globalization is not just the dominance of the West over the rest; it affects the United States as it does other countries.” (Giddens, 2000, pp. 3-4).

The concept of “risk” is associated with the ideas of probability and uncertainty. The risk implies danger and exposure to future situations. There are unavoidable risks, and these may be resigned, the same does not happen with the avoidable ones, which consequently cause other inevitable and natural risks, because they come from what human beings do in the environment. Therefore, the two types of risks are:

- Unavoidable or natural risks, i.e. caused by Nature, external to human beings (e.g. bad harvests, floods, pests, famines, etc.).
- Avoidable risks, those that result from the direct action of human beings, as they are caused, are manufactured.

Indeed, the risk accompanies globalization. In an increasingly globalized world, risks are also more global and threaten more vulnerable aspects, i.e. large crowds of people, interdependencies, and inevitable physical contacts. Based on this premise, the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* presented a controversial front page about the pandemic by Covid-19. The cover bears the title “CORONA-VIRUS, Made in China, Wenn die Globalisierung zur tödlichen Gefahr wird”<sup>132</sup> putting in question the effects of globalization. Several criticisms have risen against this publication,

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<sup>132</sup> Translation: “CORONA-VIRUS, made in China, when globalization becomes a deadly danger”. Cf. *Der Spiegel*, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.



accusing it of spreading phobias towards China. The front pages of newspapers around the world<sup>133</sup> were and remained dominated—more than six months later—by the coronavirus pandemic.

As *Der Spiegel* writes in its online edition of February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, entitled “How the Coronavirus made globalization a deadly threat”: “As paradoxical as it may seem, the very things needed to save globalization at this moment are isolation, calm and patience”, i.e. precisely the opposite of the planetary order imposed by globalization, i.e. anti-globalization is needed to save globalization.

If globalization, according to Giddens, is fast and multifaceted, these characteristics justify the nature of the risk which, like globalization, is global, fast, and multifaceted, as the coronavirus pandemic proves. Globalization entails asymmetric risks and effects that are still poorly studied and understood:

“Humans have always had to face risks of one kind or another, but today’s risks are qualitatively different from those that came in earlier times. Until quite recently, human societies were threatened by external risk—dangers such as drought, earthquakes, famines and storms that spring from the natural world and are unrelated to the actions of humans. Today, however, we are increasingly confronted with various types of manufactured risk—risks that are created by the impact of our own knowledge and technology on the natural world. As we shall see, many environmental and health risks facing contemporary societies are instances of manufactured risk: they are the outcomes of our own interventions into nature.” (Giddens, 2009, p. 193).

Globalization is an open and contradictory process; it produces phenomena that are difficult to control and predict. Globalization results in new, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and global forms of risk, given the circumstances of the rapid development of the phenomenon, as well as the profound transformations in the world.

## 8.4. Globalization vs. tradition

Tradition is the set of values, norms, uses, customs, actions, behaviors, memories, beliefs, myths, and legends that belong to a culture and that are passed on from generation to generation. Tradition is what is transmitted or delivered in the same way as before was received; tradition is what is

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<sup>133</sup> In the case of the United Kingdom, see the article “‘A national emergency’: what the papers say about the UK’s coronavirus lockdown”, published in *The Guardian* on March 24th, 2020.

transmissible. This is precisely the etymological meaning of the word “tradition”.<sup>134</sup>

Traditions are inherent and specific of cultures, i.e. each culture has its own traditions. Therefore, different cultures have different traditions. Traditions are integrators of individuals in cultures. Individuals following them and do things (uses and customs) like others and, most importantly, like their ancestors, respecting what is valued in the culture to which they belong. Sometimes, individuals follow traditions without knowing their meaning or questioning the reasons why they stick to them. For example, in traditional religious rituals, tradition is fulfilled because other individuals do so, as it is a customary and ingrained (conventional) social practice, and so did their ancestors. In religious sacraments (e.g. baptism or marriage), tradition corresponds to the transmission of practices and spiritual values, the set of beliefs that are conserved and followed with respect and conservatism over many years.

In *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger say that there are two types of tradition:

- The genuine tradition, which is ancestral and maintains its original features even over the years.
- The invented tradition is characterized by adaptations and a set of rules of a ritual and symbolic nature that are established with continued repetition in the face of the past.

According to Hobsbawm and Ranger (2000, p. 1), “‘traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented”.

“The term ‘invented tradition’ is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period—a matter of a few years perhaps—and establishing themselves with great rapidity. The royal Christmas broadcast in Britain (instituted in 1932) is an example of the first; the appearance and development of the practices associated with the Cup Final in British Association Football, of the second. It is evident that not all of them are equally permanent, but it is their appearance and establishment rather than their chances of survival which are our primary concern. ‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly

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<sup>134</sup> The concept of “tradition”, from the Latin *traditio*, from the verb *tradere* in the past participle, means “act or effect of transmitting”, “something that was delivered”.

accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. [...] However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes the ‘invention of tradition’ so interesting for historians of the past two centuries.” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2000, pp. 1-2).

Tradition is different from routine and custom. These last two concepts are commonplace: custom is variable in community life, while tradition is an invariable repetition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2000, p. 2); the routine or convention has no significant ritual or symbolic function like tradition, which acquires a cultural meaning rooted in the identity of a community (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2000, p. 3). A routine (in the sense of a path already trodden and known) has no important symbolic or ritual function for collective life. A custom is variable; it is a habitual practice, a way of proceeding, a mere habit. Then, the following questions are relevant:

- What is the relationship between tradition and globalization?
- How can globalization, being a social and total phenomenon, affect tradition, peculiar and local elements of cultural identity?
- Is globalization a risk to tradition?

Among the risks of globalization, there are also those that modify traditional values or, simply, what is considered traditional in a culture. In this regard, Giddens refers to the transformation of tradition by globalization, i.e. the transformation of local life and “detraditionalization”. The concept of “detraditionalization” does not mean the disappearance of tradition; it implies a reorganization in which tradition is reworked.

Therefore, there is an opposition or confrontation between novelty and antiquity, between the global and the local, between globalization and tradition. Despite this confrontation, there are consequences or risks, like that of many traditions that are nothing more than modernity, according to Giddens. Persistent traditions change (Giddens, 2000, p. 37). In this perspective, all traditions were invented and there was never an entirely traditional society. Traditions are penetrable to change, they evolve over time, but can be transformed or changed quickly (they are invented and reinvented), so there are no entirely pure traditions, according to Giddens

(2000, p. 40). Traditions have generic characteristics to be considered as such. For example:

- Traditions incorporate power and power relationships.
- Traditions have symbolic rituals.
- Traditions are repeated in time.

However, Giddens recognizes that traditions are necessary for societies and will always persist. For example, the Scots kilts are used for celebrations of cultural identity anchored in the tradition of using these garments as a symbol of the ancient. According to Giddens, these are not symbols of Scottish identity, because they are of recent creation or industrial invention. “Kilts were a product of the industrial revolution” (Giddens, 2000, p. 36) and these were not intended to honor a tradition.

“When Scots get together to celebrate their national identity, they do so in ways steeped in tradition. Men wear the kilt, with each clan having its own tartan, and their ceremonials are accompanied by the wail of the bagpipes. By means of these symbols, they show their loyalty to ancient rituals—rituals whose origins go far back into antiquity. Except for the fact that they don’t. Along with most other symbols of Scottishness, all these are quite recent creations. The short kilt seems to have been invented by an English industrialist from Lancashire, Thomas Rawlinson, in the early eighteenth century. He set out to alter the existing dress of Highlanders to make it convenient for workmen. Kilts were a product of the industrial revolution. The aim was not to preserve time-honored customs, but the opposite—to bring the Highlanders out of the heather and into the factory. The kilt didn’t start life as the national dress of Scotland. The Lowlanders, who made up the large majority of Scots, saw Highland dress as a barbaric form of clothing, which most looked on with some contempt. Similarly, many of the clan tartans worn now were devised during the Victorian period, by enterprising tailors who correctly saw a market in them. Much of what we think of as traditional, and steeped in the mists of time, is actually a product at most of the last couple of centuries, and is often much more recent than that.” (Giddens, 2000, pp. 36-37).

The kilt is a paradoxical case, because:

- i) It is invented.
- ii) It is invented by an industrialist.
- iii) It is invented by an English industrialist, who also altered the clothing that people from the highlands wore, for the purposes of industrial productivity.

Giddens concludes that the notion of tradition is unlike kilts; it has been around for many centuries and, once more, the appearances are deceptive. The concept of “tradition” as it is used today is a product of the past two hundred years in Europe (Giddens, 2000, pp. 37-38).

### 8.5. Media and ideology

What is the relation that can be established between the media and ideology? Apparently, the media and ideology have nothing to do with each other. However, to understand the possible relations between the media and ideology, it is necessary to clarify what ideology is beyond its merely political and common sense. Note the following excerpt from Giddens:

“The study of the media is closely related to the impact of ideology in society. Ideology refers to the influence of ideas on people’s beliefs and actions. The concept has been widely used in media studies, as well as in other areas of sociology, but it has also long been controversial. The word was first coined by a French writer, Destutt de Tracy, in the late 1700s. He used it to refer to a ‘science of ideas’, which he thought would be a branch of knowledge. De Tracy’s view has been seen as a ‘neutral’ conception of ideology. Neutral conceptions discuss phenomena as being ideological, but this does not imply they are misleading or biased in favor of particular social classes or groups. In the hands of later authors, however, ‘ideology’ was used in a more critical way. Karl Marx, for example, saw ideology as important in the reproduction of relations of class domination. Powerful groups are able to control the dominant ideas circulating in a society so as to justify their own position. Thus, according to Marx, religion is often ideological: it teaches the poor to be content with their lot. The social analyst should uncover the distortions of ideology so as to allow the powerless to gain a true perspective on their lives [...]” (Giddens, 2009, 746).

If the concept of “ideology”, according to Giddens, was only used for the first time in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (more specifically in 1796, by Destutt de Tracy),<sup>135</sup> the concept was developed half a century later by Littré, when he defined the entry “*idéologie*” in his *Dictionnaire* (1863-1869). Jules Vuillemin (1999, p. 484) adds that, on this occasion, Littré lists three meanings for the concept of “ideology”:

1. Science of ideas, considered in themselves, that is, as phenomena of the human spirit.

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<sup>135</sup> Through the work *Elements d’Idéologie*, according to Adorno and Horkheimer (1973, p. 203).

2. The science that deals with the formation of ideas, in a more restricted sense, then a philosophical system according to which sensation is the only source of our knowledge and the unique principle of our faculties.
3. Theory of ideas, according to Plato.

More or less consensually, the definition of ideology is that of a system of representations and perceptions, ideas and ideals, values and judgments, an explicit and generally organized system which serves to describe, explain, interpret or justify the situation of a group or of a collectivity, proposing a precise orientation for action, according to Guy Rocher (1989, pp. 55-56). It is a coherent system of representations and perceptions. But the concept of “ideology” may have a positive and a negative connotation, i.e. it may be understood by two opposing and fundamental conceptions, a pejorative and a laudatory one.<sup>136</sup>

- a) The Marxist conception of ideology as distortion.
- b) The integrated conception of ideology as a cultural system.

The first conception is that of Marx, mainly that which is presented in his initial works and in *The German Ideology*; the second conception is represented by Clifford Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

With the first conception, the term “ideology” acquires greater notoriety. However, if Destutt de Tracy’s first use has the sense of “science of ideas”, the use of Marx has an essentially critical and pejorative sense, because it means “false conscience” or “false reality”. It is alienating in the sense that it distorts reality and disguises facts or presents them behind a smokescreen (Dortier, 2006, p. 270). In *Ideology and Utopia*, Paul Ricoeur discusses the concept of “ideology” in Marx’s early works as being determined by his opposition to reality. Marx’s task is to determine what is real and this determination affects the concept of “ideology”, “since ideology is all that

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<sup>136</sup> There are other conceptions of ideology. Some of them are noteworthy due to their originality. For example, Max Weber’s conception. Weber conceives ideology as a legitimizing authority. For Weber, every system of power or authority always strives to legitimate itself. Therefore, the place where ideology arises is in the system of legitimation of an order of power. The problem of domination implies a system of motives wherein the claims to legitimacy of an authority attempt to meet the capacity of belief in this legitimacy. Weber assigns a different mediation function to ideology: the legitimation function. This function serves as a link between the Marxist conception of ideology as distortion and Geertz’s integrating concept of ideology. For further development of Weber’s conception of ideology, see Ricoeur’s *Ideology and Utopia* (1986, pp. 181-197).

is not this reality” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 21). The opposition is between ideology and reality. It is necessary to criticize the ideology to proceed with the reversal. Things have been reversed in human consciousness and it is necessary to “reverse the inversion”. This is the procedure of criticism, outlined in *Hegel’s Critique of Philosophy of Law*, written in 1843, although the concept of “ideology” was only developed by Marx later in *The German Ideology*.<sup>137</sup>

“It is interesting to see that the term is introduced in Marx by means of a metaphor borrowed from physical or physiological experience, the experience of the inverted image found in a camera or in the retina. From this metaphor of the inverted image, and from the physical experience behind the metaphor, we get the paradigm or model of distortion as reversal. This imagery, the paradigm of an inverted image of reality, is very important in situating our first concept of ideology. Ideology’s first function is its production of an inverted image.” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 4).

Marx’s critical and pejorative sense of ideology regarding reality refers to influential groups in society, i.e. groups capable of instilling and controlling the dominant ideas that circulate, to justify their position. The media are part of this influential group. Marx intends to lay the foundations for a critical analysis of ideologies as a set of representations, ideals, and values of a social class or group. Ideology is the product of a given social position; it is a superstructure; it is a reflection of the social position of a dominant class, which tends to legitimize its power by justifying it with universal values (Dortier, 2006, p. 270).

In this conception of Marx, there is a relation between ideology and power, insofar as ideological systems serve to legitimize the power held by certain groups. According to Giddens, ideology is the exercise of symbolic power, i.e. “ideology is about the exercise of symbolic power—how ideas are used to hide, justify or legitimate the interests of dominant groups in the social order” (Giddens, 2009, p. 746). Therefore, ideology is a set of ideas or beliefs that are shared to justify the interests of certain dominant groups.

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<sup>137</sup> The criticism begins with the criticism of religion, work already done and completed by Feuerbach. Thus, Marx’s critique of ideology rests on Feuerbach’s critique of religion. It is the model of inverted conscience, which is notorious in *Hegel’s Critique of Philosophy of Law*, when Marx affirms that the foundation of irreligious criticism is this: Man makes religion (which is an inverted conscience of the world, a “fantastic achievement”, an untrue reality) and religion does not make the man (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 23).

There must be ideologies in all societies with inequalities between individuals.

The relation between the media and ideology arises with the question of the possible ideological burden of the content transmitted, whether on television news or generalist programs. The broadcast is carried out in an imperceptible and influential way on audiences. If the news favors the government to the detriment of informative objectivity, the mass media spread ideology and broaden their range of action in society (the messages reach large audiences). In this case, the media disseminate ideology as “values and beliefs which help secure the position of more powerful groups at the expense of less powerful ones” (Giddens, 2009, p. 91).

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the relation between the media and ideology is notorious and violent, feeding the cultural industry:

“In the face of the indescribable power which these media exercise over human beings today—and here sport, which for a long time already has gone over into ideology in the broader sense, must also be included—the concrete determination of their ideological content is of immediate urgency. This content produces a synthetic identification of the masses with the norms and the conditions which either stand anonymously in the background of the culture industry, or else are consciously propagated by it.” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973, p. 201).

In the same critical line of thought as the Frankfurt School, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas understands ideology is a way of distorted communication, the systematic distortion of the dialogue relationship. In a context of recognition of parts in interaction and dialogical relationship, the situation of non-communication must be overcome by recognition, but it is a disease of communication:

“This framework of recognition is important for Habermas because it situates his theory of interaction as a ‘dialogic relation’. The situation of excommunication, which recognition must overcome, is a disease of communication. Ideology is therefore itself a disease of communication. Ideology is not the accidental but the systematic distortion of the dialogic relation. We cannot speak of the dialogic relation except through the process of recognition, and ideology is the system of resistances to the restoration of the dialogic relation.” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 228).

By contrast, Geertz’s conception sees ideology as identity and integration. The concept and interpretation of “ideology” are not pejorative, it is not distortion. In “Ideology as a Cultural System”, a text inserted in the book *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz (1973, p. 220) understands ideology



as a map; a kind of guardian of identity. Ricoeur (1986, p. 258) considers this to be “the integrative function of ideology, the function of preserving an identity”. Ideology is a symbolic mediation and is constitutive of social existence. “The function of ideology is to make an autonomous politics possible by providing the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped” (Geertz, 1973, p. 218). Ideology is always about political power.<sup>138</sup> “It is through the construction of ideologies, schematic images of social order, that man makes himself for better or worse a political animal” (Geertz, 1973, p. 218).

Ultimately, ideology has to do with the nature of human action, which is mediated, structured, and integrated by symbolic systems. As Ricoeur argues, there is a positive side and a negative side in the concept of “ideology”: the integrating conception of ideology as identity and integration; and the Marxist conception of ideology as distortion.

Is it possible an epoch, a society, or a culture without ideology? No, if we consider that the forms of life and the patterns of culture, especially the most globalized, widespread, and visual, are ideological. What is consumed (tangible or intangible products/goods) incorporates ideology, as it almost always uses signs/images with hidden meanings. These forms imply the lack of knowledge of its participants about its essence, who do not recognize the ideology or even think about what they do. It is ideology as a distortion of the view about reality.

As Slavoj Žižek asserts in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, the fundamental dimension of ideology is that which makes it not simply a “false conscience”, an illusory representation of reality; “it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological’” (Žižek, 2008, p. 15). In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels present ideology as an inverted reflection of the real in the consciousness of people living in society and about the nature of their relationships. For Marx and Engels, it is like with the inversion of images in a *camera obscura*:

“The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men—the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appear as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they

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<sup>138</sup> Because ideology always has to do with the question of (political) power, Ricoeur (1986, p. 260) confesses that he is “tempted to say that ideology has a broader function than politics to the extent that it is integrative”.

are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*] can never be anything else than conscious being [*das bewusste Sein*], and the being of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.” (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 42).

Ideology fosters the idea that it is consciousness that determines life. Marx and Engels claim the opposite: “it is not consciousness that determines life; but life that determines consciousness” (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 42).

For Žižek, the primary meaning of “ideology” is in the conception of Marx’s book *Capital*, people ignore what they do or that they participate in the ideology (in the system).

“The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s *Capital*: ‘*sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*’—‘they do not know it, but they are doing it’. The very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive *naïveté*: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it.” (Žižek, 2008, p. 24).

In *Mapping Ideology*, Žižek considers that ideology “seems to pop up precisely when we attempt to avoid it, while it fails to appear where one would clearly expect it to dwell” (Žižek, 1994, p. 4).

“‘Ideology’ can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognizes its dependence on social reality to an action-orientated set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power. It seems to pop up precisely when we attempt to avoid it, while it fails to appear where one would clearly expect it to dwell.” (Žižek, 1994, pp. 3-4).

Ideology does not have to be understood in a cause-effect relationship with society and the economy. For Louis Althusser (1918-1990), ideology is a continuous and embracing set of practices in which all classes participate (Althusser, 1971, p. 168). Contrary to the Marxist understanding of ideology as a set of ideas imposed by a dominant or privileged class on other classes, Althusser (1971, p. 171) maintains that “all ideology has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects”. Ideologies challenge individuals as subjects and operate from the

inside out (instead of operating from the outside in, according to the Marxist interpretation), as they are inscribed in the ways of thinking and living of all classes.

All forms of manifestation of ideology imply a mode of alienation (domination and exploitation). In the case of the media, there is a gap between the image and the reality they present, either through sensationalism and the spectacle of the images or by the neglect to separate the wheat from the chaff, i.e. the truth and the facts, on the one hand, and the fake news and images, on the other. According to Hartley:

“The concept of ideology has become central in the study of the media in particular and communication in general. It is useful in insisting that not only is there no ‘natural’ meaning inherent in an event or object, but also that the meanings into which events and objects are constructed are always socially oriented—aligned with class, gender, race or other interests.” (Hartley, 2004, p. 106).

The concept of “ideology” warns that there are no natural meanings inherent in an event, but that the meanings are always socially oriented, i.e. they are aligned with some factors and interests.

## 8.6. Questions for review and reflection

1. What is the relation between globalization and communication phenomena? Which of these phenomena, globalization, or communication, is the cause of the other?
2. What is the relation between globalization and capitalism?
3. What is the relation between globalization and the fall of communism?
4. Does the globalization of electronic means and devices of communication improve or worsen our understanding of the world, our tolerance for difference, and our relationship with others?
5. What is globalization for Giddens and what are its risks? What are the main tendencies of globalization?
6. What does Giddens mean by “nations today face risks and dangers rather than enemies, a massive shift in their very nature”?
7. Critically comment the following sentence of Giddens: “Apart from some marginal contexts, in the Middle Ages there was no concept of risk. Nor, so far as I have been able to find out, was there in most other traditional cultures.”
8. Do you agree with Giddens, when he says: “Much of what we think of as traditional, and steeped in the mists of time, is actually a

product at most of the last couple of centuries, and is often much more recent than that.”

9. What are the roles of science and technology in today’s world? would there be globalization without these roles?
10. What is the contribution of the media in the “democratization of democracies”? Is media intervention in the political field positive for democracy?
11. What is the relation between tradition and globalization? How can globalization affect tradition, the peculiar and local elements of cultural identity? Is globalization a risk to tradition?
12. What is the relation between the media and ideology?
13. Is it possible an epoch, a society, or a culture without ideology?
14. Do transnational companies really have more power than national governments?
15. Why Giddens claims that the risks of globalization are increasingly manufactured?



## CHAPTER NINE

### SARTORI: THE SOCIETY OF THE VISIBLE

“Television progressively produces the invasion of the image that supplants the word; the screen becomes the place where everything can be shown in a dramatic aspect, so that, according to Machiavelli’s advice, judgment is made from what is seen.”  
(Balandier, 1994, p. 126).<sup>139</sup>

After the invention of the alphabet and writing, in a first phase, and the press, in a second phase, the human being starts to reproduce and distribute information in large quantities. With the development of communication electronic systems (the third revolutionary phase in the history of communication), the human being starts to communicate more easily and quickly.

The current telecommunications networks (support of the information highways) make interactive and bi-univocal communication possible, surpassing the era of univocal communication (the alternation between being a sender and a receiver). Progress in communication electronic systems provides greater autonomy and freedom.

The advent of the Internet opened the possibility for all people, at any time, to interact in an endless virtual world of information. Today, organizations face new challenges resulting from the globalization of markets, which leads to the search for new organizational solutions, allowing them to face the competition more securely and profitably. One of the most advantageous solutions is the adoption and correct use of information and communication technologies.

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<sup>139</sup> My translation from the consulted Spanish edition of Balandier’s book, *El poder en Escenas: De la Representación del Poder al Poder de la Representación* [*Power in Scenes: From Power Representation to Power of Representation*] (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós).

The new media fight isolation and are successful opportunities for companies, institutions, and organizations that, if they do not adopt the modern technological means of information and communication, may even jeopardize their survival. Without adequate and innovative means of communication, companies, institutions, and organizations are more isolated and their products and services are not as well-known and cannot be the choice or preference of consumers.

The new information and communication technologies are interpreted as a set of reflected knowledge, either in equipment and programs or in their personal and organizational creation and use. These new technologies involve processes of treatment, control, and communication of content essentially based on electronic means: computers or electronic systems. However, this “brave new world” also poses problems, difficulties, and harmful implications, such as those that Giovanni Sartori (1924-2017) highlights and which are presented in Chapter 9.

### 9.1. From the *homo sapiens* to the *homo videns*

In *Homo Videns: Televisione e Post-Pensiero*,<sup>140</sup> Sartori considers some characteristics that define and allow us to understand the current world in a full and rapid multimedia revolution (technological and digital). It is a process with many tentacles (Internet, personal computers, cyberspace, etc.). However, Sartori criticizes this process, because it is based on the virtual, on the void.

“We are in full and rapid multimedia revolution. A many tentacle process (Internet, personal computers, cyberspace) which is however characterized by a common denominator: *tele-vedere*, and for it our *video-vivere*. So, in this book the focus is on television, and the bottom line is that video is transforming *homo sapiens* produced by culture written in a *homo videns* in which the word is ousted from the image. Everything becomes displayed. But in that case what happens with the non-viewable (which is the most)? So, while we worry of those who control the media, we do not notice that it is tool in and of itself that got out of hand. Many complain about television, thinking that it is encouraging violence, that it is reporting little and badly, or even accusing it of being a cause of cultural setback (as Habermas wrote). That is true. However, it is even more true and even more important to understand that *tele-vedere* is changing the nature of the human being. This is the *porro unum* [the essential aspect], in fact extremely essential, that until today has escaped the attention of most people. However, it is quite evident

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<sup>140</sup> Original title in Italian first published in 1997.

that the world in which we live is already resting on the shoulders of the ‘video-child’: a very recent species of human being created by the *tele-vedere*—in front of a television—even before knowing how to read and write. Therefore, in the first part of this book I deal, and I worry about the *primacy of the image*, that is, with a kind of predominance of the visible over the intelligible that leads to seeing without understanding. [...] The most caustic in this regard is Baudrillard: ‘Information, instead of transforming mass into energy, it produces even more mass’. What is certain is that television—unlike the communication tools that preceded it (even the radio)—destroys more knowledge and more understanding than it transmits.” (Sartori, 2011, pp. xv-xvi).

Sartori identifies a common denominator in this multimedia revolution: the *tele-vedere* (i.e. the “tele-vision”). It is the recognition of the importance and influence of television, as the *tele-vedere* is changing the nature of human beings. Another important concept used by Sartori is that of *video-vivere* (“video-living”). These two concepts refer to the idea of visuality, which is frequent and characterizer in today’s increasingly visual cultures. For Sartori, the video is transforming the *homo sapiens*, a product of written culture, into *homo videns*, in which the word is dethroned by the image. Related to these two concepts and the idea of visuality, we have another concept, that of “video child”. The “video-child” is attracted to the image; he consumes it permanently and in abundance, to the point of forming (growing and developing himself) with the image:

“The turning point, therefore, is given by *visual* information. Such a turn begins with the arrival of television. Therefore, I also start with the *tele-vedere*. Whatever the virtual developments of television may be after television, it is precisely television that, first of all, will modify, and in an essential manner, the proper nature of communication, displacing it from the context of the word (whether printed or transmitted by the radio) for the context of the image. The difference is radical. The word is a ‘symbol’ totally resolved in what it means, in what it makes one understand. And the word leads one to understand only when it is understood, that is, when we know the language to which it belongs; otherwise it is a dead letter, a sign, or any sound. On the contrary, the image is pure and simple visual representation. So, to understand an image, it is enough to see it; and to see it, vision is enough, it is enough not to be blind. In fact, the image is not seen in Chinese, Arabic or English. I repeat: one just see it and that’s enough. While the word is an integral and constitutive part of a symbolic universe, the image is none of that.” (Sartori, 2011, p. 13).

The image is seductive, it is easy to be consumed, i.e. to see what it conveys because it is shown in the image itself.



For Sartori, visuality is dominant in culture and social behavior, giving rise to tele-guided opinions. There is a primacy of the image, a prevalence of the visible over the intelligible, which leads to seeing without understanding. New media devices like the mobile phone and television compete for the idea of visuality, in which the image functions as another language. There are countless languages whose significant unity is not the word, but the image itself. This is what happens, for example, with the language of cinema. As Sartori (2011, p. 13) points out, the image is not seen in Chinese, Arabic, or English, because it is simply seen.

Television allows us to see everything without one do something or go somewhere to see it: what is visible comes into every house for free and without permission. Television changes the nature of communication, moving it from the context of the word (as a symbol) to the context of the image (as pure and simple visual representation, i.e. an image that is simply seen).<sup>141</sup> According to Sartori:

“Then, it is obvious that the case of television cannot be treated by analogy, that is, as if television were a continuation and a mere extension of the communication instruments that preceded it. Through television we venture into a radically new reality. Therefore, television is not an addition, but, first, a substitution that overturns the relationship between seeing and understanding. Until today we were aware of both the world and its events through oral or written narration; today, however, we can see them with our eyes and the narration—or its explanation—is almost only due to the images that appear in the video.” (Sartori, 2011, pp. 13-14).

Sartori refers to the impoverishment of the human being’s ability to understand reality when he is exposed to the images and effects of television. The appetite for images is a fundamental characteristic of societies and visual cultures. In short, and in summary:

“[...] all the knowledge of *homo sapiens* develops in the dimension of a *mundus intelligibilis* (of concepts and mental conceptions) that is by no means the *mundus sensibilis*, the world perceived by our senses. Therefore, the question is that television reverses the progression from the sensitive to the intelligible, turning it in the blink of an eye (*ictu oculi*) for a return to pure and simple seeing. Television produces images and erases concepts;

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<sup>141</sup> It is how Roland Barthes says about the photographic message, which is universally readable, just by looking at its content. According to Barthes, in *The Obvious and the Obtuse*, there is a status of the photographic image: it is a message without a code. Barthes concludes that the photographic message is continuous (Barthes, 2009, p. 13).

but in this way it atrophies our capacity for abstraction and with it all our capacity for understanding. [...] Therefore, what we see and perceive concretely does not produce ‘ideas’ but is inserted in the ideas (or concepts) that classify it and ‘mean’ it. And this is precisely the process that has been stunted when *homo sapiens* is supplanted by *homo videns*.” (Sartori, 2011, pp. 22-23).

Today, with the widespread use (by anyone, anywhere, and at any time) of mobile phones and social networks (e.g. Instagram, the network that promotes the cult of the image), societies and cultures tend to privilege visuality. Through the proliferation of screens (including electronic and dynamic billboards) and images, the cult of the image re-semanticizes an era of iconophilia (love or taste for images or icons) and iconolatry (cult and adoration of images or icons).

## 9.2. Questions for review and reflection

1. What are the main drawbacks of television as a popular means of mass communication?
2. Why is there a transition from *homo sapiens* to *homo videns*, according to Sartori?
3. What is the problem identified and attributed to the images? Why is modern iconophilia or iconolatry harmful?
4. Does society evolve or regress with the cult and primacy of images? What about human intelligibility?
5. What is the relationship between Sartori’s and McLuhan’s perspectives?



## CHAPTER TEN

### VICTORIA CAMPS: THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

“Mass culture is mediocre if it only seeks the attention of the masses. It cannot be high culture because only a few are prepared to understand it and appreciate it. The means of communication are mass media, that is their reason for being, they cannot pretend to be something else.”  
(Camps, 1996b, p. 154).<sup>142</sup>

In *Paradoxes of Individualism*, Victoria Camps criticizes the individualism and its role in modern societies. Individualism is presented in this work as a negative and fundamental trait of modernity. According to Camps:

“For us, individualism is the anti-ideology, the biggest obstacle to creating and betting on joint ventures or ideals. The members of advanced liberal societies are individualists because they show themselves unsupportive, insensitive to inequalities, without any interest in public affairs. [...] And whole societies are individualists, precisely the most developed, which are, in turn, the most indifferent to the miseries of those who live the worst.”  
(Camps, 1996a, p. 16).

For Camps (1996a, p. 17), individualism means atomization, closure in the private sphere, and disaffection with the public. Consequently, individualism threatens democracy and modern ideals of equality, fraternity, and freedom, as well as the absolute ideas and liberal values of social justice, solidarity, and fundamental rights/guarantees of all human beings.

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<sup>142</sup> My translation from the original Spanish edition of the book *El Malestar de la Vida Pública* [*The Discomfort of Public Life*] (Barcelona: Grijalbo). All quotations from Camps' works are my translations from the consulted editions, because there are no editions of the same works in English.

As far as Sociology of Communication is concerned, Camps involves the media and their contribution or involvement in individualism, asking:

- Should the media serve for what they are serving?
- Does economic rationality allow us to be reasonably human?
- If the culture in which we live in is a culture of individualism and if the reality presented to the individual is unsatisfactory, what is the role of the media in promoting this culture of individualism and general dissatisfaction?

According to Camps, the media work paradoxically, promoting the opposite of what is supposed, i.e. promoting social isolation instead of communicational contact:

“Although it may seem strange, the media do not make us communicate, but rather help to isolate us in our own world. Nothing makes the individual feel more understood, more attended to, more accompanied. The communication society is no longer supportive or affective. It did not know how to put the means and technical progress at the service of democracy and mutual understanding. Much less at the service of human beings. The technique is valid and is subject only to economic power.” (Camps, 1996a, p. 21).

Camps criticizes the media. She considers that the media are not serving what they could and should, especially when communication is the paradigm of our time. With the development of communication, the technical and technological innovations, and the status of communication as a paradigm, Camps (1996a, p. 144) recognizes that McLuhan was right when referring to the “global village”. Thus, Camps refers to a society of “non-communicators”:

“Communication is the cultural paradigm of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thanks to the technique, it is very simple to communicate: the telephone, telefax, radio, television, the press, air transport, everything takes us far with a speed that still surprises us. The means of communication, developed to the unbelievable, constitute the ‘fourth power’, an indisputable power that bears witness to the irrefutable expression—even if it costs us—that only what appears in the media is real. It did not take long for a profession to emerge, which was unusual only a few years ago: that of ‘communicologists’, aimed at investigating and theorizing the scope and limits of communication. The possibility of communicating is a value of our century, a value that most likely took the place of the illustrated values of progress and reason.” (Camps, 1996a, p. 143).

It is a paradox to talk about “non-communicators”, “non-communication” or “incommunication” in both time and society of communication. However, this is what Camps do, following other authors, such as Baudrillard:

“Baudrillard said that ‘the essence of communication is non-communication’. It seems like a paradox, but it has its meaning. Why did we start talking about communication—the French communicologist asks—why do we have to ‘communicate’ when it is so easy to talk? And he replies: ‘When it comes to communication, it is because nothing is communicated anymore, it is because the communion of meaning has been lost’. Then there are the communication techniques, the communication professionals, the communication sciences, and a whole series of terms: sender, receiver, code, message, context. He is right: we must ask ourselves what we mean when we say ‘communication’. What is to communicate? Talk on the phone? Exchange faxes? Just it?” (Camps, 1996a, p. 147).

In Camps’ perspective, there is a latent criticism of media post-modernity, the social effects of computer and electronic globalization, the role of new information and communication technologies on individuals, and the loss (or at least the change) of a social values framework. So, is there a place for ideologies and local/cultural identities in contemporary globalized societies?

Camps’ criticism of the media also extends to the field of ethics or commercial imperatives that overlap the editorial principles:

“The media perform a service called ‘public’. But they are also organized into companies that must be economically profitable. It is easy for the service of money to end up canceling the service of information, culture or, even, entertainment with criteria of good taste and good conduct. The goal of selling and raising audiences is not always well matched with other less materialistic goals. Usually the simple and not always correct deduction that the public wants is made and, above all, what it asks to consume with more enjoyment. The equation is not always right. It is purely numerical, quantitative: with more sales, more professional prestige.” (Camps, 1996b, pp. 145-146).

If the equation is numerical and intends only to reach the goal of having more sales, the media tend to subordinate programs of public interest and to give priority to programs that the public wants or asks to consume with more enjoyment. The media are inserted in a consumer society and a consumer society produces in excess and must sell everything it produces, taking more into account the quantitative criteria. To sell everything produced in excess, the consumer society creates consumption needs, even if the product is useless, as Camps (1996b, p. 146) points out.

The means of communication are mass media. The characteristics of the public define the nature of the media. Depending on the expectations, interests, needs, or preferences of the public, the means are known. There is a relation of symbiosis that is necessarily so, of life in common, and complementarity between the media and its audiences.

According to the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, Camps considers that mass culture is mediocre if it does not educate the masses, i.e. if it only aims at distracting the masses. Mass culture cannot be high culture, because only a few people are prepared to understand and appreciate this most demanding form of culture (Camps, 1996b, p. 154). However, if the mass media are essentially popular means, i.e. they are precisely the mass media, they are directed and inserted into a culture that is also a mass culture, regardless of being considered mediocre. If the culture is mediocre, what is the responsibility of the media? If the culture is mediocre, what can, and should the media do? Certainly, do not seek only the attention of the masses at any cost, with low-quality programs and level of education just because they are attractive, appealing, and popular.

Camps warns for the social responsibility of the media. Since the media is a social institution or, at least, a commercial company or collective entity with economic interests, collective interests, and social responsibilities come into conflict.

“If the media want to serve democracy and take responsibility for that service, they must fight, without nullifying them, the two powers that tyrannize them: the market and the technique. Both are elements of a modernization that does not always mean human progress.” (Camps, 1996b, p. 166).

The means of communication are, on the one hand, economic companies and, on the other hand, communication techniques. As stated by Camps (1996b, p. 167), the media are techniques to sell the product as best as possible and, therefore, are conditioned by the economic and technical powers that tyrannize them.

## 10.1. Mediocracy

At a conference entitled “Sociedad de la información y ciudadanía”, in 2003, Camps recognizes that the so-called information societies have peculiar characteristics, justifying this denomination with:

- The development of new information and communication technologies.
- A new world organization of network societies, which affects all

people and involves all areas of life.

- Changes in ways of living, both in instrumental terms (new ways or new instruments of communication) and in qualitative terms (new lifestyles, new ways of accessing knowledge, and restructuring the scale of values).

Given these characteristics of the information societies diagnosed by Camps, the problematization is based on the following questions that the author asks:

- Do social changes mean a better quality of life? In other words, do we live better?
- Are we wiser?
- Does it cost less to relate to each other? Are we less isolated? Do we have more facilities for life in common?
- Are we freer and more autonomous?
- Does the information society contribute to the construction of more democratic and humanist societies?

According to any elementary dictionary, the citizenship is the quality of a citizen in the enjoyment of civil and political rights in a free state and also in the fulfillment of civic duties (e.g. voting, as a form of participation in the construction of the “*demo + cracia*”). As in the *Dictionary of Human Sciences* coordinated by Jean-François Dortier, to be a citizen is to be recognized as an active member of a political community. This context gives civic, political, social rights and fiscal, military duties, including the possibility of civic participation in city affairs (Dortier, 2006, p. 65).

In turn, Carey (2009, p. 4) claims that “to be a citizen is to assume a relation in space to one’s contemporaries: to all, irrespective of class and kin, who exist in the same place under the canopy of politics as fellow citizens”. Consequently, what does it mean to be a person? Is it the same as being an individual or a citizen? Let us note the following excerpt from João Baptista Magalhães’s book concerning ethics and responsible citizenship:

“In Roman law ‘being a person’ meant being subject to rights and obligations. In antiquity and during the Middle Ages, the value of the human person depended on his social condition. But St. Thomas Aquinas, in line with the traditional thinking of the Catholic Church, considered that the human person had a superior dignity in relation to other beings, a dignity that came from being made in the image and likeness of God. In turn, Saint Augustine identified ‘person’ with the interiority of the soul in its relationship with itself, with others and with God. [...] As a ‘person’, man is not closed in on himself or distant from other beings: he opens himself, to



others and to the world. [...] In modern thought, the Constitution or Fundamental Law of a State of Law establishes that the human person is the maximum value (the reason for being) of a republic. All values (political, economic, social, etc.) and all rights are subja-cent to this republic. In a synthetic way, we can say: the dignity of the human person is unavoidable and inalienable, it is not conquered, nor does it depend on external factors, not even on the practice of worthy acts.” (Magalhães, 2010, pp. 22-24).

Consequently, the human being can be understood according to three distinct dimensions, i.e. as an individual, as a person, or as a citizen:

<b>Biosocial dimension: the individual</b>	<b>Moral dimension: the person</b>	<b>Political dimension: the citizen</b>
The human beings of social relations, with rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.	Human being capable of becoming aware of themselves, of others, of the world, and the meaning of existence, with rights guaranteed by moral codes and by the person himself (self-love and self-esteem).	The human beings with interventions and interactions with reality, with rights guaranteed by the Constitution (the laws of a State).

**Table 10-1:** Three human dimensions: the individual, the person, and the citizen.

These three dimensions highlight the social character of the human being, because “the desire to be recognized by others is inseparable from being human”, insofar as “it is only through recognition by others that man can constitute himself as a person”, points out Giorgio Agamben (2011, p. 46).<sup>143</sup>

According to Camps, citizenship has characteristics that are not respected in today’s societies. If being a “citizen” means being a free and equal person who cooperates socially, then general conditions must exist, such as:

- a) Political and democratic freedom (existence of public space).
- b) Willingness to cooperate.
- c) Democratic ideal: the welfare state.
- d) Civil, political, and social rights.
- e) Subject to obligations/duties.

<sup>143</sup> Agamben (2011, p. 46) explains that “*persona* originally means ‘mask’ and it is through the mask that the individual acquires a role and a social identity”.

Camps diagnoses a deficit in the contemporary democracies, mainly based on three negative factors:

- i) Little participation in citizenship (absenteeism).
- ii) Lack of commitment by the citizen in the society to which he belongs.
- iii) Public opinion with little sharpness, mainly in developed and enlightened societies by the mass media.

Camps refers to a democracy converted to “media-crazy”, i.e. a predominance and prepotency of the media. According to Camps, the logic of the media is the exercise of a series of tyrannies that impose on the media certain ways of producing news or entertainment programs and acting. This is the case of the tyranny of velocity and the tyranny of the spectacle.

The tyranny of velocity is imposed and determined by the time factor, imposing a rhythm and a lifestyle based on a kind of “chrono-mentality”. There is an acceleration in the mass production and consumption of information content. Time is also characterized by immediacy, the possibility of knowing the events “transformed” into the news in real-time. Also due to the ephemerality, brevity, fragmentation, and incompleteness of information and knowledge; the instantaneity, the sudden appearance of news, because there are screens everywhere; and fugacity, immediate oblivion of information and knowledge, i.e. news and subsequent developments.

The tyranny of the spectacle arises when the information gives way to the spectacle of the information (a fusion that results in *infotainment*,<sup>144</sup> an information-entertainment). There is a theatricality or staging, giving importance to the image with impressive apparatus and spectacularity in communication. It is the function of entertainment in the media. The fugacity feeds the spectacle, as the information is fast and superficial. When information has no images to accompany or complete what is reported, it becomes less attractive to audiences. The use of images captures attention.

Facing these two tyrannies, the news becomes mediocratic, in a scenario where information-entertainment has the essential function of producing spectacle and give primacy to sensationalism.

Therefore, how to form a “critical mass” if people only watch television and consume spectacle? Camps underlines that citizenship is affected by the

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<sup>144</sup> Term in the original in English meaning a kind of soft media, a type of popular programs that combine information and entertainment (the latter, including spectacle, sensationalism, theatricalization). In this sense, *infotainment* has a derogatory value and quality, despite condensing the preferences of audiences due to the ease of understanding or low level of demand and rigor of the contents.

mediacracy. If the massification of societies is an irreversible phenomenon, is the substitution of democracy for mediacracy avoidable?

For Camps (2003), mediacracy corresponds to a democracy dominated by a new elite, whose culture and thinking are only “fast culture” and “fast thinking”. This new elite does not want information as such, but information is converted into propaganda. Mediacracy is a mediocre democracy.

To fight against mediocrity, it is necessary, according to Camps, to recover the idea that the human being is, above all, *logos*: reason and language. Following Nietzsche’s idea, according to which thinking is ruminating, Camps considers that the important thing is not to consider any idea or information undigested without returning to it several times, analyzing things in depth; not to be in the superficiality of fast thinking. It is necessary to ruminate the information received from the media and this rumination is only possible with well-educated, informed, and critical citizens.

## 10.2. Questions for review and reflection

1. What does it mean to be a citizen? What are the conditions for citizenship? What is the relationship between citizenship and the information society?
2. What are the characteristics of an information society?
3. If we live in an individualistic culture and society, where the mass media have a strong presence, then what is the role of the media in fostering individualism and general dissatisfaction?
4. If contemporary societies are strongly characterized by means and information flows, with more access to information, do the resulting social changes mean a better quality of life? Do we live better? Are we more informed, enlightened, interrelated, and active participants in the public sphere?
5. Does the information society contribute to citizenship and to the construction of more democratic and humanist societies?
6. How to inform, educate, and enlighten audiences if they are more interested in television and sensational and spectacular content?
7. What is the role of the media (or what is the logic of the media) in building democracy?
8. How can we understand the influence or responsibility of the media for the various social problems that arise in contemporary societies?

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### RAMONET: THE TYRANNY OF COMMUNICATION

“When photography takes itself out of context, severing the connections illustrated by Sander, Blossfeldt, or Germaine Krull, when it frees itself from physiognomic, political, and scientific interest, it becomes creative. The lens now looks for interesting juxtapositions; photography turns into a sort of arty journalism.”  
(Benjamin, 2005, p. 526).

In *The Tyranny of Communication*,<sup>145</sup> Ignacio Ramonet presents a critical and negative perspective on the role played by the media in society, essentially pointing out the influences of the media and recognizing that they are, at the same time, influenced by political and economic powers. Ramonet’s perspective on modern communication technologies is demonstrated and understood in the following excerpt:

“One of the great diseases of information is the confusion that exists between the universe of public relations and that of information. Journalists gradually lost, from the end of the 1960s, the monopoly that they had in democratic societies, since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to freely disseminate information. Today we live in a universe of communication—some call it the ‘information society’—in which everyone communicates. Economic actors (companies, employers), politicians (government, parties, collectivities) or cultural (theaters, operas, cultural centers, houses of culture, editors, booksellers) produce information, have their own newspaper, their own bulletin, their own communication departments. In this sense, communication is ‘a speech delivered by an institution that favors it’. In this context, what is the specificity of the journalist? This form of communication ends up disturbing, making superfluous, confusing the journalist’s work; it takes

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<sup>145</sup> Originally published in French as *La Tyrannie de la Communication*, by Éditions Galilée (1999). The quotations and references of this book are my translations from the consulted Portuguese edition.

away its particularity, its uniqueness, its originality. In addition, these institutions provide information to journalists and ask them to give them projection. Of course, this is not a requirement, but a suggestion that can be formulated in an extremely seductive and convincing way. This is sometimes called corruption... The new technologies also favour the disappearance of the specificity of journalism. As communication technologies develop, the number of groups or individuals communicating increases. Thus, the Internet allows everyone not only to be effectively a journalist in his own way, but even to put himself at the head of a medium with a planetary dimension.” (Ramonet, 2003, pp. 55-56).

Ramonet refers to a series of concepts and expressions to characterize the media field. For example: “media messianism”; “people press”; “media short circuit”; “media mimicry”; “era of suspicion”; “democratic censorship”; “screen effect”; “it is true because it is technological”; “media truth”; “fictitious is aesthetic”; “television teratology”; “telegenic waste”; “necrophilic television”. All these concepts and expressions have derogatory meanings, through which Ramonet intends to characterize media activity.

### **11.1. From the public interest to the interest of the public**

We live in a time of distrust, in which the truth (or “public interest”) is passed over in favor of the media interest (or “interest of the public”, i.e. the content and the format that audiences like and desire to receive from the media). As Ramonet (2003, p. 45) refers, in our intellectual environment, the truth that counts is the truth of the media, the truth that the media present and say is the truth. Today, the truth is what the media propagate as such.

Through the power of the word, the media intend to manufacture consensus and consents. “The manufacture of consent is capable of great refinements”, guarantees Lippmann (2008, p. 248), for whom “the creation of consent is not a new art”. Transmitting information or ideas and influencing mentalities are inseparable operations. Consequently, media discourses are propaganda, the construction of a certain type of apparent truth or appearance of truth, fabricating or hiding facts (Ramonet, 2003, p. 47).

Ramonet’s perspective on the role of the media is negative. Ramonet does not diagnose a perfect or balanced dialectic between communication and society. The media manipulate the masses in an increasingly sophisticated and covert manner. Now, manipulation is multiform, insofar as the medium is the Internet. If television as a mass media essentially had the social functions of informing, educating, and distracting, now there is only one of them: distracting.

“The distraction that can become alienation, cretinism, stupidity. And lead to the collective absence of a brain, the domestication of souls, the conditioning of the masses and the manipulation of spirits. Today, however, the central fear is that, with the Internet, the three main functions of this new cyber media, which are still not very dominant, will become: to watch, advertise and sell.” (Ramonet, 2001, p. 20).

Ramonet refers to a Copernican revolution: before, the media sold information (or distraction) to citizens; now, via the Internet, they sell consumers to advertisers (Ramonet, 2001, p. 21). They are no longer directed at audiences to transmit objective information, but to conquer their spirit, to obtain an effect.

In parallel, Noam Chomsky states in *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*:

“You just hold a bludgeon over their [people] heads, and if they get out of line you smash them over the head. But as society has become more free and democratic, you lose that capacity. Therefore you have to turn to the techniques of propaganda. The logic is clear. Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state. That’s wise and good because, again, the common interests elude the bewildered herd. They can’t figure them out.” (Chomsky, 1997, p. 11).

The instituted powers in the USA, for example, manipulate the media to the point of making them convey to the public opinion a certain “ideological truth”.<sup>146</sup> Chomsky warns the current ambiguity of living in an eventual free society and of being subject to self-imposed totalitarianism. Consequently, he concludes that the media are partial and, ironically: “So we need something to tame the bewildered herd, and that something is this new revolution in the art of democracy: the manufacture of consent. The media, the schools, and popular culture have to be divided.” (Chomsky, 1997, p. 9).

The idea of universal rationality is utopian. Some contexts determine the formation of meanings. It is like admitting that there is no possibility of accessing God’s point of view on reality. However, it is the formula “God’s

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<sup>146</sup> Although Chomsky’s *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* was firstly published in 1991, a long time ago for a field of media in accelerated development (mainly technological), the key ideas remain current and even cemented over the years, so it is considered pertinent this work to understand the dialectic between communication and society, i.e. the role, functions and influences of the media.

point of view” that the media propose to us in their mission of evangelization of the masses.

However, due to the recent changes imposed by the phenomenon of globalization, the specificity of the media tends to disappear with new communication technologies, as more and more people are using these technologies to communicate in their own (different) way, in a self-media way, the most diverse private or public affairs. According to Ramonet, if each citizen becomes a journalist, what will be left to professional journalists specifically? This question is at the center of the current media crisis (Ramonet, 2003, p. 56).

In conclusion, Ramonet is very critical of the content, evolution, and growing role of the mass media in contemporary society, having legitimacy for that, as he was both editor-in-chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique* (from 1990 to 2008) and interpreter/researcher and author of books on the media, having published especially *La Tyrannie de la communication* (2003) and *Propagandes silencieuses* (2001). Ramonet provides in these two books an analysis of the media influenced and motivated by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Therefore, Ramonet’s analytical perspective is an interesting and necessary contribution to critically understand the activity of the media and its procedures in the “social construction” of reality, of what happens in the world, i.e. of a particular and ideological view of the world that the media manufacture and propose that we accept it.

## 11.2. Questions for review and reflection

1. What is the “tyranny of communication” for Ramonet?
2. Are the less ethical journalistic practices, which lead Ramonet to talk about media prepotency and tyranny, tend to worsen in the future? Is journalistic objectivity more and more a myth?
3. With the dilution of the mass media field and the proliferation of individual means of production and transmission of content on the Internet, what is the specificity of the journalist?

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### MODERNITY, POST-MODERNITY, AND MEDIA

“Photography is our exorcism. Primitive society had its masks, bourgeois society its mirrors, and we have our images.”  
(Baudrillard, 1993, p. 153).

As a rule, the history of humanity is divided into four major periods: Antiquity (or Ancient Age), Medievality (or Middle Age), Modernity (or Modern Age), and Contemporaneity (or Contemporary Age).<sup>147</sup> These four periods are summarized as follows:

1. After prehistory of nomadic societies before the domain of writing, the period beginning approximately 4 thousand years B.C., with various civilizations (e.g. Mesopotamia, Egypt, Phoenicians, Hebrews, and Persia) is labeled by Antiquity. Subsequently, Classical Antiquity is the period of development of civilizations such as Greece and Rome, when city-states, Athenian democracy, and the rise and domination of the Roman Empire were established. This period extends to the year 476 A.D. when the fall of the Western Roman Empire occurs.
2. The Middle Ages are described by the rise and dominion of religion, namely the Catholic Church and the Crusades (Catholic military men who intended to conquer the holy land), as well as feudal relations. This period lasted for about ten centuries, ending in the year 1453, with the Taking of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire.
3. The Modern Age is the period characterized by changes in all domains, such as the transition from feudalism to the National States

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<sup>147</sup> With more property, this periodization fits historical science. The Modern Age or modernity for History begins with the fall of Constantinople, in 1453, and goes until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with Humanism, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. Emancipation, enlightenment, trust in scientific and technological progress, reason, and the human being are central ideas of the Enlightenment and, consequently, of modernity.



with a modern configuration. With the Discoveries and the Maritime Expansion of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the world became territorially known and connected, culminating in the popular revolts that originated the French Revolution of 1789 and spread the Enlightenment ideals throughout the world.

4. The Contemporary Age begins, precisely, with the French Revolution and extends to the present day. It is a period, like the others, of breaking with the precedent, in a more radical way, as this is marked by enlightenment, by the development of science and technology.

The third mentioned period, the Modern Age, suggests that societies that are developed in political, social, economic, cultural, and scientific terms should be labeled as a modern society, after the disturbances that occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, because since the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation standards of development distinct from the rest of the world had been established in the Western world (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 75). The understanding of modernity presupposes a complementary development of three domains:

- i) Scientific and cultural domain: rationalism, enlightenment, certainty in the progress of scientific theories or narratives (evolutionism, positivism, democratic ideal, etc.).
- ii) Social and economic domain: processes of industrialization, increasing urbanization, the aegis of capitalism, liberal, competitive, and enlarged markets, etc.
- iii) Political domain: nationalist ideals and the emergence of National States, affirmation and appreciation of democratic ideals and values, the massification of societies supported by the mass media (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 76).

According to this perspective, a society is considered modern with the affirmation of these three domains, namely:

- a) Affirmation of the autonomy of human reason.
- b) Reinforcement of the belief in progress.
- c) Utopian assumption (the future as a possibility for the full realization of human beings and societies), based on ideologies and narratives of civilizational progress.

Today, the media (mainly television) play an important and referential role in the framework of social values, within the scope of a collective psychosociology. The media (both mass media and social media) are

references to everyday and collective life. There is a symbiosis between modernity and the media: the development and expansion of the media (from the expansion of Gutenberg's printing techniques) lead to the development of modern societies or the transition of societies to modernity. But the opposite is also true: the media are a product of the development of modern societies.

However, how is it possible to determine the passage or change from one period, epoch, or time to another? It is not time that changes; time is a fluid continuum. It is societies, people and their visions, mentalities, cultures, and ways of being (traditions, patterns, needs, uses, and customs) that change. When the change is profound, when societies replace models and reference frames of norm and value as if they were opposites or antagonists, there is a change in the cultural or even civilizational paradigm. In a situation of profound change, modernity defines the experiences marked by the rupture facing the tradition, according to the meaning of the word "tradition".<sup>148</sup>

Modernity designates, at the same time, a period of human history inaugurated in Europe and the set of phenomena that characterize it. It is not discussed about the place of its appearance, but the moment in which it took place. When does modernity appear?

- In the 16<sup>th</sup> century with Cartesian rationalism?
- In the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the development of science and contractual political philosophy?
- In the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the Philosophy of Lights and industrialization?
- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the triumph of science, technology, and industry?

And when does post-modernity, the post-modern thought, or the model of post-modern society appear? These questions assume that we believe in the existence of post-modernity, i.e. of a moment in time, a thought, a human condition, and post-modern societies. If there is (or has existed, for some authors) post-modernity, how to characterize it? How to demarcate it from the previous period?

Post-modernity or the post-modern will be a rupture of contemporaneity, time and ways of life (mentality, attitudes, behaviors, actions, values, norms, and experiences) that break with the previous time and ways of life because now they are distinct, discontinuous, disruptive and plural. The stable and habitual foundations of societies are shaken and put in doubt; discredit or crisis of social values, the crisis of confidence in the future, and

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<sup>148</sup> Cf. note 134.

crisis of identity (e.g. the individual and society as unfinished projects) appear. It is a period of dystopia and paradigm transition.

In the book *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World*, Zygmunt Bauman refers to the exact moment the post-modern revolution arises, according to the French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg. It is a short moment, a small, harmless, and punctual communicative action (an act of communication in a mass media, in the mediated public space) that illustrates what would later be installed as usual in the traditional public space of the media (such as television and radio) or innovative media (such as social media):

“Alain Ehrenberg, a French sociologist and uniquely insightful analyst of the convoluted trajectory of the modern individual, attempted to pinpoint the birthdate of the late modern cultural revolution (at least of its French branch) that ushered us into the times we continue to inhabit; a sort of cultural revolution’s equivalent to the first shot of the First World War aimed on 28 June 1914 by Gavrilo Princip at Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife in Sarajevo, or the battleship Aurora’s salvo of 7 November 1918, signaling the Bolshevik assault and the capture of the Winter Palace. Ehrenberg’s choice was an autumnal Wednesday evening in the 1980s when a certain Vivienne declared during a popular TV talk show, and so in front of several million spectators, that her husband Michel’s bane of premature ejaculation prevented her from ever experiencing orgasm in the course of her marital life. What was so revolutionary about Vivienne’s pronouncement? Two things. First: a kind of information that until then was deemed to be quintessentially, even eponymously private, was made public. And second: the public arena was used to vent and thrash out a matter of thoroughly private concern.” (Bauman, 2010, p. 26).

This situation is understood as a milestone, as it will have inaugurated a trend, which today is confirmed as a recurring practice: talking about any subject, at anytime, anywhere, especially in the public space. This practice has become even more frequent and commonplace with media technological advances. The Internet increases the resonance of these private confessions.

Modernity refers to ways of life and social organizations that emerge in Western Europe and that influence worldwide. In the political domain, modernity is manifested by the establishment of stable policies committed to the concert of European nations and the construction of political regimes based on the distinction between the private and the public. Modernity is also visible in Law, in the limitation and control of political power, and in the ability to live democratic developments.

In the religious domain, modernity corresponds to the laicization and secularism, that is, by the cantonment of religion in the private sphere, and by irreligion. Modernity secularizes social practices, which lose a strong

doctrinal tendency and acquire a more liberal tendency and detached from religious and moral rules.

In economic terms, the modern economy is characterized by a constant effort to inject production and distribution techniques into increasingly effective processes, as they are inspired by scientific progress. Thus, there is the growth of rational knowledge and the development of nations, as well as the flourishing of individualism.

Modernity is a transition period difficult to designate, with society receiving different designations: information society; consumer society; capitalist society; society of the spectacle; modern society; post-modern society, or post-industrial society. The causes of modernization and massification of societies are pointed to several aspects, among which:

- The assumption of universal human rights by the United Nations, after the Second World War.
- The industrial urbanization, the birth, and development of a working-class that largely escapes the influence of the Church, the division of labor, and secularization of social life after the Industrial Revolution.
- The exponential growth of population and urbanization (concentration of people in the urban environment), as well as the emergence of Ortega y Gasset's "mass man" and the growth of cities, after the Demographic Revolution.
- The advent of the bourgeoisie, a social class dedicated to the development of economic and commercial activities and, consequently, of capitalism and enrichment.
- Technical developments applied to communication techniques and processes, which lead to the development of mass media.

Therefore, it is in an interrogative sense that Giddens follows in *The Consequences of Modernity*:

“What is modernity? As a first approximation, let us simply say the following: ‘modernity’ refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence. This associates modernity with a time period and with an initial geographical location, but for the moment leaves its major characteristics safely stowed away in a black box. Today, in the late twentieth century, it is argued by many, we stand at the opening of a new era, to which the social sciences must respond and which is taking us beyond modernity itself. A dazzling variety of terms has been suggested to refer to this transition, a few of which refer positively to the emergence of a new type of social system (such as the ‘information society’ or the ‘consumer society’) but most of which suggest rather that a preceding state of affairs is drawing to a close (‘post-

modernity,' 'post-modernism,' 'post-industrial society,' 'post-capitalism,' and so forth)." (Giddens, 1996, pp. 1-2).

The complex development of contemporary societies leads to typical issues of post-modernity, such as the immediacy and ephemerality of everyday life experiences, the dilution of the boundaries between the private and the public (which raise the banal discussion of topics and the cult of celebrities). Modernity takes on a more visible and emerging dimension in the form of modernity covered by the media, which is characterized by:

- Direct relationship with the market economy.
- Attempt to expand the market to involve the entire globe.
- The globalization process does not proceed linearly or peacefully.

In this way, two possibilities are posed:

- Extensive market expansion: incorporating new territories and new consumers, new forms of production, and trade.
- Intensive market expansion: creating consumption needs beyond those already integrated into the market (increasingly intense and appealing marketing strategies by companies and governments to expand mass consumption).

Therefore, it is important not to confuse modernity with modernism. These are similar terms, but with different meanings. To distinguish these two concepts and phenomena, let us consider the following Table 12-1:

<b>Modernism</b>	<b>Modernity</b>
Ideological attitude towards modernity; reflection and criticism or self-criticism about modernity (Hartley, 2004, p. 148).	Set of events. Period of development and progress of societies to a modern, recent, current phase.
Style, language, code, a system of signs with norms, and units of meaning. It implies a worldview, a representation.	Action with a connotation: to be modern is to be in an updated time and space in terms of styles, tastes, fashions (contemporary).
Styles and movements in literature, painting, visual arts, or architecture: aspects of aesthetic reflection.	The concept is applicable to the social, economic, and political field.

**Table 12-1:** General distinction between modernism and modernity.

In general, modernism defines the diverse artistic movements or avant-garde currents from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until the first half of the

20<sup>th</sup> century (cubism, Dadaism, expressionism, futurism, or surrealism). Modernism was influential in the production of literature, architecture, painting, design, etc. (Hartley, 2004, p. 149).

To avoid a semantic confusion, in *The Consequences of Modernity* Giddens clarifies the scope of the terms “modernity” and “post-modernity”, on the one hand, and modernism and post-modernism, on the other hand:

“At this point we can connect the discussion of reflexivity with the debates about post-modernity. ‘Post-modernity’ is often used as if it were synonymous with post-modernism, post-industrial society, etc. Although the idea of post-industrial society, as worked out by Daniel Bell at any rate, is well explicated, the other two concepts mentioned above certainly are not. I shall draw a distinction between them here. Post-modernism, if it means anything, is best kept to refer to styles or movements within literature, painting, the plastic arts, and architecture. It concerns aspects of aesthetic reflection upon the nature of modernity. Although sometimes only rather vaguely designated, modernism is or was a distinguishable outlook in these various areas and might be said to have been displaced by other currents of a post-modernist variety. [...] Post-modernity refers to something different, at least as I shall define the notion. If we are moving into a phase of post-modernity, this means that the trajectory of social development is taking us away from the institutions of modernity towards a new and distinct type of social order. Post-modernism, if it exists in cogent form, might express an awareness of such a transition but does not show that it exists.” (Giddens, 1996, 45-46).

Likewise, it is important to distinguish between modernity and modernization<sup>149</sup> and, above all, to distinguish between modernity and post-modernity based on the following elements:

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<sup>149</sup> Process of economic, scientific, and technological development of a country to modern times, i.e. a renewal and reorganization of community life. Modernization is the state resulting from the action of modernizing, updating, making society modern. Therefore, modernization is a face of modernity.

Modernity	Post-modernity
Valorization of the intelligible (prevalence of the reason).	Valorization of the sensible; the prevalence of feelings and sensations.
Critical reason (idealization of modern man as a rational being).	Instrumental reason (operative and utilitarian reason). The values of reason are put in doubt.
Subordination to moral values and doctrines in favor of the collective (e.g. social justice).	Ideological and social void (the decline of ideals). Narcissism and individualism; fading interest in public causes.
Period of ideals (utopias, ideologies, and metanarratives) = ideal of human nature progress (essentialism).	Crisis of ideals, references, and values; dystopia, disillusionment, and loss of faith in progress. <sup>150</sup>
The conception of Man as a universal category.	Worldviews. End of the concession of Man as a universal and constant category in History.
The incentive to sacrifice, obligation, and abnegation as sources of individual and social progress. Ethics of duty.	The incentive to desire and seduction: immediate pleasures (seeking individual comfort, happiness, and pleasure). Hedonistic ethics.
The sacralization of the sacrum.	The secularization of the profane.
The predominance of the ethics of existence.	The predominance of the aesthetics of existence.
Reality/objectivity and unity. Objective knowledge (orthodoxy).	Appearance, simulation/subjectivity and pluralism (heterodoxy).
The transcendence of values: freedom, equality, and fraternity (the valuing trinity of modernity).	The immanence of values: immediacy and contingency. Materiality (“a world where there is a lot of everything”: the tyranny of choice).
Time and societies of the future. Respect for the past (traditions).	Valorization of the present ( <i>carpe diem</i> ). Innovation and reinvention, but the tyranny of time and superficiality.
Solid social relationships (Bauman).	Liquid social relationships (Bauman). Light society: “erasable” people in virtual (superficial, instant, and ephemeral) relationships.

<sup>150</sup> In the book *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche reflects on the faith in progress that corresponds to the progress of humanity itself. If time advances, move on, everything in it also advances and progresses. The future is progress and Nietzsche enquires and criticizes his epoch, which seems to go no further than the previous century has advanced (Nietzsche, 1968, pp. 42, 55, 63, 70).

Moral and ruled culture. Stabilized and pre-defined cultural forms and patterns.	Post-duty culture or light and painless ethics (Lipovetsky). Liberal culture and education.
The separation between the public and private spheres.	The fusion between the public and private spheres (multi-signification of everyday life).

**Table 12-2:** General distinction between modernity and post-modernity.

In short, post-modernity is the set of social, cultural, and political phenomena and transformations that have occurred in post-industrial societies since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, predominated by large flows of information, the automatic processing of data, and synergies of information (simultaneous and cooperative action) in the social network structure, as result of the vertiginous acceleration of technological production. In post-modernity, everything happens quickly and within the media field. The collective consciousness is formed by the consumption of media products and virtual content, and only what is mediated, conveyed, and made known by the media, is real.

The post-modern period or post-modernity is as difficult to mark chronologically as it is to characterize. These two difficulties are related to the divergent perspectives of several authors on what post-modernity is, in the first case, and by the diffuse and ambiguous character of what is post-modernity, in the second case. Taking advantage of these difficulties, especially the second, post-modernity can be characterized as being ambivalent, uncertain, and equivocal, but also critical and skeptical regarding societies, cultures, and individuals.

There is no standard of modernity or modern thought, as this period encompasses and relates different levels of development and various fields (social, cultural, political, or ideological, philosophical, or intellectual, aesthetic or artistic, etc.). In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Giddens summarizes modernity with two metaphorical images:

“Two images of what it feels like to live in the world of modernity have dominated the sociological literature, yet both of them seem less than adequate. One is that of Weber, according to which the bonds of rationality are drawn tighter and tighter, imprisoning us in a featureless cage of bureaucratic routine. [...] The second is the image of Marx [...] According to this portrayal, modernity is seen as a monster. [...] Marx perceived how shattering the impact of modernity would be, and how irreversible. At the same time, modernity was for Marx what Habermas has aptly called an ‘unfinished project.’ The monster can be tamed, since what human beings have created they can always subject to their own control. Capitalism,



simply, is an irrational way to run the modern world, because it substitutes the whims of the market for the controlled fulfillment of human need. For these images I suggest we should substitute that of the juggernaut—a runaway engine of enormous power which, collectively as human beings, we can drive to some extent but which also threatens to rush out of our control and which could rend itself asunder. The juggernaut crushes those who resist it, and while it sometimes seems to have a steady path, there are times when it veers away erratically in directions we cannot foresee. The ride is by no means wholly unpleasant or unrewarding; it can often be exhilarating and charged with hopeful anticipation. But, so long as the institutions of modernity endure, we shall never be able to control completely either the path or the pace of the journey. In turn, we shall never be able to feel entirely secure, because the terrain across which it runs is fraught with risks of high consequence. Feelings of ontological security and existential anxiety will coexist in ambivalence.” (Giddens, 1996, 137-139).

As Giddens himself explains, “juggernaut” is a term of Hindu origin, which means “lord of the world”. An image of this Hindu deity was taken each year through the streets on a huge car, “which followers are said to have thrown themselves under, to be crushed beneath the wheels”. In this metaphor of modernity, juggernaut’s car alludes to the consequences of modernity, by becoming victims of our own works that we admire.

## 12.1. Nietzsche and the modernity/post-modernity transition

The transition from modern to post-modern thinking (i.e. the change from a period of modernity to another period of post-modernity) raises endless debate. Some authors consider that there is no such transition, simply because we are still in modernity and post-modernity is, at best, a mirage; other authors understand that there is a transition, but it is a continuation or a synthesis with slight differences, transformations, or social changes; and other authors identify a break between periods, a discontinuity of different qualitative changes in lifestyles and the ways of being, existing and living in society.

The concept of “modernity” underlies that of “secularization”,<sup>151</sup> in the same sense that Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) refers to the idea of

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<sup>151</sup> The idea of secularization is faithful to the Latin etymology of the word *saeculum* (Barroso, 2018, p. 99), as we see it employed by Nietzsche, who refers to a temporal dimension of a present and immanent time. It is the constitutive characteristic of modernity, which designates a time in human history inaugurated in Europe. In

immanent time.<sup>152</sup> If secularization has to do with a temporal dimension (i.e. given the present and immanent time), this is the essence or the constitutive feature of modernity.

The secularization of mass societies and cultures is also reflected at the intellectual level, in reflections on the importance of the human condition. According to Giddens (1996, p. 47), Nietzsche was one of the first authors to draw attention to this transition of mentality, ways of being, existing, and living in society, ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and understanding the changing world.

A peculiar purpose in Nietzsche's work is the fight against false idols,<sup>153</sup> the apparent truths, the indoctrination and prevailing values of the decadent spirit of Christianity, the alleged objectivism of science and knowledge, and man's inability to transform and overcome this cultural but also civilizational combat. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche addresses the possibility or alternative to values and proposes life (the will to live) as the supreme value. The affirmation of life in a will to live refutes false values, on the one hand, and elevates man in a new model: the superman. "The concept of the superman leads Nietzsche to a new idea of morality" (Marias, 1967, p. 363). It is thus, with apotheosis, that Nietzsche announces this new model of man, proclaimed by Zarathustra, in the preamble of the book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Now he is a new man, enlightened, free from old myths and values, who becomes a superman above good and evil and capable of creating his own values. The superman is the fruit of three transformations or metamorphoses of the spirit:

1. Camel: the man submitted to the laws and to what they are told.
2. Lion: the man rebelled against the imposed order.
3. Child: the man after renewing his values and in a supreme position.

As Nietzsche (2006, p. 16) states in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "Three metamorphoses of the spirit I name for you: how the spirit becomes a camel, and the camel a lion, and finally the lion a child". The figures of the camel,

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Sociology, secularization means the process of losing power, popularity, and social function of religious beliefs and institutions (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 272).

<sup>152</sup> Present and inseparable time from the subject.

<sup>153</sup> In *Ecce Homo: How To Become What You Are*, Nietzsche explains what he means by the word "idol", namely about another book, precisely with the title *Twilight of the Idols*: "What the title-page calls idol is quite simply what till now has been called 'truth'. *Twilight of the Idols*—in plain words: the old truth is coming to an end..." (Nietzsche, 2007a, p. 80). Consequently, for Nietzsche, the idols are the ideals and "truths" manufactured and imposed as such in society.

lion, and child are metaphors, they are types of human attitudes and behaviors. The human being goes through these phases throughout his life. However, generalizing and conceiving this process in a new species of human beings will certainly be impossible to result in a superman and we all be like that.

Changes in mentality or perspective on central issues that are absolute or unquestionable are sometimes difficult to accept. Especially when they concern the understanding of the human being or human nature. In *Nietzsche, Freud & Marx—Theatrum Philosophicum*, Foucault underlines:

“According to Freud, there are three major narcissistic wounds in Western culture: the wound imposed by Copernicus; the one made by Darwin, when he discovered that man descended from the monkey; and the wound caused by Freud when he, in turn, discovered that consciousness is born out of unconsciousness.” (Foucault, 2000, p. 51).

The effects of secularization are felt in the:

- Laicization and secularization, namely against absolute religious unanimity as a rule, even when a religion dominates public life and regulates private life.
- Pluralism and freedom of individual religious options.
- Religious indifference.
- Atheism.
- The progressive decline of the influence of traditional religious institutions since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Decreasing practice of the faithful.
- Growing difficulties in recruiting the clergy.
- Process of de-Christianization that paved the way for the sociological theories of secularization.

In this sense, secularization is advocated as:

- a) The phenomenon of individualization of religion (and subjectivity of the religious experiences).
- b) Adaptation of religion to modernity.
- c) The irreversible process of social marginalization of the religious institutions.

Between 1873 and 1876, Nietzsche published four *Untimely Meditations*. The second untimely entitled “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874), is like a personal struggle against the conception of time and culture of its time, but also against historicism, history, and historical

reason, which is eminently artificial. As Nietzsche acknowledges in *Ecce Homo: How To Become What You Are*:

“The *second Untimely* (1874) highlights what is dangerous about our kind of scientific endeavor, what there is in it that gnaws away at life and poisons it—life made *ill* by this dehumanized machinery and mechanism, by the ‘impersonality’ of the worker, by the false economy of the ‘division of labor’. The *end*, culture, is lost—the means, modern scientific endeavor, *barbarizes*... In this essay the ‘historical sense’, in which this century takes pride, was recognized for the first time as an illness, as a typical sign of decay.” (Nietzsche, 2007a, p. 50).

Nietzsche’s struggle also represents the conflict of human life with temporality and introduces the concepts of “sense” and “value”. Nietzsche criticizes the intellectuality of his epoch. He inquires the role of the intellectual in society. For Deleuze’s *Nietzsche and Philosophy*:

“This is why philosophy has an essential relation to time: it is always against its time, critique of the present world. The philosopher creates concepts that are neither eternal nor historical, but untimely and not of the present. The opposition in terms of which philosophy is realized is that of present and non-present, of our time and the untimely.” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 107).

Indeed, the problem of the value of history and the problem of historical consciousness are inherent. The historical consciousness distinguishes between human beings (who possess it) and animals (who ignore what they are and who live the impulses of the moment, without melancholy or satiety). Human beings are proud of their humanity when compared to other animals, but they envy the animal’s happiness. Ironically, Nietzsche (2007b, pp. 114-115) ridicules human beings for being able to admire themselves and cannot learn to forget; they are stuck in history, in the past. Sometimes one must learn to forget to be free of the past. As Nietzsche says in *Untimely Meditations*, animals forget immediately; they see “the instant die”, because they live a non-historical life, absorbing themselves completely in the present moment and without knowing how to hide or hide. Animals show themselves exactly as they are at every moment; they differ from man:

“Thus the animal lives *unhistorically*: for it is contained in the present, like a number without any awkward fraction left over; it does not know how to dissimulate, it conceals nothing and at every instant appears wholly as what it is; it can therefore never be anything but honest. Man, on the other hand, braces himself against the great and ever greater pressure of what is past: it pushes him down or bends him sideways, it encumbers his steps as a dark,

invisible burden which he can sometimes appear to disown and which in traffic with his fellow men he is only too glad to disown, so as to excite their envy.” (Nietzsche, 2007b, p. 61).

On the modern awareness of time, Nietzsche’s perspective is radical. He conceives time as something that always eludes us and, therefore, he considers that the past will not be safe or useful either (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 240). Thus, it will not be right to take the essence of time through the past, because it would remove importance from the present. In *Human, All To Human*, Nietzsche says: “there are no eternal facts, nor are there any absolute truths” (1996, p. 15). Everything has evolved. In Nietzsche’s perspective, all the knowledge we have about reality is only a perspective, it is relative to the circumstances and needs of the subject who knows a given reality.

Nietzsche appreciates and praises Greek Classical Antiquity because in that period there was a harmony between knowledge and action. Nietzsche intends to restore this harmony by creating a strategic need that makes the present unavoidable, open to the future and that sends the past to oblivion. Forgetting is necessary (Nietzsche, 2007b, p. 62). The possibility of forgetting is the faculty of feeling momentarily out of history:

“Thus: it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to live at all without forgetting. Or, to express my theme even more simply: *there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture.* [...] Cheerfulness, the good conscience, the joyful deed, confidence in the future—all of them depend, in the case of the individual as of a nation, on the existence of a line dividing the bright and discernible from the unilluminable and dark; on one’s being just as able to forget at the right time as to remember at the right time; on the possession of a powerful instinct for sensing when it is necessary to feel historically and when unhistorically. This, precisely, is the proposition the reader is invited to meditate upon: *the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture.* [...] the past and the present are one, that is to say, with all their diversity identical in all that is typical and, as the omnipresence of imperishable types, a motionless structure of a value that cannot alter and a significance that is always the same.” (Nietzsche, 2007b, pp. 61-66).

Nietzsche defines the precise degree and the limit at which it is necessary to forget the past, otherwise man becomes “the gravedigger of the present” (Nietzsche, 2007b, p. 62). This degree and limit would be given by the need to know the exact measure of what Nietzsche (2007b, p. 62) calls

“the *plastic power* of a man, a people, a culture”, i.e. “the capacity to develop out of oneself in one’s own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds” (Nietzsche, 2007b, p. 62).

All actions require forgetfulness. Historical life is the epicenter of the tension between memory and forgetfulness. All actions, all possibilities of history, need to be forgotten, the non-historical. Human life is historical, but its historical strength or capacity for action and perpetuation comes from something that is not historical. For this reason, it is necessary to have plastic power to draw a demarcation line between what is clear and visible and what is obscure and impenetrable. This is a *sine qua non* condition for all action and life to not become impossible.

If men, unlike animals, have a historical sense and a broader horizon, they must stimulate and preserve the faculty to feel things directly, to use the faculty that allows them to serve the past to life and remake history with the past. However, Nietzsche warns that too much history destroys man. Paradoxically, the absence of historical sense is useful to allow us to think.

There is also a supra-historical point of view that corresponds to those who have a historical spirit, where the spectacle of the past drives them into the future (Nietzsche, 2007b, p. 65). They are the “historical men”:

“These historical men believe that the meaning of existence will come more and more to light in the course of *its process*, and they glance behind them only so that, from the process so far, they can learn to understand the present and to desire the future more vehemently; they have no idea that, despite their preoccupation with history, they in fact think and act unhistorically, or that their occupation with history stands in the service, not of pure knowledge, but of life.” (Nietzsche, 2007b, p. 65).

Nietzsche criticizes them for not knowing that their thoughts and actions are unhistorical and are not driven by the need for knowledge. Nietzsche indicates a sense of culture. This sense is Greek, because it sees a new and improved *Physis*<sup>154</sup> in culture, without distinction between an inner and an outer, without dissimulation or convention. For Nietzsche, this would be the conception of a civilization where the agreement of life and thought, of appearing and of wanting would take place. It would be an original agreement that would derive from a cyclical conception of time.

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<sup>154</sup> Greek concept that means Nature (Peters, 1967, p. 158).

Nietzsche refers to Christianity to explain his epoch. The excess of history would derive from the medieval *memento mori*<sup>155</sup> and the illusion that Christianity cherishes regarding the future of existence on earth (Nietzsche, 2007b, p. 102). To the excess of history and Christianity, Nietzsche joins Hegel's philosophy as the basis of the whole problem of epigonism.<sup>156</sup>

For Hegel, everything that happens is directed towards the end of the world (Hartmann, 1983, pp. 633-647). In this sense, Hegel admits in *Philosophy of Right* that all rational is real and all real is rational on its way to the Absolute Spirit: "what is rational is real; and what is real is rational" (Hegel, 2001, p. 18). This path suggests the divinization of the last moment, the present time, insofar as it has the meaning and the end of the previous evolution.

Due to the extraordinary development of new information and communication technologies, we often hear that we live today in a society in full and constant transformation, in a society that is the most immediate product of the phenomenon of globalization or, simply, in an information society, i.e. in a society whose most fundamental instrument is the "network". It is an instrument with notable consequences for the structure and organization of the world in a virtual network.

With this scenario of an unceasing transformation of the world, the social transformations (new ways of communicating, interacting, knowing, and living) mean a better life? Do we have more democratic, just, tolerant, and humane societies?

The present epoch is that of the triumph of spectacle, consumerism, global market liberalism, capitalism. It is Debord's "society of the spectacle". Starting from Debord criticism on such society of the spectacle, Agamben (2007, p. 79) points out in *The Coming Community* that, according to Debord, the spectacle manipulate collective perception and take control of social memory and social communication, "transforming them into a single spectacular commodity where everything can be called into question except the spectacle itself, which, as such, says nothing but, 'What appears is good, what is good appears'".

"Today, in the era of the complete triumph of the spectacle, what can be reaped from the heritage of Debord? It is clear that the spectacle is language, the very communicativity or linguistic being of humans. This means that a

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<sup>155</sup> In the original Latin expression translated as "remember that you are going to die".

<sup>156</sup> Belief in the aging of humanity. According to Nietzsche, historical culture would be nothing more than congenital aging.

fuller Marxian analysis should deal with the fact that capitalism (or any other name one wants to give the process that today dominates world history) was directed not only toward the expropriation of productive activity, but also and principally toward the alienation of language itself, of the very linguistic and communicative nature of humans [...]” (Agamben, 2007, p. 79).

Taking Agamben’s challenge as a warning concerning the emerging social transformations, in a global epoch when communication appears as a paradigm of modernity, the most evident consequences are the crisis of social values and the loss of humanity and, paradoxically, incommunicability. As Agamben (2007, p. 81) adds: “what hampers communication is communicability itself; humans are separated by what unites them. Journalists and mediacrats are the new priests of this alienation from human linguistic nature.”

This alienation or uprooting of the linguistic being or the new *homo communicans* is due, in part, to this epoch of excessive communication and knowledge. Nietzsche’s criticism is part of the fight against the tyrannies of modernity, time, and history, by defending the “recovery” of man as being endowed with useful thought.

In Nietzsche’s perspective, thinking is like ruminating: no idea or information is digested without analyzing its conditions of possibility and avoiding the superficiality of a supposed and imposed ready-to-think. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche points out:

“Already one is ashamed of keeping still; long reflection almost gives people a bad conscience. One thinks with a watch in hand, as one eats lunch with an eye on the financial pages—one lives like someone who might always ‘miss out on something’. ‘Rather do anything than nothing’—even this principle is a cord to strangle all culture and all higher taste. [...] the true virtue today is doing something in less time than someone else.” (Nietzsche, 2007c, pp. 183-184).

According to this excerpt from *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche warns of the decline of the spiritual and intellectual dimension of humanity, the result of his premature aging. Nietzsche’s reflection focuses on the wrong use of the valences of human actions in society. What is also interesting, in this reflection, is that Nietzsche’s words are a close representation of the current situation that characterizes Western societies.

The question about the relevance of Nietzsche’s thought for the understanding of current societies is implied in this excerpt from *The Gay Science*, which faithfully portrays Nietzsche’s philosophical view towards a culture that does not know how to think for itself or think about itself. Since Nietzsche’s epoch, the deviation of Western societies from historical



heritages has been increasingly greater, which makes a critical Nietzschean philosophy on life's sense and values more emergent.

A consequence of the modern world was first recognized by Nietzsche as a crisis and depreciation of values associated with existential disorientation, according to Lipovetsky and Serroy in *World-Culture: Responding to a Disoriented Society*:

“No one better than Nietzsche has been able to theorize the anguish of modern man in the face of the ‘death of God’. Nothing else is true, nothing else is good: when higher values lost the right to direct existence, man was left alone with life. As the feeling of emptiness increases, intoxicating behaviors multiply to escape at night from a worthless world, to the abyss of lack of purpose and meaning.” (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 31).<sup>157</sup>

Indeed, systematic knowledge of human action or trends in social development is possible, taking into account Nietzsche's nihilism, which, for Giddens' *The Consequences of Modernity*, links to modernity the idea that “history can be identified as a progressive appropriation of rational foundations of knowledge (Giddens, 1996, p. 47). In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Giddens considers:

“Moreover, if Nietzsche was the principal author disconnecting post-modernity from modernity, a phenomenon supposedly happening today, how is it possible that he saw all this almost a century ago? Why was Nietzsche able to make such a breakthrough without, as he freely said, doing anything more than uncovering the hidden presuppositions of the Enlightenment itself?” (Giddens, 1996, p. 47-48).

In the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche (1998, p. 33) also warns of the need to demystify the relative importance that people attach to certain entities: “truth” designates nothing but what we nowadays call “illusions”. It is necessary to show that the foundations on which we build our truths, especially the most sacred or absolute for us (to the point of assuming themselves in the form of “our idols”) were a product of history. Therefore, the proposal is to use reason to understand the power of decision, the will to power as an insatiable desire to manifest a power that is the most crucial, and not so much life itself and nature.

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<sup>157</sup> My translation from the consulted Portuguese edition of Lipovetsky and Serroy's book *A Cultura-Mundo: Resposta a uma Sociedade Desorientada* [*World-Culture: Responding to a Disoriented Society*] (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras).

Nietzsche makes a heterodox conception of the truth: the truth was not conceived as something that we discover about the world; but a moral quality and, therefore, something subjective, controversial, and interpretable. For Nietzsche, morality is the province of the collective, not the individual. According to Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*:

“*Preparatory human beings*.—I welcome all the signs of a more virile, warlike age approaching that will above all restore honour to bravery! For it shall pave the way for a still higher age and gather the strength that the latter will need one day—the age that will carry heroism into the search for knowledge and wage wars for the sake of thoughts and their consequences. To this end we now need many preparatory brave human beings who surely cannot spring from nothingness any more than from the sand and slime of present-day civilization and urbanization [...] For—believe me—the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is—to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you seekers of knowledge!” (Nietzsche, 1997c, pp. 160-161).

Nietzsche claims that one must be prepared to face the challenges of the future, overcoming and beat them with sage, courage, and audacity, because the epoch that is ahead is hostile.

## 12.2. Heidegger: the question concerning technology and modernity

Martin Heidegger (1887-1976) addresses the role of science and technology as activities developed by the human being and which are important for the understanding of modernity. For Heidegger, modernity allows the conceptualization of the world as a whole, an image (a “world picture” in his words) created by the human being. In the essay *Die Frage nach der Technik*,<sup>158</sup> Heidegger entitled Part III of “The age of the world picture” and characterizes this modern period, sustaining a crisis of representation and affirming that modernity, which allows the conceptualization of the world as an imaginary world created by man, it is like the era of “loss of gods”:

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<sup>158</sup> Title of the work in the original in German, published in 1962. The edition used for this book is the English version, entitled *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (cf. Heidegger, 1977).

“One of the essential phenomena of the modern age is its science. A phenomenon of no less importance is machine technology. We must not, however, misinterpret that technology as the mere application of modern mathematical physical science to praxis. Machine technology is itself an autonomous transformation of praxis, a type of transformation wherein praxis first demands the employment of mathematical physical science. Machine technology remains up to now the most visible outgrowth of the essence of modern technology, which is identical with the essence of modern metaphysics. A third equally essential phenomenon of the modern period lies in the event of art’s moving into the purview of aesthetics. That means that the art work becomes the object of mere subjective experience, and that consequently art is considered to be an expression of human life. A fourth modern phenomenon manifests itself in the fact that human activity is conceived and consummated as culture. Thus culture is the realization of the highest values, through the nurture and cultivation of the highest goods of man. It lies in the essence of culture, as such nurturing, to nurture itself in its turn and thus to become the politics of culture. A fifth phenomenon of the modern age is the loss of the gods. This expression does not mean the mere doing away with the gods, gross atheism. The loss of the gods is a *twofold* process. On the one hand, the world picture is Christianized inasmuch as the cause of the world is posited as infinite, unconditional, absolute. On the other hand, Christendom transforms Christian doctrine into a world view (the Christian world view), and in that way makes itself modern and up to date. The loss of the gods is the situation of indecision regarding God and the gods. Christendom has the greatest share in bringing it about. But the loss of the gods is so far from excluding religiosity that rather only through that loss is the relation to the gods changed into mere ‘religious experience’. When this occurs, then the gods have fled. The resultant void is compensated for by means of historiographical and psychological investigation of myth.” (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 116-117).

The role of science is important in understanding modernity. Science develops the technique and technique frees the human but makes him *subjectum*. According to Heidegger’s *The Question Concerning Technology*:

“The essence of the modern age can be seen in the fact that man frees himself from the bonds of the Middle Ages in freeing himself to himself. [...] Certainly the modern age has, as a consequence of the liberation of man, introduced subjectivism and individualism. [...] What is decisive is not that man frees himself to himself from previous obligations, but that the very essence of man itself changes, in that man becomes subject. [...] However, when man becomes the primary and only real *subiectum*, that means: Man becomes that being upon which all that is, is grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth. Man becomes the relational center of that which is as such. But this is possible only when the comprehension of what is as a whole changes. In what does this change manifest itself? What, in keeping

with it, is the essence of the modern age? When we reflect on the modern age, we are questioning concerning the modern world picture [Weltbild].” (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 127-128).

The change of conception of a world picture means the world is conceived and understood as an image. As Heidegger (1977, p. 129) explains, “world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture”. This change defines the modern era.

“The expressions ‘world picture of the modern age’ and ‘modern world picture’ both mean the same thing and both assume something that never could have been before, namely, a medieval and an ancient world picture. The world picture does not change from an earlier medieval one into a modern one, but rather the fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age.” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 130).

According to Heidegger (1977, p. 134), “the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture”. The word ‘picture’ (*Bild*) means the structured image (*Gebild*) that is the creature of man. According to Heidegger, we live in the age of the “world-as-picture”. It is the modern age, when the world has become a picture, i.e. a systematized and representable object of techno-scientific rationality. For Heidegger, this phenomenon (trend or pictorial turn) is a historical transformation equivalent to the Modern Age. The “world-as-picture” does not change from a previous Medieval Age to a Modern Age, but the world becomes a picture and this fact is what distinguishes the essence of the Modern Age.

Indeed, the human being does not live only from instinct (his nature); he also lives on the rational faculty (his thinking) and the operative faculty (his voluntary technical action) that modify the natural circumstances in which he finds himself. The technique is the modification that human beings impose on their natural circumstances to produce (more than satisfy) their superfluous needs, according to Ortega y Gasset (2009, p. 37). Voluntary technical action is an effort to save effort (Ortega y Gasset, 2009, p. 43). If the technique is an effort that saves many and greater efforts (i.e. it brings rest and supposed well-being), a problem arises: what do one do with the saved effort? What will human being do to occupy his life?

For Ortega y Gasset (2009, p. 33), the technique is the opposite of the adaptation of the subject to the environment, given that it is the adaptation of the environment to the subject. For its existence, the human being needs well-being. Human beings, techniques, and well-being are synonymous (Ortega y Gasset, 2009, p. 37). All human beings are technical beings. The

technique is creation, production, *poiesis*; the technique is somewhat poetic, as stated by Heidegger (1977, p. 13) in *The Question Concerning Technology*.

### 12.3. Baudrillard: the end of the social

Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) is often associated with post-modern and post-structuralist theory, but he wrote about many and varied subjects, being difficult to situate his work in just a theoretical framework. Baudrillard's work combines sociological and philosophical approaches, social and cultural theory, and an idiosyncratic and sharp criticism on key events and phenomena of our contemporary epoch, society, culture, and thought.

One of Baudrillard's most famous and important works will certainly be *The Consumer Society*. Baudrillard's vehement criticism of materialism and consumerism, which, according to the author, characterizes contemporary societies is deduced from the title alone. Therefore, these societies are precisely consumer societies. They are societies riddled with objects and, consequently, these objects encourage their consumption, since mass production of objects and goods presupposes mass consumption of these objects and goods. According to *The Consumer Society*:

“There is all around us today a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance, constituted by the multiplication of objects, services and material goods, and this represents something of a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects. Their daily dealings are now not so much with their fellow men, but rather on a rising statistical curve—with the reception and manipulation of goods and messages. This runs from the very complex organization of the household, with its dozens of technical slaves, to street furniture and the whole material machinery of communication; from professional activities to the permanent spectacle of the celebration of the object in advertising and the hundreds of daily messages from the mass media; from the minor proliferation of vaguely obsessional gadgetry to the symbolic psychodramas fueled by the nocturnal objects which come to haunt us even in our dreams. The two concepts ‘environment’ and ‘ambience’ have doubtless only enjoyed such a vogue since we have come to live not so much alongside other human beings—in their physical presence and the presence of their speech—as beneath the mute gaze of mesmerizing, obedient objects which endlessly repeat the same refrain: that of our dumbfounded power, our virtual affluence, our absence one from another. Just as the wolf-child became a wolf by living among wolves, so we too are slowly becoming functional. We live by object time: by this I mean that we live at the pace of objects, live to the rhythm of their ceaseless succession. Today, it is we who watch them as they are born, grow

to maturity and die, whereas in all previous civilizations it was timeless objects, instruments or monuments which outlived the generations of human beings.” (Baudrillard, 1999, p. 25).

Consumption is directly associated with abundance, on which it depends. Abundance is caused by the industrialization and the massification of societies; it leads to consumption and transforms us, as well what we do and how we live.

In *A l’Ombre des Majorites Silencieuses ou la Fin du Social*,<sup>159</sup> Baudrillard warns of what he calls the “abyss of meaning” in contemporary societies:

“Whatever its political, pedagogical, cultural content, the plan is always to get some meaning across, to keep the masses *within reason*; an imperative to produce meaning that takes the form of the constantly repeated imperative to moralize information: to better inform, to better socialize, to raise the cultural level of the masses, etc. Nonsense: the masses scandalously resist this imperative of rational communication. They are given meaning: they want spectacle. No effort has been able to convert them to the seriousness of the content, nor even to the seriousness of the code. Messages are given to them, they only want some sign, they idolize the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolize any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence.” (Baudrillard, 1983, pp. 9-10).

Baudrillard refers to “the end of the social”. He identifies this collective demand for new forms of expression, culminating in the end or death of the social (the social void) and, by contrast, in the heyday of the masses:

“*The social has basically never existed*. There never has been any ‘social relation’. Nothing has ever functioned socially. On this inescapable basis of challenge, seduction and death, there has never been anything but simulation of the social and the social relation.” (Baudrillard, 1983, pp. 70-71).

The information society does not only bring advantages, such as volume and easier and immediate access to information; it also brings an implosion of meaning and, consequently, of human understanding. The circulation of informational content is so intense that it exhausts its own capacity and time to understand it. The media receive so much credit from the public that the culture is mediatic. Everyone is influenced in a massive and uniform way by the messages transmitted through intense and constant flows of

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<sup>159</sup> The edition used is in English, with the title *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities ... or the End of the Social and Other Essays* (cf. Baudrillard, 1983).

information. In *A l'Ombre des Majorites Silencieuses ou la Fin du Social*, Baudrillard criticizes the implosion of meaning in the media, denouncing the existence of more and more messages, more information and less and less meaning (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 95).

According to Baudrillard's *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, the importance of communication is excessive. Paradoxically, communication is more social than the social itself:

“Communication is more social than the social itself: it is the hyperrelational, sociality overactivated by social techniques. The social, in its essence, is not this. Rather, it was a dream, a myth, a utopia, a conflicted and contradictory form, a violent form—and, certainly, an occasional and exceptional occurrence. Communication, by banalizing the interface, plunges the social into an undifferentiated state. That is why there is no such thing as a communicational utopia. To conceive of a utopian society based on communication is an impossibility, because communication results, precisely, from a society's inability to transcend itself as a function of new aims. The same goes for information: excess knowledge is dispersed arbitrarily in every direction on the surface, but commutation is the only process to which it is subject. At the interfaces, interlocutors are connected up to one another after the fashion of an electric plug in a socket. Communication ‘occurs’ by means of a sole instantaneous circuit, and for it to be ‘good’ communication it must take place fast there is no time for silence. Silence is banished from our screens; it has no place in communication.” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 12).

According to this excerpt, Baudrillard maintains that the death of the social is due, paradoxically, to communication. Paradoxically because communication is essentially a social field, from the etymology of the concept to its effective practice.

### 12.3.1. Images, simulations, and hyperreality

In a world increasingly iconolatrous and riddled with images, the human being lives in a reality built by signs (images, representations) and their effects of representation. The human being lives in the artificial representations that he produces about reality. Images are signs, they are representations of reality; they acquire more importance and realism, i.e. while representations, they impress more and seem more real than reality. With more devices for the production and reproduction of images and the cult of them, likelihood and appearance predominate at the expense of reality itself. The image is always a representation of something, just like all signs.

The problem is that the image becomes valid by itself, contrary to the classic principle of semiotics, according to which *aliquo stat pro aliquid*.<sup>160</sup> Instead of being valid for what it refers to or represents, the image is the object of worship and widespread practice. The copy is preferable to the original, just as the simulacrum (the technical reproduction) is preferable to the real, coming to appear even more real than the real itself. This context in which the image appears to play a fundamental role in the perception and experience of the real is harmful, since simulating reality through images means eliminating the important differences between the real and the imaginary (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 144).

Today, in a world with an excess of images, where the use and dependence on visuality transform the culture, which is already visual, into an iconolatriy, Baudrillard's epigraph at the beginning of this Chapter 12 has more and more relevance: "Photography is our exorcism. Primitive society had its masks, bourgeois society its mirrors, and we have our images" (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 153). The images fascinate by the instantaneousness of its perception. However, the immediate perception of the image destroys the understanding of its content.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard radicalizes the consequences of images and claims that reality has ceased to exist; now we live the representation of reality. This difference is abysmal and has repercussions. When we live in representations, we do not live authentically. The media contribute to this transition from what is lived to what is not lived, that is, from reality to representation, as they are spreader. In doing so, they cement post-modern societies. These societies are defined by profound social changes, such as the one Baudrillard warns of.

In post-modern and visual societies like the current ones, we live in representations and attribute more importance and strength of seduction and attraction to signs/images than to reality itself. Simulacra and simulations arise.<sup>161</sup> These two terms are different but semantically close:

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<sup>160</sup> As Umberto Eco explains in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, this classic expression, translated as "one thing is instead of another", emphasizes the idea of representation or substitution: x or *aliquid* is for y or *aliquo* (cf. Eco, 1986, pp. 14-18).

<sup>161</sup> The terms "simulacrum", in the singular, and "simulacra", in the plural, are derived from the Latin *simulare*, which means "to simulate" or "make it look like".



	Simulacrum	Simulation
Common sense	Copy, image, resemblance, appearance without reality, simulated action.	Pretending, disguise, deception.
Baudrillard's sense	<p>A sign/image without referent or without a real object; a sign that cannot be exchanged for reality.</p> <p>The simulacrum is not a situation of illusion as advanced as the simulation is. In the simulacrum, one can see that one is in deception or experiencing something that is not real.</p>	<p>A kind of copy that is not only indistinguishable from what it copies, but in which the distinction between copy and original disappears.</p> <p>The notion of the real is lost because an idea or situation is adopted as a supposed truth of which there is no longer the discernment of being a distortion of reality.</p>

**Table 12-3:** Distinction between simulacrum and simulation.

Simulacra are usually understood as a problem for thought because they put the question of falsehood and non-truth, i.e. they are what hide the inexistence of the truth; in this perspective, the simulacrum is “true” (Smith, 2010, p. 196). The perception of reality and the idea that is formed about reality is triggered by signs, signifiers that, by the form (more than by the content) produce impressions, effects of reality. The referents of these signifiers do not exist; they are mirage, illusions, simulations. The real is, thus, only the simulacrum of the symbolic, whose form is reduced and intercepted by the sign.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard describes the “precession of simulacra”, the growing distance between the image and reality:

1. The image begins as a reflection of reality.
2. The image covers reality.
3. The image masks the absence of reality.
4. The image has no relation to reality (it is a mere copy of an *ad infinitum* copy, without “original”).

In this gradual and intensifying process of erasing reality by the image, reality disappears and the real is replaced by the hyperreal, a “copy without original” that is more real than reality itself. For Baudrillard, the example is Disneyland: America’s hyperreal simulation (Bell, Loader, Pleace & Schuler, 2005, p. 134). It is a social microcosm, an imaginary world and that is why it is successful. According to *Simulacra and Simulation*:

“Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms: the Pirates, the Frontier, the Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to ensure the success of the operation. But what attracts the crowds the most is without a doubt the social microcosm, the religious, miniaturized pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys. One parks outside and stands in line inside, one is altogether abandoned at the exit. The only phantasmagoria in this imaginary world lies in the tenderness and warmth of the crowd, and in the sufficient and excessive number of gadgets necessary to create the multitudinous effect. The contrast with the absolute solitude of the parking lot—a veritable concentration camp—is total.” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 13).

Disneyland is a perfect model for all types of confused simulacra, states Baudrillard. Foremost, it is a game of illusions and ghosts to hide the “real” country, the “real” America which is Disneyland. Disneyland is the product and fabrication of the imaginary to make us believe that the rest is real without being already simulation.

“But this masks something else and this ‘ideological’ blanket functions as a cover for a simulation of the third order: Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America that is Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle. The imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false. It is rather a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp. Whence the debility of this imaginary, its infantile degeneration. This world wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the ‘real’ world, and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere — that it is that of the adults themselves who come here to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness.” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 14).

Disneyland is a good example of hyperreality, because: a) it is a place where the false is produced by technological development and is admired; b) it presents us “more reality” than Nature, that is, the hyperreal is what is more real than real, the copy that is more perfect than the original (Perry, 1988, p. 42). Disneyland is a space for regeneration and mental recycling of dreams, imagery, or sociability already lost. For this reason, Baudrillard (1997, p. 2) argues that today “simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance”, on the contrary, “it is the generation by

models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. Inspired by the history of the map by Jorge Lu s Borges, Baudrillard points to the map as an analogy of the simulacra. This means that “the territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 2).

“Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the 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 without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself.” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 2).

Baudrillard (1997, p. 6) denounces what he calls “the murderous power of images”. Images murder the real, its own model. The images represent the real and we are pleased with representations to the detriment of reality itself. Today, we prefer representation (where it is more comfortable to live, as it constitutes a visible and intelligible mediation of the real) than what is represented, that is, reality itself. The world has become a representation; everything is signs and these signs are worth more than what (the reality) they represent.

“This way the stake will always have been the murderous power of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model, as the Byzantine icons could be those of divine identity. To this murderous power is opposed that of representations as a dialectical power, the visible and intelligible mediation of the Real. All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum — not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. Such is simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by

interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. Such would be the successive phases of the image: –it is the reflection of a profound reality; – it masks and denatures a profound reality; –it masks the absence of a profound reality; –it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum. In the first case, the image is a good appearance – representation is of the sacramental order. In the second, it is an evil appearance – it is of the order of maleficence. In the third, it plays at being an appearance – it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer of the order of appearances, but of simulation.” (Baudrillard, 1997, pp. 6-7).

This idea of domination of representation in the world is comparable to Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*. In this work two possibilities of conceiving the world are distinguished, the will and the representation:

- The world as will: of the things themselves and of the will that is hidden behind the phenomenon that is representation.
- The world as representation: illusion, appearance.

According to Schopenhauer, the world is representation, or rather, (my) world is my representation. Following Berkley’s skeptical perspective of immaterialism, Schopenhauer stresses in *The World as Will and Representation* that:

“The world is my representation”: this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being, although man alone can bring it into reflective, abstract consciousness. If he really does so, philosophical discernment has dawned on him. It then becomes clear and certain to him that he does not know a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth; that the world around him is there only as representation, in other words, only in reference to another thing, namely that which represents, and this is himself. If any truth can be expressed a priori, it is this; for it is the statement of that form of all possible and conceivable experience, a form that is more general than all others, than time, space, and causality, for all these presuppose it. While each of these forms, which we have recognized as so many particular modes of the principle of sufficient reason, is valid only for a particular class of representations, the division into object and subject, on the other hand, is the common form of all those classes; it is that form under which alone any representation, of whatever kind it be, abstract or intuitive, pure or empirical, is generally possible and conceivable. Therefore no truth is more certain, more independent of all others, and less in need of proof than this, namely that everything that exists for knowledge, and hence the whole of this world, is only object in relation to the subject, perception of the perceiver, in a word, representation. Naturally this holds good of the present as well as of the past and future, of what is remotest as

well as of what is nearest; for it holds good of time and space themselves, in which alone all these distinctions arise. Everything that in any way belongs and can belong to the world is inevitably associated with this being-conditioned by the subject, and it exists only for the subject. The world is representation.” (Schopenhauer, 1969, p. 3).

This excerpt highlights some fundamental ideas, namely:

- Everyone’s world is their own representation of the world.
- Everything that exists for knowledge, and hence the whole of this world, is only an object in relation to the subject, perception of the perceiver, i.e. representation.
- Everything that in any way belongs and can belong to the world is inevitably associated with this being-conditioned by the subject, and it exists only for the subject.
- The world is representation.

What is a representation? What is the problem that the representation raises? Does the real refer to a representation (is it inside the sign) or is it just what is outside the sign?

For Baudrillard, the current media age is dominated by a pure simulacrum. The frequency with which the media disseminates images of spectacle or scandal, provoking sensationalism and creating distance in face of factuality, demonstrates how disconnected representations are, i.e. they create simulacra (kinds of representations produced by simulations). The real and the hyperreal are two orders of simulacra generated by images (signs) through representation and, later, by simulation. According to Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation*:

“That is, we are in a logic of simulation, which no longer has anything to do with a logic of facts and an order of reason. Simulation is characterized by a precession of the model, of all the models based on the merest fact — the models come first, their circulation, orbital like that of the bomb, constitutes the genuine magnetic field of the event. The facts no longer have a specific trajectory, they are born at the intersection of models, a single fact can be engendered by all the models at once.” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 18).

For Baudrillard (1997, p. 21), it is impossible to find an absolute level of real again, but it is also impossible to stage the illusion, because “illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible”.

“Whence the characteristic hysteria of our times: that of the production and reproduction of the real. The other production, that of values and commodities, that of the belle époque of political economy, has for a long

time had no specific meaning. What every society looks for in continuing to produce, and to overproduce, is to restore the real that escapes it. That is why today this "material" production is that of the hyperreal itself. It retains all the features, the whole discourse of traditional production, but it is no longer anything but its scaled-down refraction (thus hyperrealists fix a real from which all meaning and charm, all depth and energy of representation have vanished in a hallucinatory resemblance). Thus, everywhere the hyperrealism of simulation is translated by the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself." (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 25).

To understand the concept of "simulacrum", we must relate it to the concept of "reality". The simulacrum is the representation or image of the real without origin or reality, that is, it is the result of the hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 3). The reality is the quality of what exists. Reality constitutes everything that is real. The real is what provides an equivalent reproduction; it is reproducible under certain conditions. At the end of this reproducibility process, the real is not only what can be reproduced, but also what is always reproduced. The real was never more than a model of simulation and reality did not always exist, as it is only spoken of after there is a rationality to affirm it. There are effects of the real, effects of truth, effects of objectivity that tend to disappear or become scarcer, but it seems the real does not exist; it is the virtual that now appears to exist as real.

But how far does reality go and does hyperreality begin? How far does hyperreality go? How to measure the perception of reality and be sure about the reality that perception "perceive"?

The problem is that the simulacrum acts as an intensifying element of the real on which it is based, artificially creating a hyperreality characterized by spectacularity, that is, a counterfeiting of the real that is more vivid and seductive than the factuality (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 144). Contrary to a perception of the real, the simulacrum does not provide new knowledge about the world and factuality, it only reproduces it. The simulacrum is desirable, convenient, and comfortable allowing a technologically produced world, but not the effective world, as it is not based on truth or reality.

For this reason, *Simulacra and Simulation* begins stating that today the territory no longer precedes the map; on the contrary, it is the map that precedes the territory (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 2). For post-modernity, the simulacrum appears as the true, it creates the illusion of the real and truth, it seduces and convinces, allowing no more knowledge or experience in the real world and leading to the inability to distinguish between the real and the non-real. It is fallaciously believed that only what is reproduced by the image exists, when in fact, for Baudrillard, it is precisely the role of the image that creates the illusion (the simulacrum) about the real. In the

creation of the simulacrum, the image detaches itself from its referent and takes on a life of its own, which is de-territorialized. The objective is to aestheticize the sensation and perception.

For Baudrillard, the simulacrum is like a type of representation produced by simulation, it is a copy without an original. In a world where there are only simulations or where the form of the simulacrum predominates, the world itself is a copy of a copy and the very notions of authenticity and truth lose their point of reference (Smith, 2010, p. 199). The concept of “simulacrum” is a problem for Baudrillard, but not in the sense of Plato, i.e. as a misleading imitation.<sup>162</sup> Like Nietzsche, Baudrillard understands that simulations are not like false images or obscure the truth through a device, a façade; “it is always a false problem to wish to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 29).

What is the problem with the images? The problem is that images are not representative, they do not “re-present” reality. It is problem of conceiving and understanding the world as an image. To conceive and understand the world as an image means to impose a way of seeing the world, an ideological way, oriented to certain meanings that the images produce and indicate as convenient. For this reason, Baudrillard says:

“Ideology only corresponds to a corruption of reality through signs; simulation corresponds to a short circuit of reality and to its duplication through signs. It is always the goal of the ideological analysis to restore the objective process, it is always a false problem to wish to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum.” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 29).

Regarding images in general (including media and technological images), Baudrillard highlights in *The Evil Demon of Images* the perversity of the relationship between the image and its referent (the supposed reality),

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<sup>162</sup> The problem of images for Plato is limited to the question of images being mere images of the truth. As Plato points out in *The Republic*: “In the category of the seen the first section is images, by which I mean in the first place shadows, and in the second place reflections in water, or any dense, smooth, shiny surface. Everything of that sort, if you see what I mean” (Plato, 2003, 509e-510a). For Plato, any imitation is always negative because: 1) it deviates from the truth; 2) it appeals to emotions and emotions make us see things emotionally, leading us to immorality, instability, and irrationality. Images take us away from common sense and can be dangerous. In Plato’s work, the question about the relation between *eidos* (real, truth), *ikon* (image), and *eidolon* (simulacrum) is of interest. According to *The Baudrillard Dictionary* (Smith, 2010, p. 102), the question is about the relation between the true model (and the model as truth) and the attempt to capture that model in a representation (*ikon*).

i.e. the virtual and irreversible confusion the sphere of images and the sphere of reality, whose nature is less and less understandable. Baudrillard refers “the diabolical seduction of images”, because images follow a strategy by which they always seem to refer to a real world and real objects, reproducing something that is, in a logical and chronological way, prior to own images.

“As simulacra, images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction. Benjamin, in his essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, already pointed out strongly this modern revolution in the order of production (of reality, of meaning) by the precession, the anticipation of its reproduction. It is precisely when it appears most truthful, most faithful and most in conformity to reality that the image is most diabolical—and our technical images, whether they be from photography, cinema or television, are in the overwhelming majority much more ‘figurative’, ‘realist’, than all the images from past cultures.” (Baudrillard, 1984, p. 13).

For Baudrillard, the images are diabolical because they seem to conform to reality. We naively believe in this conformity, in the realism of images. This is what happens with certain movies, which impress by the images that can detach us from the notion that they are enactments, representations, fictions. Baudrillard (1997, pp. 60-61) presents the example of *Apocalypse Now*, by Francis Ford Coppola. In movies with exaggerations, special and technological effects generated by a computer, the reality (if any) is the production and presentation of the movie itself, which is a simulation. It is a paradox: the represented (reality) comes from the representative (image).

“Coppola does the same thing: he tests the power of intervention of cinema, tests the impact of cinema become a vast machine of special effects. In this sense his film is very much the prolongation of war by other means, the completion of that incomplete war, its apotheosis. War becomes film, film becomes war, the two united by their mutual overflow of technology.” (Baudrillard, 1984, p. 16).

The image contaminates and shapes reality (Baudrillard, 1984, p. 16). It is as if the reality of something or situation is anticipated by the images of that thing or situation. Baudrillard invokes the problem of the image to warn about the primacy of the image as a simulacrum, over any putative reality. The image does not constitute the reality itself. The image is the representation of reality, it is the simulacrum. The simulacrum is like a second baptism of objects, things, reality; the first baptism is representation. To simulate is to pretend an absent presence; it is to create an image without correspondence or representation with reality.



We live surrounded by images. These images represent reality independently of reality itself, on the one hand, and they seek to make spectacular impressions of what they represent, on the other hand. It is the hysteria of the production and reproduction of the real (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 33). These images are simulations and many of them are misshapen in the face of reality. Even so, they are more attractive to the viewer than the reproduced reality.

Based on the assumptions of a critical theory of mass culture and spectacle, Umberto Eco analyses the effects of an iconolatriy (or semiolatriy, in general)<sup>163</sup> on the processes of language and cognition, which distorts the real with the artificial, the apparent and the virtual, i.e. with the strategic production of images and products from cultural entertainment industry. Umberto Eco presents *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality* as a critical essay on contemporary culture. A visual, tautological, and hyperbolic culture, essential for the creation of perceptions of appearance, fostering the production of signs as a support for virtualization of reality or hyperreality (Eco, 1998, p. 19). Hyperreality is the false exponent in which imitations not only reproduce reality but also try to improve it.

For example, there are museums that work as a way of providing the experience of another dream reality, fiction, which reality itself does not satisfy. Is this reality a fiction? The dream is desire, it is what one would like to have, but one does not have it; reality is what gives rise to dreams as a way of evading reality itself.

In fact, the concept of “hyperreality” is connected with the effects of mass culture, in particular those of the virtual reproduction of objects, events, or experiences that replace or are preferred over the authenticity of the real (the idea that the copy is more real than the original).

In this perspective, for Eco and Baudrillard, hyperreality is indistinguishable from reality, image (signs that represent reality), and the sensation of appearance in forms of simulation. In *America*, Baudrillard (1989, p. 36) points out that America is neither dream nor reality; it is a hyperreality. It is a utopia which has behaved from the very beginning as though it were already achieved. In America, everything is real and pragmatic, and yet it is all the stuff of dreams too, says Baudrillard.

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<sup>163</sup> A kingdom of signs and meanings, a field of the semiosphere, according to Yuri Lotman’s concept (2005, p. 208). The semiosphere is the sphere of signs, the space, or system of Semiotics, without which communication cannot happen (Hartley, 2004, p. 207).

“Yes, California (and America with it) is the mirror of *our* decadence, but *it* is not decadent at all. It is hyperreal in its vitality, it has all the energy of the simulacrum. ‘It is the world center of the inauthentic’. Certainly it is: that is what gives it its originality and power. The irresistible rise of the simulacrum is something you can simply fell here without the slightest effort.” (Baudrillard, 1989, p. 104).

Today, the reality is hyperrealist, as Baudrillard (2000, p. 74) claims in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. In this book, Baudrillard (2000, p. 86) adds that “we must add the ‘hyperreal’ to the celebrated categories of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary, since it captures and redirects, perverts, the play of the three others”. “Reality has already incorporated the hyperrealist dimension of simulation so that we are now living entirely within the ‘aesthetic’ hallucination of reality” (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 74). He demonstrates that reality is superseded or concealed by imitation that is always proposed as new and more complete and, therefore, more interesting for mass culture. In turn, Eco remains critical of mass culture and spectacle, like Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*.

In *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality* and in *America*, Eco and Baudrillard, respectively, use the term “hyperreality” to describe how our perception of the world increasingly depends on simulations of reality, as we become a communicational, technological and hyperreal society. Eco and Baudrillard recognize the construction of a kind of semiocracy.<sup>164</sup> The signs of hyperreality serve to escape from referentiality. Eco and Baudrillard recognize “a tendency for signs to break loose from their referential moorings, to fly free of cognitive meaning and take on a hyper-life of their own that is more real than reality and hence hyperreal”, says John Tiffin (2005, p. 41).

For Baudrillard, America is the perfect simulacrum of immanence and the material transcription of all values (Barroso, 2018, p. 104). In America, everything is paradoxically real and utopian. As Baudrillard refers in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*:

“Today the whole system is swamped by indeterminacy, and every reality is absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and simulation. The principle of simulation governs us now, rather than the outdated reality principle. We

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<sup>164</sup> The concept of “semiocracy” derives from the Greek terms *semeion*, “sign”, and *krátos*, “power”, meaning a powerful and dominant empire of massified and influential signs, which impose a certain way of seeing, thinking, feeling, act or just mean and interpret the world.

feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacra.” (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 2).

This indeterminacy is reshaped by profound social transformations, whose modalities are hyperreality and simulation. For Baudrillard, what regulates social life today is a principle of simulation, not reality. Therefore, the core of Baudrillard’s theory of communication is the notion of symbolic exchange (Smith, 2010, pp. 36-37). Symbolic exchange is the authentic form (for both simulation and reality) of communication to exercise interaction and reciprocity in a cultural context.

Hyperreality is related to simulation and, to use Baudrillard’s concept, with the simulacrum, both in conceptual terms (one concept presupposes the other) and in concrete terms of what they are and what they represent, i.e. a reproduction, copy or image without referent, without objective correspondence with something in the reality that gives rise to it. Hyperreality always refers to a simulation of reality that is, paradoxically, considered more real than reality itself.

In a post-modern critical perspective, hyperreality is the result of the technological mediation of experiences. With hyperreality, what goes through reality is a network of images, signs without referents. Thus, what is represented is the representation itself. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard (2000, p. 74) discusses the “hyperrealism of simulation” and the very reality that, today, is hyperrealist, i.e. reality has already incorporated the hyperrealist dimension of simulation. The whole reality became a simulation. The real and the imaginary were absorbed in the symbolic.

Reality becomes a representation or simulation of itself: “The consummate enjoyment [*jouissance*] of the signs of guilt, despair, violence, and death are replacing guilt, anxiety and even death in the total euphoria of simulation” (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 74). Note the following excerpt from *Symbolic Exchange and Death*:

“The end of the spectacle brings with it the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another reproductive medium such as advertising or photography. Through reproduction from one medium into another the real becomes volatile, it becomes the allegory of death, but it also draws strength from its own destruction, becoming the real for its own sake, a fetishism of the lost object which is no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denegation and its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.” (Baudrillard, 2000, pp. 71-72).

In Baudrillard’s perspective, the contradiction between reality and imaginary disappears. Unreality corresponds to the similarity of reality with

itself, i.e. the absurd identification of reality, which is its own representation. This is the crisis of representation. The very definition of the real is “that of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction” (Baudrillard, 2000, pp. 73). The real is situated in a reproductive process; it is what can be reproduced and what is always reproduced.

Hyperreality is, for Baudrillard, the last stage of simulation, where the sign has no relation to reality, but it is the pure simulacrum of reality. Reality has become an operational effect of symbolic processes. On the one hand, signs serve to produce other signs, creating a system of generalized symbolic exchange, on the other hand, signs are exchanged for each other instead of exchanged for what they represent (reality).

A problem regarding the contemporaneity of the images has to do with what Georges Balandier (1920–2016) calls, in *Le Pouvoir sur Scènes*, by “violence of the spectacle”.<sup>165</sup> Balandier states that in the era of generalized communication, violence has become a spectacle; through the media image, violence invades consciences and the individual imaginary (Balandier, 1994, p. 113). For Balandier (1994, p. 140), reality seems to enjoy less vigor than the image, as Baudrillard also recognizes. For this reason, Baudrillard proposes a new look at images (signs) that are modified in themselves, by virtuality, not by changing what they represent, i.e. the reality itself. The social reality also changes mainly due to the impulse of the media (in particular, digital media, new technological media) and an epoch of post-modernity. For example, the images that are propagated on social networks, with filters, editing, montage, to simulate a given reality and impress by the spectacular, receiving many “likes”, provoking reactions (comments) and leading to shares. A criterion (including news relevance) is the high number of views, likes, and shares of a video on YouTube, which, for that reason alone, is elevated to the status of news on television information programs.

Regarding the effect of unreality and invisibility caused by the image, Régis Debray (1994, p. 278) states in *Viet et Mort de l'Image: Une Histoire du Regard en Occident* that the paradox is that image and reality become indiscernible: such a space is exploitable and impalpable, at the same time, not illusory and unreal. The real and the true do not correspond to the visible. Debray assures:

“We are the first civilization that can believe itself authorized by its devices to *believe in our eyes*. The first to have placed a sign of equality between

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<sup>165</sup> As mentioned earlier, the consulted edition of Balandier’s book is *El poder en Escenas: De la Representación del Poder al Poder de la Representación* (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós).

visibility, reality and truth. All the others, and ours until yesterday, estimated that the image prevents to see. Now, it's proof. The representable presents itself as irrefutable. Now, as the market increasingly fixes the nature and limits of sensitive representations, insofar as they are mediated by industries, the sign of equality is transformed and becomes: 'Unsellable = unreal, false, not valid'. Only the solvable is valid; only what has a clientele is valuable. The leveling of truth values to information values indexes the former to supply and demand: what has a market will be considered true. Translation: 'the public is our only judge'." (Debray, 1994, pp. 358-359).<sup>166</sup>

So, if we live in the simulations provided by media images, how do we know and can we know/understand what is, in fact, real? If the simulations of reality are more and more perfect and indistinguishable from reality, will we no longer have eye perception capable of perceiving differences or, simply, we give up or even do not worry about perceiving them? If the perceived reality conforms to reality, do we see it in the same way? Is this way manipulated to be what it is? Or is none of what we see real and, on the contrary, is it all embedded in the same simulacrum configuration that impresses in a certain way?

### 12.3.2. Instant communication

In today's societies, the production, transmission, and reception of content are characterized by velocity, immediacy, and ephemerality. The contents circulate at a velocity that makes them instant products, superficial and disposable flashes. It is called "instant communication". This expression presupposes the use of digital platforms, a quick means of spreading as if they were viruses. This is the meaning of viral communication, the current availability of resources to send messages instantly, over immense distances, giving rise to similar meanings in millions of people at the same time (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1993, p. 17).

In contemporary societies, there is a transition from the traditional reception of information (news or entertainment) from social communication to this new modern dimension of digital and instant communication. Societies have changed, just as forms, technical means, and channels of communication and information have changed. Before, the sender and receiver were clearly separated in the communication process; today, access to modern social networks is easy, immediate, and open, where free

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<sup>166</sup> My translation from the consulted Spanish edition.

information is transmitted, without the usual intermediaries and gatekeepers.<sup>167</sup> This aspect is not a problem; it is a change in the communicational paradigm.

From the traditional systems and models of communication and mediation to modern digital forms of communication and mediation, there is an emergence of:

- Narrative artifacts and new models of communication and mediation.
- Narrative and interactive virtual environments, with the consequent expansion of cyberspace and more interactivity, sharing, and immersion.
- New levels of virtual and interactive representation and narration.

It is in this sense that Baudrillard (2005, p. 31) considers immersion, immanence, and immediacy as the characteristics of the virtual. The interactive world abolishes the demarcation line between the subject and the object (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 78). We will live, as Baudrillard says, in the hyperreality of simulations? Everything will become an image/sign, spectacle, and “trans-aesthetic” object? Images and spectacles will tend to replace the meaning and authenticity of the human experience?

The change in the communicational paradigm is due to material aspects developed with capitalism and economic liberalism. We live in a world-market where everything exists and in excessive quantities. Even in the media field, where the traditional media no longer operate alone; they unfolded and innovated in new media, through which the forms of communication and information are diversified. In “Constituents of a Theory of the Media”, Enzensberger (1982, p. 55) already admonished 50 years ago: “the new media are oriented toward action, not contemplation; toward the present, not tradition.

Instant communication corresponds to the profuse use of self-media and social media, defining the way we inform and relate. Instant communication contributes paradoxically to the democratization and magnification of communication (opinions, comments, posts, reactions to posts, etc.) in addressing a large audience and at a distance, but in a network society’s

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<sup>167</sup> The concept of “gatekeeper” was developed by Kurt Lewin, in 1947, to demonstrate the dynamics of information filtering that work within social groups and that influence them (Wolf, 1992, pp. 159-160). A gatekeeper is a person or group that has the power to decide what information should move past him (through the information “gate”) to the group or individuals beyond (what kind of news items will be published), and what information should not.

autocracy and intolerance. Modern forms of network communication bring people together and keep them apart, as well as include/exclude, accept/refuse, and tolerate/repudiate them, diluting the barriers between the private and the public. Instant communication is guided by:

- Network interconnection.
- Digital dimension.
- Origin and veracity are difficult to assess.
- Free of charge, immediacy, informality, and personalization.

In contrast to traditional communication, to the mass communication media that demarcated the sender of the receiver, instant communication is the proper form of communication and network society:

<b>Traditional mass communication</b>	<b>Modern instant communication</b>
Traditional and formal means of transmitting the information.	Modern and digital means of transmitting the information.
Traditional communication and mediation systems and models.	Modern digital forms of communication and mediation.
Credible, because it is broadcast by a known and legitimate broadcast channel.	Doubtful (sometimes) in origin and veracity, because it can be spread by anyone anonymously as fake news.
Deep in information and clarification of the facts (the truth).	Superficial information and opinion promotion (the likelihood = appearance of truth, plausible, probable).
More ability to hold public attention.	Less ability to hold public attention.
Informative completeness. More extensive news.	Informative simplification. Shorter news.
Produced by qualified professionals (mass media).	Self-initiative (self-media).
More serious and rigorous: the news are more formal.	More spectacular/sensationalist: the news become entertainment that passes news.
Indirect information circuit (the intermediary transmits the news).	Direct information circuit: from producer to consumer (can be the same).
E.g. first it is news, then it becomes “viral” (spoken) in society.	E.g. first it is viral on the network, then it is news on TV.

**Table 12-4:** Differences between traditional mass communication and modern instant communication.

Instant (viral) communication is a digital and immediate form of interaction. It appears because of technological developments that have modified the processes of communication and social interaction. Among these developments, the following stand out:

- a) The appearance of the Internet in 1969, in an exchange of messages over telephone lines between two American universities (UCLA and Stanford University).
- b) The appearance of the first mobile phone in 1973 developed by Motorola.
- c) The launch of the first personal computer in 1981 by IBM (considering the Apple I in 1976 and the Apple II in 1977).
- d) The emergence of the first social network (Classmates) in 1995.
- e) The transition from Web 1.0 (created in 1989 by Tim Berners-Lee) to Web 2.0 (developed by Tim O'Reilly in 2004).

These five developments were so important in changing social interactions, behaviors, and organizations that they constitute historical and technological milestones for communication. Traditional media are replaced by social media since the emergence of the Internet. Mobile phones and personal computers have facilitated and even encouraged (since they are adapted) the use of social networks.

Instant (viral) communication is the result of a change in the communicational paradigm: from a passive receiver to an active receiver, simultaneously producer and consumer of information that circulates quickly, but also in an ephemeral and superficial way, in the new organization of the network society. Instant communication reflects the quality of social experiences and relations based on the immediate, the ephemeral, the superficial, and the immanence of connectivity. The idea of “crisis of experience” is now replaced by the idea of over-experience and massification of views, comments, reactions, and shares on the Internet. The transformations are not only of the experience but also of experience’s forms of expression. For this reason, Agamben refers to the non-translatability in which we find ourselves in appropriating our human condition, i.e. historical. In *Infancy & History: The Destruction of Experience*, Agamben says this non-translatability “makes everyday existence intolerable”:

“It is this non-translatability into experience that now makes everyday existence intolerable—as never before—rather than an alleged poor quality of life or its meaninglessness compared with the past (on the contrary, perhaps everyday existence has never been so replete with meaningful events). [...] For experience has its necessary correlation not in knowledge but in



authority—that is to say, the power of words and narration; and no one now seems to wield sufficient authority to guarantee the truth of an experience, and if they do, it does not in the least occur to them that their own authority has its roots in an experience. On the contrary, it is the character of the present time that all authority is founded on what cannot be experienced, and nobody would be inclined to accept the validity of an authority whose sole claim to legitimation was experience. (The youth movements' denial of the merits of experience is eloquent proof of this.” (Agamben, 1993, p. 14).

In this perspective, what was formerly recognized as valences and merits of the traditional narrative is now diluted in technological societies and digital narratives, whose differences are evident:

<b>Traditional narratives</b>	<b>Digital Narratives</b>
Transcendent dimension.	Immanent dimension.
Necessity (fullness) and referentiality.	Contingency and worldliness.
Substantial and verbal (translating experiences).	Accidental and visual.
Authority and recognition of the narrator.	Coexistence of diversities and heterogeneities.
Support integration systems.	They function as criticism and comment.
Perennials (lastingness): “sacred” revisiting of the past to guide the future.	Perishing: a new type of collective amnesia. Ephemerality, meteoric succession.
E.g. mythical macro-narratives.	E.g. micro-narratives of the blogosphere.

**Table 12-5:** Traditional narratives vs. digital narratives.

Blogg<sup>168</sup> is an example. In two decades, blogs (network diaries) and other new media (podcasts, social networks, etc.) disseminate information, both personal and public interest, and become popular and influential forms of content production on the Internet. They also allow the emergence of online communities and discussion forums on numerous subjects and interests, thanks to their unlimited capacity and reduced cost.

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<sup>168</sup> Act of writing self-publishing on the Internet to freely disseminate information without criteria.

According to data from Netcraft,<sup>169</sup> there are over 1.5 billion websites on the world wide web today. Despite the sharp growth, there are numerous problems and disadvantages of this practice and communication act:

- Lack of objectivity and neutrality.
- Information overload.
- Contents are not scrutinized.
- Ethical irresponsibility.
- Anonymity in the digital environment.
- The field of the news media now includes the citizen-journalist, news aggregators, bloggers and Tweeter, Facebook, YouTuber users.

Social networks are the new places for social relations and for information or training. They are unlimited spaces for various possibilities. Mobile devices allow permanent, fast, immediate, and everywhere connectivity, being the preferred means of using social networks. A simple mobile phone is not just for the essentials (making phone calls), but also for creating and maintaining social relations in a network or for sharing moments, experiences, and opinions, even if they are immanent, ephemeral, and banal. With few characters or a simple photograph, everything is shared, including aspects of private or public life, because what is most valued is sharing, no matter what is shared.

In 2015, the word of the year for the Oxford dictionaries was not a word for the first time; it was an emoji. This choice is paradoxical because the word of the year is an image. The emoji in question is the one that represents “tears of joy”. An emoji is an icon, an ideogram, a standardized pictogram that expresses emotion, attitude, state of mind, or mood. The paraphernalia of emojis available is increasing, mainly in visual cultures.<sup>170</sup> Presumably, an emoji expresses better than words, it conveys what one wanted more easily, especially what is intangible and ineffable. It is as if the image dethrones the word, seeing replaces reading. In an iconophile and iconolatrous age like the present, in which the image and visibility are increasingly privileged and assume the domain of expression and understanding, it is with the image that the visual construction of knowledge

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<sup>169</sup> Netcraft is an Internet services company based in Bath, England, and has been surveying the web since 1995.

<sup>170</sup> Emojis are more and more, covering the semantic field of the diversity of moods, feelings, sensations, situations, or experiences. There is even the menstruation emoji, in the significant form of a drop of blood, to share the information that one is having this period.

and culture is made. As Isabel Capeloa Gil (2011, p. 11) says, the desire and preference for the image is a characteristic of the pictorial maelstrom age.

If one attribute of the image is the function of social memory organ, according to Agamben, press photographs reporting events of violence and war become iconic cultural objects, as the historic events themselves. Press photographs can awaken collective consciousness and memory, increase the repudiation of war like Huynh Cong Ut's Vietnam war photograph.<sup>171</sup> This photograph is renowned for making known the drama of the Vietnam War as a social imaginary or collective memory. Another example is the photograph of Eddie Adams (from 1968) showing the execution of a presumably Vietcong. The Hart Park drowning photograph is another well-known case that occurred on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1985.<sup>172</sup> This photograph caused controversy and "involved the body of a young boy who had drowned in a lake in Bakersfield", California. The picture shows "the dead boy, face and all, in a body bag" (Swaffield, 2011, p. 452).<sup>173</sup>

More recently, the photograph of the body of a Syrian child, Aylan Kurdi, who hit the coast of a Turkish beach in September 2015;<sup>174</sup> or the recent (published on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019) harrowing image of a Salvadoran dad and his 23-month-old daughter drowned while trying to swim across the Rio Grande into Texas). In these cases, there are arguments to not publish photographs that report human tragedy, protecting the public from the striking impact of the image, which is violent and avoidable in a more judicious and less sensational editorial line. There are more subtle ways of

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. Fischer & Fischer, 2000, p. 88.

<sup>172</sup> About this case and for a complete report, see Bob Greene newspaper article entitled "Photo of tragedy is a prize mistake", *Chicago Tribune*, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1985.

<sup>173</sup> Regarding the relation between journalism and ethics and to understand the importance of the issue of publishing or not publishing a photograph in the press, see Bruce Swaffield's article "Making the case for what can and should be published" (2011). Swaffield addresses the journalistic ethics in relation to what should or should not be published as news. Journalists have a responsibility to be fair, honest, and ethical, that is, they cannot publish everything. For Swaffield, making decisions that involve ethical and moral values is not easy, but the news value and the effect/impact on the public must be considered.

<sup>174</sup> The front page of the Portuguese daily newspaper *Público* (on September 3rd, 2015) shows a full-page image with the Syrian child, Aylan Kurdi, dead on the beach. However, this newspaper has an unprecedented editorial and care to justify the hard decision to publish the image, following the primary objective of calling attention to the cause of the refugees and serving as a psychological whip to awaken the collective conscience.

showing reality, avoiding sensationalism without highlighting or trivializing extreme violence (Barroso, 2020b, p. 36). Images of this kind become as instantly shared and known on social networks as appealing to public opinion. That is the power of the image, which becomes even greater when it is displayed in a wide spectrum, as in the front pages of the newspapers.

In an iconophile world, images proliferate and have great power. When emojis appeared in 1999, they became popular because they met people's instant communication needs. Emojis cross linguistic boundaries; they do not speak any language, unlike words; they "speak" a universal language that dispenses code. Consequently, emojis reflect "human pro-social inclinations for intersubjective communication", as languages do, according to Vyvyan Evans (2014, p. 3). Languages are multiform and heteroclite, they are components of life and social relationship. Therefore, the human capacity to adapt to new languages is innate and the appetite is greater for forms of instant communication.

#### 12.4. Debord: the society of the spectacle and image cult

When Jim Fitzpatrick created the artistic image of Che Guevara from a photograph of Alberto Korda, in 1968, he was far from imagining that the mentioned work would become one of the most iconic images, known and spread in the world. The image has become so famous that no one believes when Fitzpatrick says he is the creator of that image. Creation (the artistic image of Che Guevara) surpassed the creator (Fitzpatrick), becoming an object of iconolatry and more famous than the artist himself.

The image even surpasses Che Guevara himself. Paradoxically, the representation of reality (the image) is more than the reality (Che Guevara). The image that Fitzpatrick called "Viva Che" represents much more than what it represents. Thanks to the image, Che Guevara went from revolutionary to pop culture icon. The image was even carried as a flag in the recent anti-government social protests in Egypt, Yemen,<sup>175</sup> or Bahrain, in 2011.<sup>176</sup>

Even capitalism, which Che Guevara opposed, ended up appropriating his image. After Che Guevara's death, the image was and continues to be explored by the cultural industry. Capitalism manufactures thousands of goods with the image of Che Guevara: posters, t-shirts, caps, key chains,

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. *The Guardian*, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>176</sup> The image would also have been reproduced in the style of Andy Warhol, by his assistant Gerard Marlangue (cf. *Observador*, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

plates, mugs, tattoos, etc. All the paraphernalia of objects massively reproduces this image. Che Guevara's image ended up enriching capitalist entrepreneurs, which turns out to be paradoxical. Che Guevara became an anti-capitalist celebrated by capitalism.

In the documentary entitled *Propaganda: The Art of Selling Lies*, directed by Larry Weinstein in 2019, Fitzpatrick reveals the motivation that led him to create this image. When Che Guevara was murdered, reveals Fitzpatrick, who killed him committed an "obscene act": they placed him on a platform to drain the blood of the cattle. Fitzpatrick says that Che Guevara looked like the dead Christ. Fitzpatrick was so outraged by the way he was murdered and the fact that they were trying to make him disappear and he thought: "That will not happen". Fitzpatrick confesses that when he created the image, it was deliberate propaganda. He wanted the image as simple as possible so that everyone could copy it. He made pamphlets, prints, and distributed it to everyone, registered it as being free to use, and declared it free of rights for the use of revolutionaries and leftists. The image began to multiply and appear in unusual and the most absurd places, like bathrooms in Tokyo, as Fitzpatrick revels in Weinstein's documentary. The image took off and became so famous that intimidated Fitzpatrick, who adds that he even went so far as to say that he was the author because no one believed (Weinstein, 2019). Fitzpatrick believes he was very lucky because as if by accident he created one of the most iconic images of all time.

The image created by Fitzpatrick is a good example of the current visual and popular societies, where the cult of the image predominates. What makes the image so appealing is its ability to synthesize what it reveals, showing it immediately and effortlessly through a universal language. Fitzpatrick just wanted Che Guevara not to be forgotten and ended up creating one of the best known and most reproduced images in the world.

Fitzpatrick's artistic image of Che Guevara is a relevant case study, demonstrating what has been noticed for more than 50 years. In 1967, Guy Debord (1931-1994) published *The Society of the Spectacle*, a critical work of the society of abundance, namely the spectacle itself. Debord designates the societies of that time by societies of the spectacle. Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* is the development of critical theory about what is most prevalent and characteristic in our societies: the spectacle. In this book, the critical theory coincides with the social critic theory of the spectacle. Debord states that the spectacle is the denial of life and this denial is visible due to the loss of quality and living conditions associated with the commodity, because the spectacle is a commodity and, therefore, proletarianizes the world. Today, the unified practice of the integrated

spectacular has economically transformed the world and our perception in terms of surveillance and control (Debord, 1995, p. 8).

The cover of the English edition of Debord's book *The Society of the Spectacle* presents an explicit image of the object of criticism of the work: the problem of the massification of society through the image. It is a photograph by J. R. Eyerman, which has become emblematic and historical, because it reproduces a moment of the premiere of the film *Bwana Devil* (1952), considered the first in 3D and in color. In Eyerman's original photograph, we see the audience of that film aligned, uniformed, standardized in behavior, and staring straight ahead, where the screen is supposed to be,<sup>177</sup> wearing appropriate glasses to see the effect of the 3D images.<sup>178</sup> Spectators in the room line up in uniform rows, representing the culture industry and mass consumption which is, in this case, images that produce a spectacle. This is Debord's criticism against the mimicry and conformism provided by the spectacle of the media in the mass society.

The language style is critical and refutative of ideologies and the market, both in development, and the less and less active participation of people in the public space. Thus, it is not surprising the quotation of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, made by Debord at the beginning of Chapter 1 of *The Society of the Spectacle*, regarding the people's preference for images, representations, and appearances rather than things themselves, reality, and authentically being. The problem that results from this preference is evident: instead of sacralizing what is important (e.g. a certain truth, revealed or not), today's illusion is sacralized.

In this critical perspective on the society of the spectacle, Debord immediately begins Chapter 1 with a strong proposition: "The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived." (Debord, 1995, p. 12).

This first thesis demonstrates Debord's Marxist influences, not only the form (written in numbered aphorisms) but the content: it is an inaugural admonition like the one Marx presented a hundred years earlier, in 1867, in *Capital*.

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<sup>177</sup> The screen, in this context, is more than a simple screen that reproduces images; it is a device for the production of spectacle and the absorption of the spectator's attention and gaze, capable of determining his perception and of alienating him collectively.

<sup>178</sup> These glasses have a stereoscopic 3D effect, having lenses of different colors (usually of chromatic contrast, such as red and blue).

The last part of this quotation highlights the imagery, apparent and spectacular dimension of the representation in which we live today and to which the “autonomous image” that produces representations and spectacles contributes. According to Debord (1995, p. 12), “the spectacle in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life”.

Paradoxically, society becomes what it is not. The spectacle transforms society and becomes society itself.

“The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges. Being isolated—and precisely for that reason—this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation.” (Debord, 1995, p. 12).

So, what is the spectacle for Debord after all? “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1995, p. 12). The spectacle is a *weltanschauung* (worldview) that has been actualized:

“The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm—a world view transformed into an objective force.” (Debord, 1995, pp. 12-13).

Iconolatry is the cult of the image, a kind of splendor of the images that is properly emphasized by Debord’s “society of the spectacle”. The world becomes a stage of autonomous images. There is no spectacle without images, without ideology or sensationalist apparatus provoked by the image content. For Debord, the spectacle “epitomizes the prevailing model of social life”; the spectacle is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production and the consummate result of that choice (Debord, 1995, p. 13). In an even more radical way, Debord admits that the spectacle is the main production of today’s society (Debord, 1995, p. 16). The spectacle is, therefore, a tendency to see the world in a mediated way and this world is no longer directly apprehensive.

For Debord, the recognition of the primacy of image results in the profusion of the spectacle. This is also referred by Deleuze (1997, p. 21), for whom it is a civilization of the cliché. In *Cinema 2—The Time-Image*, Deleuze points out:

“On the one hand, the image constantly sinks to the state of cliché: because it is introduced into sensory-motor linkages, because it itself organizes or induces these linkages, because we never perceive everything that is in the image, because it is made for that purpose (so that we do not perceive everything, so that the cliché hides the image from us...). Civilization of the image? In fact, it is a civilization of the cliché where all the powers have an interest in hiding images from us, not necessarily in hiding the same thing from us, but in hiding something in the image.” (Deleuze, 1997, p. 21).

The civilization of the image<sup>179</sup> or the Deleuze’s civilization of the cliché is the civilization of iconic inflation that rests on redundancy, concealment, distortion, manipulation. In the society of the spectacle, the monopoly is that of appearance. The means and ends of the spectacle are identical. Therefore, for Debord (1995, p. 15), the spectacle is essentially tautological.

The representation of sociability is simulated through images and it is also blessed with the spectacle transmitted by the images, whether in form or content, becoming an ideological discourse. The impoverishment of the experience is identified in the excitement caused by the spectacle. The spectacle, in turn, comes from the technification of experience, from the excessive production of images that result in the formation of simulations. These are the main points discussed by Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*, which correspond to Debord’s idea of the non-experience in *The Society of the Spectacle*, when he mentions the “concrete inversion of life” and the “autonomous movement of the non-life” because it does not consist in an authentic experience; it is only intermediation or representation (Debord, 1995, p. 12).

Debord demonstrates a reactionary and critical character, inciting a fight against the spectacular and consumerist perversion of modern life and cultural imperialism, which prefers image and representation over concrete and natural realism. In the society of the spectacle, the real world becomes an agglomeration of simple images that, in turn and paradoxically, becomes reality (at least in perceptual terms). In the society of the spectacle criticized by Debord, the image is more important than reality, objects, and truth. This thesis confronts what happens in contemporary societies and reveals its timeliness and adequacy. Today, images discard truth and reality. The more

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<sup>179</sup> The expression “civilization of the image” was used pertinently by Enrico Fulchignoni, in the book *La Civilisation de l’Image* (cf. 1969). See also *Le Pouvoir sur Scènes*, by Georges Balandier (1994, p. 133), which also refers to a “civilization of images”.



spectacular the images, the more they achieve this perverse effect in visual cultures.

What is the spectacle? The spectacle is the fetishism produced in contemporary society. However, it is not necessary for technical and scientific development, nor should we accept the easy and tempting fallacy according to which something is true because it is technological (Ramonet, 2003, p. 36). For Debord, the spectacle is the ideological discourse of certain interests and social orders, that is, it is the discourse of society. It is a tautological, empty, hyperbolic discourse; it is a praiseworthy monologue, a self-portrait of current and established power (the *status quo*).

In this sense, Debord (1995, p. 12) emphasizes that societies are an accumulation of spectacle, and “all that once was directly lived has become mere representation”. The experience loses authenticity in the representation. For Debord, the spectacle is the inversion of life, like the concept of “ideology” by Marx and Engels (1998, p. 42), appearing upside down like a “*camera obscura*” that inverts reality.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord denounces the omnipresence of the media and their images. By overexposing the image, the media falsify the real experience of the world by individuals (spectators and passive consumers of images). It is, according to Debord, the alienation of the spectator before the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity). The more the spectator contemplates the image, the less he lives; the more the spectator accepts to recognize himself in the dominant images of consumerist need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires.

“The spectator’s alienation from and submission to the contemplated object (which is the outcome of his unthinking activity) works like this: the more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The spectacle’s externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual’s own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere.”

The representation of social simulation is performed through spectacle-images, such as those on advertising or political billboards, relating ideology and appearance, or false awareness. According to Debord (1995, p. 23), “the spectacle’s function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation”. In Debord’s perspective, the spectacle is like an ideological

discourse, it produces alienation and it is an accumulated capital that becomes an image and its own language.

In a photograph published by *The Boston Globe*, a crowd is watching the cast (*inter alia* Johnny Depp) of the movie *Black Mass* on a visit to the Coolidge Corner Theater, in Brookline.<sup>180</sup> The crowd is not authentically living the reality that is happening or enjoying a special and unique moment, because people are distracted in capturing and registering in photography a life not lived in a hyperreality. It is the spectacle as the “autonomous movement of non-life” mentioned by Debord (1995, p. 12). This autonomous movement of the non-life or the non-lived is also shown in many photographs representing the daily life of the Louvre Museum, with the avid visitors attempting to photograph the work of art.<sup>181</sup>

The same social phenomenon currently happens in music concerts with popular singers and contrary to what happened until recently, in the 1980s, when technological devices for capturing and sharing images did not yet exist and, therefore, spectators enjoyed the moments and musical shows more intensely.

Inserted in the spectacle, the individual is affected; his gestures are no longer his. Nowhere does the spectator feel at home because the spectacle is everywhere. The problem with the spectacle is that of promoting a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1995, p. 12). Human relationships are no longer based on pure and direct experience and are mediated by the images of the spectacle. In addition to social relationships, the perception and perspective on reality also change, due to the intermediation and spectacle of the images.

The spectacle presents itself in the human experience as a particular and dominant model of life and social relationship. The spectacle inverts the real, because it is produced so that the lived reality ends up materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle. “In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood” (Debord, 1995, p. 14). The conclusion is what Debord (1995, p. 15) calls “monopolization of the realm of appearances”.

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<sup>180</sup> Cf. the photograph by John Blanding published in *The Boston Globe* on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>181</sup> About this social phenomenon of crowds photographing the Mona Lisa at the Musée du Louvre, Paris, see the article “These tourist snappers are killing the Mona Lisa”, by Jonathan Jones (cf. *The Guardian*, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009).

The spectacle's incubator and habitat are capitalism and the free market economy where the spectacle is also inserted. The spectacle is "capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image", argues Debord (1995, p. 24). For this reason, the spectacle corresponds to the moment when the commodity fully occupies social life, or rather, the moment when "the commodity completes its colonization of social life" (Debord, 1995, p. 29). This colonization of social life is also due to the media. According to Debord (1995, p. 44), "waves of enthusiasm for particular products, fueled and boosted by the communications media, are propagated with lightning speed".

Paragraph 24 of *The Society of the Spectacle* demonstrates the participation and collaboration of the media in the dissemination of the spectacle and its consequences:

"By means of the spectacle the ruling order discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise. The spectacle is the self-portrait of power in the age of power's totalitarian rule over the conditions of existence. The fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relationships conceals their true character as relationships between human beings and between classes; a second Nature thus seems to impose inescapable laws upon our environment. But the spectacle is by no means the inevitable outcome of a technical development perceived as *natural*; on the contrary, the society of the spectacle is a form that chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle—understood in the limited sense of those 'mass media' that are its most stultifying superficial manifestation seems at times to be invading society in the shape of a mere *apparatus*, it should be remembered that this apparatus has nothing neutral about it, and that it answers precisely to the needs of the spectacle's internal dynamics. If the social requirements of the age which develops such techniques can be met only through their mediation, if the administration of society and all contact between people now depends on the intervention of such 'instant' communication, it is because this 'communication' is essentially *one-way*; the concentration of the media thus amounts to the monopolization by the administrators of the existing system of the means to pursue their particular form of administration." (Debord, 1995, p. 19).

The term "media" is used to describe the way in which the spectacle takes on and presents in society. The media do not have the desirable and necessary neutrality, because they are or serve as instruments to produce spectacle, as if it were the fulfillment of a kind of public service. The media serve to distract the masses through the spectacle they spread. The problem is that the spectacle seduces, fascinates, arouses interest in the masses because it is more attractive and distracting; it captivates and colonizes spirits because it is empty, it reduces reality to a commercial fragment and

encourages to focus attention on appearances. For Debord, this problem constituted a total degradation of social life.

The spectacle has roots in the economy. The triumph of the spectacle is the triumph and autocracy of the capitalist market economy. “The spectacle has its roots in the fertile field of the economy, and it is the produce of that field which must in the end come to dominate the spectacular market” (Debord, 1995, p. 37). The spectacle is an octopus whose tentacles extend to all areas of life, altering the human experience in society, which becomes alienated by the ideology produced by the spectacle.

“Ideology was no longer a weapon, but an end in itself. [...] The ideology that took on material form in this context did not transform the world economically, as capitalism in its affluent stage has done; it succeeded only in using police methods to transform perception.” (Debord, 1995, p. 73).

Since 1967, the year in which *The Society of the Spectacle* was published, until today, the forms of social life confirm Debord’s thesis. We do not really live except in the appearance of images that produce spectacle and that, for this reason, fascinates us the most. In this way, the lines of force from Debord’s critical perspective to the so-called spectacle societies are summarized:

- The accumulation of spectacle is increasing; more and more images are produced, and more and more spectators perceive the world through these images, contenting themselves with fragmented, superficial, and inauthentic apprehensions.
- Sequentially to the previous point, the representation of the world dominates over the world itself, as there is more and more experience in representation (in appearance) and less in reality (in truth).
- The spectacle triumphs, because it fascinates, it simplifies the understanding of reality and the world and it unifies, since most people consume spectacle and, therefore, identify themselves with what they see: the spectacle alters human interactions.<sup>182</sup>
- The main consequence of the society of the spectacle is to provide non-life, as people are in the representation and are satisfied with it.
- Alienation increases as the spectacle in societies increases, because the function of the spectacle is the production of alienation.
- The spectacle can be recognized on any screen in modern societies,

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<sup>182</sup> Today, social networks (e.g. Facebook and Instagram) monitor and control social relationships, opinions, and emotions or moods in an even more autocratic and colonizing way.

including the screens of personal computers that still reproduce images.

- The media have no neutrality; they are instruments of the production of spectacle as if it were a public service.
- The spectacle is the daily manifestation of social phenomena, products, or consumption suggested by capitalism through advertising, television, cinema, etc.; the spectacle creates desires, needs, and expectations.

For Debord, capitalism commercialized all social relations and propagated alienation in the public and private spheres, insofar as people are distracted from this loss by the false fascination provided by the spectacle. Thus, new needs and possibilities are manufactured and maintained by capitalism and are distributed by the mass media (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 61).

Debord is very close to the Marxist ideals and establishes a direct relationship between the spectacle and the economy. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord follows the theses of Marx's *Capital*, recovering important concepts, such as “merchandise”, “fetishism” and “alienation”. In addition, he starts *The Society of the Spectacle* in a similar way to the beginning of *Capital* and ends the work, similar to Marx, with a solution to the problem: the destruction of the society of the spectacle through a kind of revolutionary praxis, appealing to it is necessary to put a practical force into action.

“For the society of the spectacle to be effectively destroyed, what is needed are people setting a practical force in motion. A critical theory of the spectacle cannot be true unless it joins forces with the practical movement of negation within society [...]” (Debord, 1995, p. 143).

Debord was a founder and a member of the Situationist International (1957-1972), a group of avant-garde intellectuals and political thinkers who opposed capitalism. Among the group members, Raoul Vaneigem also stands out. This intellectual movement was neo-Marxist and inspired by certain artistic styles, such as Dadaism and Surrealism, having been influential, through ideals based on *The Society of the Spectacle* and *The Revolution of Everyday Life*<sup>183</sup> by Vaneigem, in student demonstrations in

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<sup>183</sup> *The Revolution of Everyday Life* is a translation from French of *Traité de Savoir-vivre à l'Usage des Jeunes Générations*, which was first published by Gallimard in 1967.

May 1968. These ideas were advanced for the time, as the course of history came to demonstrate and confirm today.

## 12.5. Foucault: societies of the surveillance and control

In the Preface to the book *Liquid Surveillance*, Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon start by contextualizing the relevance of surveillance in human societies, especially in the most contemporary ones, and in sociological discussions:

“Surveillance is a growing feature of daily news, reflecting its rapid rise to prominence in many life spheres. But in fact surveillance has been expanding quietly for many decades and is a basic feature of the modern world. As that world has transformed itself through successive generations, so surveillance takes on an ever changing character. Today, modern societies seem so fluid that it makes sense to think of them being in a ‘liquid’ phase. Always on the move, but often lacking certainty and lasting bonds, today’s citizens, workers, consumers and travelers also find that their movements are monitored, tracked and traced. Surveillance slips into a liquid state.” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 6).

Indeed, surveillance is very (and increasingly) present in the modern world; it is a central dimension of modernity, late modernity, post-modernity or, as Bauman calls it, “liquid modernity” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 9). For this reason, it constitutes a relevant topic of sociological discussion, in particular Sociology of Communication, as surveillance implies mechanisms and devices implemented as information systems in societies (not just contemporary ones) to regulate and condition social actions, attitudes, and behaviors through forms of visual communication (e.g. video cameras that capture and record images in the public space).

Surveillance and control of societies is, paradoxically, an ancient and modern theme. It is an old theme because it has been discussed by several authors for centuries, if we consider, for example, *The Republic*, one of Plato’s most important works and which constitutes one of the first political and social approaches to search for an ideal and harmonious way of administration of the *pólis* (city, but also society) as a guarantee of order and institution of fundamental rights, duties, and freedoms (cf. Plato, 2003, 369b-371e). But it is also a modern theme because the recent advances in science and technological developments impose the adoption of systems, mechanisms, and devices (e.g. video surveillance cameras in historic centers, sports venues and spectacle events for crowds, on highways, etc.)

as a resource for monitoring and control or a simple deterrent to certain deviant behaviors in society.

Castells considers that the end of privacy represents the dilution of barriers between the private and the public. In *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*, he states:

“There has been so much enthusiasm about the freedom brought by the Internet that we have forgotten the persistence of authoritarian, surveillance practices in the environment that remains the most important in our lives: the workplace. With workers becoming increasingly dependent on computer networking in their activity, most companies have decided that they have the right to monitor the uses of their networks by their employees.” (Castells, 2001, p. 173).

In today’s global and technological societies, the structuring of everyday behavior through dominant norms in society raises threats to citizens’ freedoms, rights, and guarantees. “But in our age, a significant proportion of everyday life, including work, leisure, personal interaction, takes place on the Net” and most economic, social, and political activities are hybrid (Castells, 2001, p. 180), i.e. they are online (virtual) and offline (real) interactions. As we cannot live without others, life in an electronic panopticon is equivalent to having half of our lives permanently exposed to monitoring and this exposure, according to Castells (2001, p. 180), can lead to schizophrenia: we would be ourselves offline and we would be an image of ourselves online, internalizing censorship.

“The issue is not the fear of Big Brother because, in fact, most surveillance will have no directly damaging consequences for us-or, for that matter, no consequences at all. The most worrisome aspect is, in fact, the absence of explicit rules of behavior, of predictability of the consequences of our exposed behavior, depending upon the contexts of interpretation, and according to the criteria used to judge our behavior by a variety of actors behind the screen of our glass house.” (Castells, 2001, p. 180).

Therefore, surveillance and control of societies work to obtain positive results (e.g. road prevention and safety or surveillance and control of urban violence), but also objectionable results (e.g. loss of privacy) as a practice of social status of deprivation, oppression, and totalitarianism exercised over people.

The currently connected societies evoke the model of society presented and described by George Orwell (1903-1950) in his notorious work entitled *1984*. This work, published in the late 1940s, enunciated predictions that were difficult to believe at the time, but that today are real, thanks to the

development of technology. The algorithms and numerical platforms, for example, control our preferences, our interests, and, in general, what we think, do, or say when we use the Internet. Posting a comment on Twitter, sharing an opinion on Facebook or a photograph on Instagram, booking a plane flight for a vacation on a travel agency website, or simply looking for a hotel for a certain date on Google are simple everyday experiences, but are now determined by digital platforms. These platforms do not just allow us to get what we want; they are enhanced artificial intelligence tools that take advantage of all the traces we leave on the Internet to later predict and guide our behavior.

That is why that in 2016 the European Union has decided and, two years later, implemented that these devices are subject to users' consent, in favor of respect for privacy. These are the impositions of the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR),<sup>184</sup> which aims to give citizens back control over their personal data. This situation is paradoxical, as the citizen must resort to an external mechanism to have privacy and control over his life. This paradox comes close to the oppressive dimensions and situations, such as that of Orwell's *Big Brother* or the previous and original model, that of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, which will be discussed below.

In the book *1984*, Orwell addresses this theme, criticizing the dystopia of an imagined and apparently organized society. In this version of Orwell, technological developments and communication devices support this situation of surveillance and control. At the beginning of the book *1984*, Orwell presents this society of surveillance and control from a huge poster placed on the street wall representing a face of a man with features of austere beauty that stared at passersby in such a way as if his eyes followed the movements of those who pass, with the caption underneath: "Big Brother is watching you".

Orwell's book reports, in a dysphemistic way, the police of thought that acts on "thoughtcrime" and "symptoms of unorthodoxy", considering that orthodoxy is unconsciousness and, as the author explains, it means the absence of thought, absence of the need for think.

In *1984*, Orwell represents a model of the society of the future, characterized by the predominance of surveillance and control. The dystopian future presented by Orwell, when he published *1984* in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is today a concrete reality in more developed and technological

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<sup>184</sup> The GDPR is a European diploma from 2016, which establishes rules regarding the protection, treatment, and free movement of personal data in all member countries of the European Union. The purpose of this regulation is to strengthen data protection and harmonize legislation in the Member States.



societies. The Orwellian society is that of control, as demonstrated by the slogan of the Government party in Orwell's narrative:

“‘Who controls the past,’ ran the Party slogan, ‘controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’ And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. ‘Reality control’, they called it: in Newspeak, ‘doublethink’.” (Orwell, 1977, p. 23).

In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*,<sup>185</sup> Michel Foucault (1926-1984) proposes an archeology of the human sciences, a kind of conditions for the possibility of knowledge or systems of thought in the formation of Western culture, from the Classical Age to the Modernity (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997, p. 66). In Foucault's perspective, historians must abandon the surface study of ideas (what Foucault calls *connaissance*) in favor of an analysis of deeper or more fundamental structures of thought (*savoir*). This change in the historiographic look is the cornerstone of the archaeological method. In the archeology of the human sciences, the archaeologist tries to discover *epistemes*, sets of rules that are not consciously understood, but that shape what can be thought and said. In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault points out:

“I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an ‘archaeology’.” (Foucault, 2002, p. xxiii).

In the presentation of the Portuguese edition of this book, Eduardo Lourenço mentions that *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* offers not only an original reading of the History of Ideas in Europe, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a new methodology, designated

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<sup>185</sup> Originally published in French as *Les Mots et les Choses: Une Archéologie des Sciences Humaines*, by Editions Gallimard, Paris (1966).

by Foucault under the concept of “archaeology”. As Foucault (2002, p. xxiii) explains in the Preface: “such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an ‘archaeology’”.

“Now, this archaeological inquiry has revealed two great discontinuities in the episteme of Western culture: the first inaugurates the Classical age (roughly half-way through the seventeenth century) and the second, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the modern age. The order on the basis of which we think today does not have the same mode of being as that of the Classical thinkers. Despite the impression we may have of an almost uninterrupted development of the European ratio from the Renaissance to our own day, despite our possible belief that the classifications of Linnaeus, modified to a greater or lesser degree, can still lay claim to some sort of validity, that Condillac’s theory of value can be recognized to some extent in nineteenth-century marginalism, that Keynes was well aware of the affinities between his own analyses and those of Cantillon, that the language of general grammar (as exemplified in the authors of Port-Royal or in Bauzée) is not so very far removed from our own—all this quasicontinuity on the level of ideas and themes is doubtless only a surface appearance; on the archaeological level, we see that the system of positivities was transformed in a wholesale fashion at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century.” (Foucault, 2002, p. xxiv).

According to Foucault, there is no evolution from the Classical Age to the Modern Age. Foucault contradicts the existence of an epistemological continuity, arguing that there is, instead of that continuity or evolution, an epistemological rupture, a discontinuity.

Orwell’s model of the totalitarian screen or Big Brother<sup>186</sup> is rooted in a first panoptic model of surveillance, developed by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), an English utilitarian philosopher.<sup>187</sup> This is the reason for the first formulation of an ideal of rational surveillance that combines collective security and individual consent. In 1787, Bentham proposed the panoptic as an ideal prison project that allows the constant surveillance of detainees

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<sup>186</sup> In the book *1984*, Orwell gives shape to a model of surveillance, control, and centralized and totalitarian power linked to an instrument, the screen. This instrument is like an eye. Metaphorically, it is the eye of God that sees everything because it is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

<sup>187</sup> For Bentham’s utilitarian thinking, morality is based on the notion of utility. Thus, an action is morally good if it is useful to as many people as possible. It is a principle of utility that must be useful in leading to the happiness of all or the greatest number.

without them seeing, that is, prisoners are seen without being able to see (Bentham, 1995, pp. 35-36). Panoptic is a visibility device, a model of surveillance and control. Furthermore, in *L'Oeil du Pouvoir*<sup>188</sup> Foucault (1979, p. 18) considers that Bentham is one of the most exemplary inventors of the technology of power, for having developed a perfect architectural device to solve the problems of surveillance in society in general and in the various social institutions (schools, hospitals, prisons, etc.).

In 1975, Foucault published *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,<sup>189</sup> renewing the analysis of the ways in which power was exercised and referring two forms of social control: the discipline-blockade or block and the discipline-mechanism. These are two images of the discipline (Foucault, 1995, p. 209). The first is made up of interdictions, prohibitions, barriers, hierarchies, and compartments, breaks in communication; the second is made up of multiple and intertwined surveillance techniques, flexible and functional control processes, devices that exercise their surveillance through the individual's interiorization of his constant exposure to the look of control" (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997, p. 66).

"Foucault's theses make it possible to identify the power-communication devices in their own organizational form. The organization model understood as 'panoptic', a society's utopia, serves to characterize the mode of control exercised by the television device: a way of organizing space, controlling time, continuously monitoring the individual and ensuring positive production of behaviors. The panoptic, architectural figure of a type of power that Foucault sought from the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), is this surveillance machine in which, with full visibility, the entire circle of the divided building in alveoli can be controlled from a central tower and where the watched, housed in individual cells and separated from each other, are seen without seeing. Adapted to the characteristics of television, which inverts the sense of sight allowing the watched to see without being seen, and which no longer works solely through disciplinary control, but also works through fascination and seduction, the panoptic becomes, to explain television as 'organization machine', in the 'reverse panoptic', according to the expression of the philosopher Étienne Allemand, in *Pouvoir et Télévision*." (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997, p. 67).

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<sup>188</sup> According to Foucault's title in the original in French.

<sup>189</sup> In the original in French *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison*.

The disciplinary power of surveillance and control societies seeks “docile bodies”, organized and disciplined human bodies that provide a submissive, productive environment and trained source of the workforce:

“Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same Forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude’, a ‘capacity’, which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.” (Foucault, 1995, p. 138).

Societies are marked by the panoptic, by the ideas put into practice of permanent surveillance and control through normalization. People’s activities are examined and regulated to ensure that people are subject to standards and values associated with an idea and practice of “normality”.

“In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fining them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences.” (Foucault, 1995, p. 184).

In this sense, normalization is one of the great instruments of power. The relationship between communication and power is a condition *sine qua non* for the establishment of a society of surveillance and control. Therefore, it is sociologically pertinent to analyze and understand the mass media, considered the fourth power, and their influences on individuals and societies.

According to Foucault, the major effect of the panopticon, as advocated by Bentham, is to “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1995, p. 201). Thus, the primary objective is achieved: to make surveillance permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action. To be effective, power must be visible, but unverifiable. The panoptic is a device that dissociates seeing and being seen, on the one hand, and places the total seen in a position without the possibility of seeing:

“The panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. It is an important

mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. [...] The Panopticon functions as a kind of laboratory of power. Thanks to its mechanisms of observation, it gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate into men's behavior; knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of knowledge over all the surfaces on which power is exercised." (Foucault, 1995, pp. 201-204).

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault reinvents a conception of power. According to Gilles Deleuze, if power was previously the postulate of property, it would be the property of a class that would have conquered it:

"As the postulate of property, power would be the 'property' won by a class. Foucault shows that power does not come about in this way: it is less a property than a strategy, and its effects cannot be attributed to an appropriation 'but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings'; 'it is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions.'" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 25).

What is power? For Foucault, power is a relationship of forces and the whole relationship of forces is a relationship of power:

"What is Power? Foucault's definition seems a very simple one: power is a relation between forces, or rather every relation between forces is a 'power relation'. In the first place we must understand that power is not a form, such as the State-form; and that the power relation does not lie between two forms, as does knowledge. In the second place, force is never singular but essentially exists in relation with other forces, such that any force is already a relation, that is to say power: force has no other object or subject than force." (Deleuze, 1988, p. 70).

The panoptic is understood as an extensible model of functioning and definition of the interrelations of power in the plane of human, collective and daily life. The panoptic is like an institution. It is the diagram of a power mechanism brought to its ideal form, as Foucault states in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*:

"It is polyvalent in its applications; it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work. It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centers and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which

can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons. Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used.” (Foucault, 1995, p. 205)

Therefore, the panoptic is a relationship and communication device with different applications, mainly today, with more technological, communicational, and complex societies in terms of social relationships.

“One of the basic ideas in *Discipline and Punish* is that modern societies can be defined as ‘disciplinarian’; but discipline cannot be identified with any one institution or apparatus precisely because it is a type of power, a technology, that traverses every kind of apparatus or institution, linking them, prolonging them, and making them converge and function in a new way.” (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 25-26).

Although still relevant in modern societies, the panoptic gives way to the synoptic. In *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, Bauman says:

“The Panopticon, even when it was universal in its application and when the institutions following its principles embraced the bulk of the population, was by its nature a local establishment: both the condition and the effects of panoptical institution was immobilization of its subjects—surveillance was there to stave off escape or at least to prevent autonomous, contingent and erratic movements. The Synopticon is in its nature global; the act of watching unties the watchers from their locality—transports them at least spiritually into cyberspace, in which distance no longer matters, even if bodily they remain in place. It does not matter any more if the targets of the Synopticon, transformed now from the watched into the watchers, move around or stay in place. Wherever they may be and wherever they may go, they may—and they do—link into the exterritorial web which makes the many watch the few. The Panopticon forced people into the position where they could be watched. The Synopticon needs no coercion—it seduces people into watching. And the few whom the watchers watch are tightly selected. [...] The many watch the few. The few who are watched are the celebrities. They may come from the world of politics, of sport, of science or showbusiness, or just be celebrated information specialists. Wherever they come from, though, all displayed celebrities put on display the world of celebrities—a world whose main distinctive feature is precisely the quality of being watched—by many, and in all corners of the globe: of being global in their capacity of being watched. Whatever they speak about when on air, they convey the message of a total way of life. *Their life, their way of life.*” (Bauman, 1998, pp. 52-53).

For Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*, "whatever else the present stage in the history of modernity is, it is also, perhaps above all, post-Panoptical" (Bauman, 2006, p. 11). In the transition or, at least, coexistence between the panopticon and the synopticon, Baudrillard takes a more radical position and maintains that we are at the end of the panoptic. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, he refers to the reality-TV of reality shows, whose example is the program *An American Family* with the Loud family:

"It is still to this ideology of lived experience — exhumation of the real in its fundamental banality, in its radical authenticity — that the American TV *vérité* [truth] experiment attempted on the Loud family in 1971 refers: seven months of uninterrupted shooting, three hundred hours of nonstop broadcasting, without a script or a screenplay, the odyssey of a family, its dramas, its joys, its unexpected events, nonstop — in short, a 'raw' historical document, and the 'greatest television performance, comparable, on the scale of our day-to-day life, to the footage of our landing on the moon.' It becomes more complicated because this family fell apart during the filming: a crisis erupted, the Louds separated, etc. Whence that insoluble controversy: Was TV itself responsible? What would have happened if TV hadn't been there? More interesting is the illusion of filming the Louds as if TV weren't there. The producer's triumph was to say: 'They lived as if we were not there.' An absurd, paradoxical formula — neither true nor false: Utopian. The 'as if we were not there' being equal to 'as if you were there.' It is this Utopia, this paradox that fascinated the twenty million viewers, much more than did the 'perverse' pleasure of violating someone's privacy. In the '*vérité*' experience it is not a question of secrecy or perversion, but of a sort of frisson of the real, or of an aesthetics of the hyperreal, a frisson of vertiginous and phony exactitude, a frisson of simultaneous distancing and magnification, of distortion of scale, of an excessive transparency." (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 30).

The TV-*vérité*<sup>190</sup> causes a sensation of reality and authenticity, the sensation as if TV cameras were not there filming the people that appear in the screen, i.e. the protagonists of the reality-show program that appear on the screens in the homes of each viewer, but as if the viewers were there. The Loud family broke up during the shooting, as Baudrillard says, and the Louds split up. Was television responsible for this family outcome? The Loud family was unceasingly filmed in its insignificant intimacy, with 20 million viewers. It was as if the TV wasn't there, which is still paradoxical.

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<sup>190</sup> The TV-truth or reality-TV, a TV program or cinema that shows ordinary people in actual activities without being controlled by a director.

It is “a sort of frisson of the real, or of an aesthetics of the hyperreal”, according to Baudrillard (1997, p. 30).

“The pleasure of an excess of meaning, when the bar of the sign falls below the usual waterline of meaning: the nonsignifier is exalted by the camera angle. There one sees what the real never was (but ‘as if you were there’), without the distance that gives us perspectival space and depth vision (but ‘more real than nature’). Pleasure in the microscopic simulation that allows the real to pass into the hyperreal. (This is also somewhat the case in porno, which is fascinating more on a metaphysical than on a sexual level.)” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 30).

The Loud family was already hyperreal. It was an “ideal heroine” and typical American family that, “as in ancient sacrifices”, is “chosen in order to be glorified and to die beneath the flames of the medium” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 31).<sup>191</sup> The communication channel, the TV, serve as the stage for this sacrificial process. For Baudrillard, this sacrificial spectacle is offered to twenty million Americans as the liturgical drama of mass society.

“Besides, this family was already hyperreal by the very nature of its selection: a typical ideal American family, California home, three garages, five children, assured social and professional status, decorative housewife, upper-middle-class standing. In a way it is this statistical perfection that dooms it to death. Ideal heroine of the American way of life, it is, as in ancient sacrifices, chosen in order to be glorified and to die beneath the flames of the medium, a modern fatum. Because heavenly fire no longer falls on corrupted cities, it is the camera lens that, like a laser, comes to pierce lived reality in order to put it to death. ‘The Louds: simply a family who agreed to deliver themselves into the hands of television, and to die by it,’ the director will say. Thus it is a question of a sacrificial process, of a sacrificial spectacle offered to twenty million Americans. The liturgical drama of a mass society. TV *vérité*. A term admirable in its ambiguity, does it refer to the truth of this family or to the truth of TV? In fact, it is TV that

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<sup>191</sup> In parallel with the case of the Loud family, it is recommended to understand the panoptic theory and its illusory effects by viewing the film *The Truman Show* (1998) directed by Peter Weir. This film tells the story of a citizen (played by Jim Carrey) with the name Truman (ironically meaning “real man” in English) who lives in a lie, since he was born and even adulthood, i.e. he lives on a television program. The reality that Truman thought existed was a reality-show scenario, in which the only participant, himself, was unaware that everything in his life, including his wife, was part of that program with a production team, a lot of audience, strategies of product placement during the broadcast and transmitted continuously. In a similar recording, the film *EDtv* (1999), by Ron Howard, is also recommended.



is the truth of the Louds, it is TV that is true, it is TV that renders true. Truth that is no longer the reflexive truth of the mirror, nor the perspectival truth of the panoptic system and of the gaze, but the manipulative truth of the test that sounds out and interrogates, of the laser that touches and pierces, of computer cards that retain your preferred sequences, of the genetic code that controls your combinations, of cells that inform your sensory universe. It is to this truth that the Loud family was subjected by the medium of TV, and in this sense it amounts to a death sentence (but is it still a question of truth?).” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 31).

It is the end of the panoptic system, because “the eye of TV is no longer the source of an absolute gaze, and the ideal of control is no longer that of transparency” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 31). The game system between seeing and being seen changes:

“Something else in regard to the Louds. ‘You no longer watch TV, it is TV that watches you (live),’ or again: ‘You are no longer listening to Don’t Panic, it is Don’t Panic that is listening to you’ — a switch from the panoptic mechanism of surveillance (*Discipline and Punish [Surveiller et punir]*) to a system of deterrence, in which the distinction between the passive and the active is abolished. There is no longer any imperative of submission to the model, or to the gaze ‘YOU are the model!’ ‘YOU are the majority!’ Such is the watershed of a hyperreal sociality, in which the real is confused with the model, as in the statistical operation, or with the medium, as in the Louds’ operation.” (Baudrillard, 1997, pp. 31-32).

Baudrillard refers to a further stage in the social relationship, in which we are the information, the social, and in which television is no longer a spectacular medium. For this reason, “we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 81). The information conveyed by the media devours its own content; it devours communication and the social. This happens for two reasons:

- a) The “creating communicating” is supplanted by the staging communication, just as producing meaning is supplanted by the staging of meaning.
- b) Behind this exacerbated staging of communication, the mass media, the information in forcing, continue to disrupt the real (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 82).

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard explains:

“Information devours its own content. It devours communication and the social. And for two reasons. Rather than creating communication, it exhausts itself in the act of staging communication. Rather than producing meaning,

it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning. A gigantic process of simulation that is very familiar. The nondirective interview, speech, listeners who call in, participation at every level, blackmail through speech: "You are concerned, you are the event, etc." More and more information is invaded by this kind of phantom content, this homeopathic grafting, this awakening dream of communication. [...] Behind this exacerbated *mise en scène* of communication, the mass media, the pressure of information pursues an irresistible destructuration of the social. Thus information dissolves meaning and dissolves the social, in a sort of nebulous state dedicated not to a surplus of innovation, but, on the contrary, to total entropy. Thus, the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses. And this is only the macroscopic extension of the implosion of meaning at the microscopic level of the sign. This implosion should be analyzed according to McLuhan's formula, the medium is the message, the consequences of which have yet to be exhausted." (Baudrillard, 1997, pp. 82-83).

In reason a), there is a loss of communication and an overvaluation of the simulacrum and the hyperreal. In this first reason, there is "the hyperreality of communication and of meaning", which is or at least seems "more real than the real" and "that is how the real is abolished" (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 83), that is thus canceled. In reason b), the media are, for Baudrillard, "producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses".

The contents and their senses are absorbed in the medium's unique dominant form. Only this medium is an event. In this perspective, Baudrillard agrees with McLuhan on the role of media in content, according to his famous phrase: the media is the message.

"[...] there is not only an implosion of the message in the medium, there is, in the same movement, the implosion of the medium itself in the real, the implosion of the medium and of the real in a sort of hyperreal nebula, in which even the definition and distinct action of the medium can no longer be determined. Even the 'traditional' status of the media themselves, characteristic of modernity, is put in question. McLuhan's formula, the medium is the message, which is the key formula of the era of simulation (the medium is the message — the sender is the receiver — the circularity of all poles — the end of panoptic and perspectival space — such is the alpha and omega of our modernity), this very formula must be imagined at its limit where, after all the contents and messages have been volatilized in the medium, it is the medium itself that is volatilized as such." (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 84).

The end of the message means the end of the medium, mainly the electronic mass media. It also means the end of the mediating instance of reality. It is the end of the perspective and panoptic space, the abolition of the spectacular. According to Baudrillard (1997, p. 32), “there is no longer a medium in the literal sense”, since the medium “is now intangible, diffused, and diffracted in the real, and one can no longer even say that the medium is altered by it”.

“We are no longer in the society of the spectacle, of which the situationists spoke, nor in the specific kinds of alienation and repression that it implied. The medium itself is no longer identifiable as such, and the confusion of the medium and the message (McLuhan) is the first great formula of this new era.” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 32).

For Baudrillard, arguing the implosion (of the contents, of the absorption of meaning, of the evanescence of the medium, of the reabsorption of the dialectic of communication, of the social in the masses) implies that nothing more that has meaning happens. An example presented by Baudrillard is when:

“[...] the media make themselves into the vehicle of the moral condemnation of terrorism and of the exploitation of fear for political ends, while simultaneously, in the most complete ambiguity, they propagate the brutal charm of the terrorist act, they are themselves terrorists, insofar as they themselves march to the tunes of seduction.” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 86).

In a short text which takes on a prophetic character<sup>192</sup> entitled “Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle”, Deleuze diagnoses a transformation or change from a surveillance model to a control model: the end of disciplinary confinement societies, in the sense of Bentham and Foucault, and the beginning of the same surveillance and control regimes, but by companies.

If Foucault addresses the institutionalized subject, referring to the big seclusion environments or confinement systems, in which the subject does not cease to transit, Deleuze considers the end of all these environments

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<sup>192</sup> Prophetic because the text was published in 1990, when the collapse of communism and the beginning of a single strand and world order, that of capitalism, fostered by economic neo-liberalism. In May of that year, when Deleuze published this text in the *L'Autre Journal*, the World Wide Web had been invented a year earlier by Tim Berners-Lee and there were no mobile phones or personal computers proliferating yet.

(Parr, 2005, p. 54). For Foucault, the subject moves from institutionalization to institutionalization throughout his life, that is, from confinement to confinement, each with its own laws: first, the family; then, the school; then, the barracks; then, the factory; from time to time the hospital, eventually the prison, which is the confinement system *par excellence* (Deleuze, 2003, p. 240). However, Deleuze considers that we are in a generalized crisis in all these environments of confinement. The disciplinary society gives place to the control society.

In “Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle”, text that is reproduced in *Pourparlers 1972-1990*, Deleuze underlines:

“In disciplinary societies, we never stopped start over (from school to barracks, from barracks to factory), while in the control societies nothing ever ends, the company, the training, the service being the metastable and coexisting states of the same modulation, like a universal deformer.” (Deleuze, 2003, p. 242).<sup>193</sup>

According to Deleuze, we have moved from the discipline society, governed by command words, to the control society, which defines us as a number, a password. The numerical control language is made up of digits, which mark the access or rejection of information. We are no longer faced with the mass-individual pair, according to Deleuze (2003, p. 242), as individuals have become the “*dividuels*”<sup>194</sup> and the masses become the samples, data, markets, or “banks”. Much more advanced than the old sovereign societies and disciplinary societies, the control societies operate with sophisticated machines, computer machines whose passive danger is the interference and the active danger is piracy and the introduction of viruses (Deleuze, 2003, p. 243). In these control societies, the control is continuous and increasingly hegemonic over information and communication, which are, in turn, increasingly instant. It is thanks to the advent of a new technology of computing and cybernetics that this arrogance of surveillance and control is exercised, particularly through continuous control and instant communication.

Although Deleuze in no way suggests that we should return to institutions and societies of discipline, he concludes that it is alarming the perspective of a new society of control (Parr, 2005, p. 54). The trend towards

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<sup>193</sup> My translation from the consulted original French edition “Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle”, in G. Deleuze, *Pourparlers 1972-1990* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit).

<sup>194</sup> The individuals go from undivided (i.e. individuals) to divided persons.

this perspective of a new society of control is due to the appearance and increase of new control techniques and because we are constantly coerced by the forms of communication.

Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) had already imagined the world as a network, admitting that the numerical world influences us without restricting us. According to Leibniz, the real is composed of individuals (basic atoms that Leibniz calls monads). Individuals are independent of each other. Each individual substance is autonomous, like a world apart, but the substances are in constant connection with each other. This individual and autonomous condition, on the one hand, and in constant connection, on the other hand, is what characterizes us today on social networks. This Leibnizian perspective is nonetheless paradoxical, for what is the essence of being a monad is individuality and autonomy in relation to other monads, with which he establishes a constant communicative connection, which he could not fail to be.

When we connect to the Internet, we know that we may be being watched or controlled. When we enter a website, the terms of use automatically appear. During the Internet “navigation”, we cannot avoid the ads that appear suddenly on the screen without permission and, strangely, to our measure, as the ads propose precisely what we were looking for in our previous navigation. Do we care or bother about being watched or controlled on the Internet? Do we not care or bother because we are satisfied or compensate for withdrawing the benefit we want from the Internet? Do we not care because this circumstance (of being watched and controlled) is inevitable and tolerable, despite being a *sine qua non* condition?

## 12.6. Charles Taylor: the ethics of authenticity

Modernity unleashes a revolution in our social imaginary. This is one of the main ideas of Charles Taylor expressed in the book *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Modernity alters the social imaginary, as it also transforms the other domains of collective and individual life. “My basic hypothesis is that central to Western modernity is a new conception of the moral order of society”, says Taylor (2004, p. 2). If the age changes and societies undergo profound changes, the social or collective imaginary is also modified with this new modern period. According to Taylor (2004, p. 159), “modernity has involved, among other things, a revolution in our social imaginary, the relegation of these forms of mediacy to the margins and the diffusion of images of direct access”.

Indeed, the concept of “social imaginary” is central to Taylor. With this concept, Taylor means something broader and deeper than intellectual

schemes that serve to think about social reality. For Taylor, social imaginaries are ways by which people imagine their existence, their social relationships and what surrounds them, how they relate to other people, how things happen and imply them, their expectations, etc.

“By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.” (Taylor, 2004, p. 23).

But a social imaginary is not a social theory. The social imaginary differs from social theory in that it is broader and is not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried by images, stories, and legends. The social imaginary is a common understanding that makes common practices possible, that is, interactions in the public sphere.

“There are important differences between social imaginary and social theory. I adopt the term imaginary (i) because my focus is on the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends. It is also the case that (ii) theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: (iii) the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.” (Taylor, 2004, p. 23).

If the social imaginary changes with modernity, people’s participation in the public sphere also changes, because now people have different conceptions of collective life and this is reflected in the social structure and in the public sphere. For Taylor, the public sphere is a common space of collective interests, where the media play an important role:

“The public sphere is a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these. I say ‘a common space’ because although the media are multiple, as are the exchanges that take place in them, they are deemed to be in principle intercommunicating. The discussion we’re having on television now takes account of what was said in the newspaper this morning, which in turn reports on the radio debate yesterday,

and so on. That's why we usually speak of the public sphere in the singular. The public sphere is a central feature of modern society, so much so that even where it is in fact suppressed or manipulated it has to be faked." (Taylor, 2004, p. 83).

At the end of the book *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Taylor justifies the relationship between the modern social imaginary and modern secular society. The modern path of society is long and secular, having contributed to the exodus of religion from the public sphere. The social imaginary "is the end of a certain kind of presence of religion or the divine in public space" (Taylor, 2004, p. 187); it helped to remove God from the public space. It will not have totally eliminated, but only and at least "it has certainly removed one mode in which God was formerly present, as part of a story of action-transcendent grounding of society in higher time" (Taylor, 2004, p. 186). The modern social imaginary fits into a modern secular society, at the end of the presence of religion or the divine in the public space; it is the end of a society structured by its dependence on God or religion:

"[...] this social imaginary is the end of a certain kind of presence of religion or the divine in public space. It is the end of the era when political authority, as well as other metatopical common agencies, are inconceivable without reference to God or higher time, when these are so Woven into the structures of authority that the latter cannot be understood separately from the divine, the higher, or the numinous." (Taylor, 2004, p. 187).

God and religion are not completely absent from public space, but they are less present and continue to be, in a way, essential to social and cultural identities. According to Taylor, modernity is secular. The secularity of modernity is in the absence of religion, which now occupies a different place.

Secularization is the decline of religious beliefs and practices in societies that have modernized, according to the theses defended by sociologists since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To support these theses, the development of science and techniques weakens beliefs and spirituality in favor of materialism and religious power gives way to secular power (Dortier, 2006, p. 630). Secularization corresponds to the disenchantment of the world, according to Weber's expression.

It is in the book *The Ethics of Authenticity* that Taylor deepens the criticisms of modernity and its consequences, that is, the social transformations that result from this new way of being and living in the world. According to Taylor (2003, pp. 2-9), there are three malaises of modernity:

1. Individualism and loss of collectivism.
2. The predominance of instrumental reason over critical reason.
3. The decrease in political participation or abstention and restrictions on individual freedom.

The following excerpt of *The Ethics of Authenticity* summarizes these three malaises of modernity:

“(1) The first source of worry is individualism. Of course, individualism also names what many people consider the finest achievement of modern civilization. We live in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors couldn’t control. And these rights are generally defended by our legal systems. In principle, people are no longer sacrificed to the demands of supposedly sacred orders that transcend them. [...] This worry has recently surfaced again in concern at the fruits of a ‘permissive society,’ the doings of the ‘me generation,’ or the prevalence of ‘narcissism,’ to take just three of the best-known contemporary formulations. The sense that lives have been flattened and narrowed, and that this is connected to an abnormal and regrettable self-absorption, has returned in forms specific to contemporary culture. This defines the first theme I want to deal with. (2) The disenchantment of the world is connected to another massively important phenomenon of the modern age, which also greatly troubles many people. We might call this the primacy of instrumental reason. By ‘instrumental reason’ I mean the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost-output ratio, is its measure of success. [...] The primacy of instrumental reason is also evident in the prestige and aura that surround technology, and makes us believe that we should seek technological solutions even when something very different is called for. [...] (3) This brings us to the political level, and to the feared consequences for political life of individualism and instrumental reason. One I have already introduced. It is that the institutions and structures of industrial-technological society severely restrict our choices, that they force societies as well as individuals to give a weight to instrumental reason that in serious moral deliberation we would never do, and which may even be highly destructive. A case in point is our great difficulties in tackling even vital threats to our lives from environmental disasters, like the thinning ozone layer. [...] But there is another kind of loss of freedom, which has also been widely discussed, most memorably by Alexis de Tocqueville. A society in which people end up as the kind of individuals who are ‘enclosed in their own hearts’ is one where few will want to participate actively in self-government. They will prefer to stay at home and enjoy the satisfactions of private life, as long as the government of the day produces the means to these



satisfactions and distributes them widely. This opens the danger of a new, specifically modern form of despotism, which Tocqueville calls ‘soft’ despotism. It will not be a tyranny of terror and oppression as in the old days. The government will be mild and paternalistic. It may even keep democratic forms, with periodic elections. But in fact, everything will be run by an ‘immense tutelary power,’ over which people will have little control.” (Taylor, 2003, pp. 2-9).

The malaises of modernity are “features of our contemporary culture and society that people experience as a loss or a decline, even as our civilization develops” (Taylor, 2003, p. 1). These are essentially pathologies that plague today’s post-modern societies and are generally characterized as shown in the following Table 12-6:

Malaise	Description
1. Individualism and loss of collectivism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Concentration on the Self (it is the “me generation”) or “prevalence of narcissism”.</li> <li>–Loss of ideals and narrowing of horizons (loss of meaning over moral horizons).</li> <li>–Permissive societies, in which “people have lost a broader view, because they have focused on their individual lives” (Taylor, 2003, p. 4).</li> </ul>
2. The predominance of instrumental reason over critical reason.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–The rationality that is used when considering the application of simpler means to reach a given end.</li> <li>–The “maximum efficiency, the best cost-output ratio, is its measure of success” (Taylor, 2003, p. 5).</li> <li>–Eclipse of the ends and unbridled instrumental reason.</li> </ul>
3. Abstention and restrictions on individual freedom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Individuals who are self-absorbed and focused on the pleasures of private life are not interested in participating in political life.</li> <li>–Soft despotism (political structures and institutions restrict the choices).</li> <li>–Loss of identity (Taylor, 2003, p. 9).</li> </ul>

**Table 12-6:** Taylor’s three maladies of modernity and their respective description.

These three malaises of modernity mentioned by Taylor foster a post-modern culture of conformist and dependent narcissism, which would be particularly embedded in religion as a private issue, insofar as a subjective shift towards a new form of interiority is advocated.

The source of morality is within the subject and allows him to intuitively distinguish good from evil, like what Saint Augustine’s meditations on an “Inner Master” reveal.

“We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. For purposes of this discussion, I want to take ‘language’ in a broad sense, covering not only the words we speak but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the ‘languages’ of art, of gesture, of love, and the like. But we are inducted into these in exchange with others. No one acquires the languages needed for self definition on their own. We are introduced to them through exchanges with others who matter to us what George Herbert Mead called ‘significant others.’ The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not ‘monological,’ not something each accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical.” (Taylor, 2003, p. 33).

Ethics is always important, especially today. Either the question of ethics overlaps, insofar as modernity is a period of transformation for the secularity of values, or the ethical question is erased and diluted, insofar as it will follow the trend of devaluation and crisis of values and, consequently, of the social, cultural and individual identity itself.

In this sense, Taylor distinguishes between ethics of modernity and ethics of authenticity. Ethics is not understood as a duty, but as a way of realizing the human through actions in the public space; they express values. It is important to know what our sources of value are because these sources allow us to build an ethical-cultural identity. Knowing what the sources allow us to position, in a more critical way, in the public space (in the public sphere) where human interactions and conflicts occur.

The crisis of modernity is taking place in the construction of the modern West. Taylor’s intention is to recover the cultural and philosophical sources linked to the expression of human identities. The ethics of recognition correspond when there is no gravitational center to define the individual through a single prism, but significant and valuable cultural references, whose cores are in the modern collective life and experience. Autonomy develops on the dialogical plane. To be autonomous is to act driven by a moral and cultural configuration arising from a community’s way of being. Modernity develops the concept of “autonomy” based on rationality.

Individualism denies any form of ethics because ethics presupposes the other. Individualism is the result of the fragmentation of modern collective life and experience. The crisis of modernity is linked to the development of subjectivity, in which the individual constructs particular ends, thus completely forgetting the other.

The malaises of modernity are the causes of the modern collective discomfort and put the ethics of authenticity in crisis. Among other consequences of the discomfort of modernity, Taylor indicates:

- a) Loss of meaning/orientation (society without design).
- b) The disappearance of moral horizons/ethical referents (ethical level).
- c) Eclipse of the ends (teleological level).
- d) The decrease in social and civic rights: freedom (political level).

Taylor's argumentative strategy focuses on analyzing the sources of contemporary individualism and recognizing individualism that presents itself in an ambivalent way: today we live in a world where most people have the right to choose the way they wish to live (daily practices, preferences, religion, political option, etc.).

## 12.7. Lyotard: the human condition and the post-modern

Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) is recognized for his study and understanding of post-modernity in his vast work, namely *The Post-modern Condition* (1979), following a cross-over perspective between existentialism and Marxism in the critique of current societies, that transform the human condition and create the inhuman.

In this perspective, post-modernity is a prerogative of Western societies of a capitalist feature, in which there is evidence of changes in social behavior, more specifically from the 1980s.

The concept of "post-modernity" inaugurated by Lyotard in *The Post-modern Condition* (Giddens, 1996, p. 2), supports the disbelief in the meta-narratives of modernity, which culminates in the delegitimization of ideals, precepts, and rules. According to Lyotard's *The Post-modern Condition*:

"The object of this study is the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies. I have decided to use the word *post-modern* to describe that condition. The word is in current use on the American continent among sociologists and critics; it designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts. The present study will place these transformations in the context of the crisis of narratives." (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiii).

Lyotard represents post-modernity, according to Giddens (1996, p. 2), referring to a peculiar view of deep social, cultural, and epistemological transformations:

"As he [Lyotard] represents it, post-modernity refers to a shift away from attempts to ground epistemology and from faith in humanly engineered progress. The condition of post-modernity is distinguished by an evaporating

of the 'grand narrative'—the overarching 'storyline' by means of which we are placed in history as beings having a definite past and a predictable future. The post-modern outlook sees a plurality of heterogeneous claims to knowledge, in which science does not have a privileged place." (Giddens, 1996, p. 2).

In Lyotard's view, modern conditions of knowledge are distinct from post-modern conditions. While modernity is characterized by the perception of the world in the light of totalizing systems (meta-narratives or meta-reports) with predictability, objectivity, and scientific progress (making scientific knowledge based on a rational, logical, and legitimate discourse), post-modernity it is characterized by narrative discourses that question values and ends (Lyotard, 1984, p. 24), without submitting to argumentation and proof (Sebastião, 2012, p. 66).

"I have said that narrative knowledge does not give priority to the question of its own legitimation and that it certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof. This is why its incomprehension of the problems of scientific discourse is accompanied by a certain tolerance: it approaches such discourse primarily as a variant in the family of narrative cultures. The opposite is not true. The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilize, educate, develop. This unequal relationship is an intrinsic effect of the rules specific to each game. We all know its symptoms. It is the entire history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of Western civilization. It is important to recognize its special tenor, which sets it apart from all other forms of imperialism: it is governed by the demand for legitimation." (Lyotard, 1984, p. 27).

The issue is a confrontation between scientific knowledge and narrative knowledge. Since knowledge is a base for cultural elevation and advancement, legitimate (the scientific knowledge) knowledge gives more guarantees than the knowledge that is not supported by argumentation and proof (the narrative knowledge). With post-modernity a new statute of knowledge appears and, with it, new forms to access and transmit knowledge, provided by new information technologies (Sebastião, 2012, p. 66). Knowledge is the result of interpretations about the world. But the narrative knowledge of post-modernity is dominated by the media and information technologies that define what is real. Thus, post-modernity is

characterized by a crisis of rational knowledge, representativeness, and legitimation.

The causes of post-modernity are *inter alia*:

- a) The internationalization of trade and business.
- b) The opening and proliferation of large commercial areas.
- c) Successive incentives for widespread consumption.
- d) The development of media and technology, which disseminates material values and consumption incentives.
- e) The trivialization of the use of content with greater exposure to mass influences.

Lyotard maintains that the recent social changes, now more oriented towards materiality and consumption, meant the transition from societies based on values inspired by the French Revolution to more individualistic, ephemeral, and consumerist ideals. In a theoretical framework of comprehensive and interpretive sociology (critical perspective of society and human being), Lyotard argues that we entered the so-called post-modern society or the era of post-modernity (or “hyper-modernity”, for Lipovetsky), considering the following characteristics of post-modern society:

- Almighty presence of the media and multimedia devices.
- Invasion of the social and personal sphere.
- Futile programs and content, such as reality TV shows and other flashes of modern lifestyle broadcast live all over the world.
- Spectacularization of media discourse to attract the attention of audiences.
- Live television broadcast as a logic of reality simulation.
- Fantasies and fictions spread by the media essentially for those who do not find satisfaction with their reality.
- Informative saturation at breakneck speed.
- Mass search for distinctive marks according to what is consumed and displayed, leading to hedonism.
- Overdose of debates and exhaustive information about the same events, in all media, emptying ideologies and trivializing events, making ideas repeated in speeches (the form overlaps the content).
- Post-modern culture cultivates pastiche, mixing old and new times.

In this scenario, the capitalist system contributes to social changes, namely in terms of lifestyles and consumption. But what is capitalism? It is a concept from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, acquiring an increasingly

negative meaning throughout that century. Capitalism<sup>195</sup> designates a certain organization of economic activities. Being a broad concept, it covers several meanings:

- Meaning 1: the private appropriation of the means of production, accompanied by a separation between the holders of capital and the work indispensable for its activation.<sup>196</sup>
- Meaning 2: capitalism is understood as a market economy, in which producers and consumers are in regulated markets, for countless exchanges and sharing goods, services, and negotiations.
- Meaning 3: a structured society with the primary objective of increasing indefinitely the production and consumption of goods and services, in endless growth and made possible by scientific and technical development, which allows increasing the efficiency of the production apparatus, to offer increasingly lower relative prices and to expand the circle of consumption to larger and less satisfied audiences.

Consequently, the idea of post-modernity, popularized by Lyotard in *The Post-modern Condition*, refers to the representation of a world that no longer believes in progress, in science, in reason, or in the future. The post-modern is synonymous with disillusionment, with the end of modernity's meta-narratives about the virtue of progress.

## 12.8. Lipovetsky: from post-modernity to hyper-modernity

Recent and ongoing social and cultural transformations, based on materialistic and consumerist issues attached to the economic logic of the liberal market, arouse sociological interest and involve various aspects and dimensions of human life. One of the critical views on these transformations is proposed by Gilles Lipovetsky, for whom there is currently a transition to hyper-modernity. The social structure changes and so do the relationships

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<sup>195</sup> The term “capitalism”, understood to describe an economic, social, and political system, appeared in 1860, according to Hobsbawm (1995, p. 13) in *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*.

<sup>196</sup> The meaning 1 is opposed by the so-called anti-capitalism, which aims to eliminate the separation between the possessed (owned) and the proletariat, allowing all workers in a production unit to become the collective owners of their capital and transferring the ownership of the entire capital of a country to the State.

between people. Social normalization no longer has the weight of the past in the indication of each person in the social order, leading the individual to lose his sense of duty and to derive between the constant appeals to consumption and pleasure (Sebastião, 2012, p. 94). Lipovetsky argues they are hyper-consumerist, hyper-hedonistic, and hyper-narcissistic societies, typical of an era that began to emerge in the 1980s.

Lipovetsky's work is polygraphic. From Lipovetsky's vast work, the following titles stand out: *L'Ère du Vide, Essais sur l'Individualisme Contemporain* (1983); *L'Empire de l'Éphémère, La Mode et son Destin dans les Sociétés Modernes* (1987); *Le Crépuscule du Devoir* (1992); *La Troisième Femme, Permanence et Révolution du Féminin* (1997); *Les Métamorphoses de la Culture Libérale–Éthique, Médias, Entreprise* (2002); *Le Luxe Éternel, De l'Âge du Sacré au Temps des Marques* (with Elyette Roux) (2003); *Les Temps Hypermodernes* (2004); *Le Bonheur Paradoxal, Essai sur la Société d'Hyperconsommation* (2006); *La Société de Déception* (2006); *L'Écran Global, Cultures-médias et Cinéma à l'Âge Hypermoderne* (with Jean Serroy) (2007); *La Culture-monde. Réponse à une Société Désorientée* (with Jean Serroy) (2008); *L'Occident Mondialisé, Controverse sur la Culture Planétaire* (with Hervé Juvin) (2010); *L'Esthétisation du Monde, Vivre à l'Âge du Capitalisme Mondialisé* (2013).

In general, Lipovetsky insists on the critical analysis of hyper-modern societies, as he calls it, i.e. profoundly transformed societies. For him, the diagnosis of current societies of the excess indicates the following aspects:

- Exaggerated consumerism (hyper-consumption societies) and constant appeals for the consumption of all types of products, goods, services, and brands, regardless of consumer needs.
- Priority search for the satisfaction of pleasures (hedonistic societies).
- Focus on private and individualistic interests as a form of social projection (narcissistic societies).
- Secondary social normativity (post-duty societies).
- Loss of values, ideals, and references (empty and disoriented societies).
- New social relationship practices focused on personal needs (network societies).
- New uses and customs around the image and the devices that present and share them (screen societies and cultures).
- Concern about being in a global fashion (fun-societies and world-culture).

The most striking feature of contemporary societies and the one that Lipovetsky criticizes most is exacerbated consumerism. This consumerism,

which is already hyper-consumerism for Lipovetsky, implies the other defining aspects of societies, which are social problems, some apparently divorced from the practice of consumption, as is the case of happiness. In *The Paradoxical Happiness: Essay on Hyperconsumption Society*,<sup>197</sup> Lipovetsky recognizes that neither the ecological protests nor the new versions of more sober consumption will be enough to dethrone the growing hegemony of the market sphere, to derail “the consumerist TGV” (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 15). It is the beginning of a new phase of consumer capitalism, typical of a hyper-consumption society that leads, precisely, to a happiness that is paradoxical.

Paradoxical happiness is peculiar to *homo consumericus*, a kind of distant, mobile, and flexible turbo-consumer. For this paradoxical happiness, to live better corresponds to a collective passion of the masses. The supreme objective of democratic societies is the exalted improvement of material living conditions, which defines this new phase of capitalism.

We move from an economy centered on supply to an economy centered on demand. The brand policy is required and privileged: creating value for the customer and loyalty systems. It is in this transformational scope that Lipovetsky refers in *The Paradoxical Happiness: Essay on Hyperconsumption Society* the three phases of mass consumption:

1. Fordian revolution of mass production or fabrication of non-differentiated products in large quantities: standard parts and specialized workers (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 23).
2. The democratization of consumption, excess of goods, and multiplication of brands (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 26).
3. Individualization of products and appeal to consumption based on a kind of ethereal marketing (Lipovetsky, 2010, pp. 31-41), visible in certain advertising slogans.

However, the systematic appeal to consumption creates frustrations, both for real consumers (who always want more and try different products) and for potential consumers (who wish but has no purchasing power). In *The Paradoxical Happiness: Essay on Hyperconsumption Society*, Lipovetsky states:

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<sup>197</sup> Originally published in French as *Le Bonheur Paradoxal, Essai sur la Société d'Hyperconsommation*, by Gallimard (2006). The quotations and references of Lipovetsky's books listed in the Bibliography are my translations from the Portuguese and Spanish editions consulted for the realization of the present work.



“It is clear that snobbery, the individual’s desire to shine, to differentiate, to exhibit a certain position has not disappeared, but the main reason to support the tropism for superior brands is no longer the desire for social recognition: today, the aim is above all the narcissistic pleasure of feeling a distance from the ordinary, enjoying a positive image of ourselves and for ourselves. Elitist pleasures have not evaporated; they have been restructured through the subjective logic of neo-individualism; the individual creates satisfaction for himself, and not so much to win the admiration and esteem of others. It is no longer a matter of ‘imposing’ an image on others, but of confirming its value in one own eyes, of being, in Veblen’s words, ‘satisfied with oneself’. [...] ‘L’Oréal because I deserve it’. In our days, enthusiasm for brands is fueled by the narcissistic desire to enjoy the intimate feeling of being a ‘quality person’, to compare ourselves to others finding ourselves at an advantage, to be better than the masses, without caring with the approval of others or with the desire to make them jealous. [...] First of all, many campaigns abandon the strategy of repetitive praise of the product, favoring the spectacular, the playful, the humor, the surprise, and the seduction of the consumers. Advertising designated as ‘creative’ is an expression of this change. The aim is no longer to sell a product, but rather a way of life, an imaginary, values capable of triggering an emotion: the purpose of communication is increasingly to create an affective relationship with the brand. The purpose of commercial persuasion has changed: it is no longer enough to inspire confidence, publicize and memorize a product—it is necessary to mitigate the brand and make the consumer fall in love with it. Mechanistic strategies have given way to emotionalist strategies that meet experiential individualism. On the other hand, just as the markets are increasingly segmented, so advertising unfolds its campaigns, fragmenting into multiple executions and diversified styles. Repetitive advertising is followed by advertising based on creativity and the frequent renewal of campaigns, in order to capture the attention of the ‘skeptical’ hyper-consumer saturated with messages. Today, advertisements must be renewed every six or eight months. *Coca-Cola* ran 17 ads in 1997, versus a single in 1986. Since 1995, *Levi’s* has launched 2-3 ads a year. There are 500 *Absolut Vodka* ads that combine unity and difference. What happens in communication also applies to products and services: speed and variety are imposed as the new principles of hyper-brands. We are not seeing an advertising totalitarianism, but a spectacular and detached hyper-advertising, dreamlike and complicit; ironic hyper-advertising that looks at itself, plays with itself, and with the consumer. A new era of advertising is required which, based on the principles of fashion (change, fantasy, seduction), is in tune with the emotional buyer [...]” (Lipovetsky, 2010, pp. 41, 81-82).

If Thorstein Veblen understood consumerism and hedonism as signs of social status for those who can do it at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. those who have purchasing power and social status, this practice of consumption

and leisure became widespread in the contemporary era. Social models are replaced by individual behaviors to the point of becoming a preference and a possibility for everyone in the contemporary “era of emptiness” that belongs to Narciso (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 41). Snobbery, the desire to be famous and the social overlap now adapt to the narcissism that differentiates the consumers and the neo-individualistic satisfactions.

Lipovetsky refers to a deterioration in the quality of social relations with the predominance of economic, commercial, and personal interests of the consumer. Sociability is in crisis, as are the forms and means of communicability:

“The despotic order of consumption is precisely that which establishes the unilaterality of communication, an abstract social relationship that prevents any form of reciprocity between human beings: television is thus ‘the guarantee that people will no longer speak to each other, that they will be definitely isolated in the face of an unanswered word’. The problem of systematic desocialization was further reinforced with the development of networks and new information technologies that would gradually replace the old life in society with virtual interactions. Studies carried out reveal that the use of the Internet ‘decreases the circle of close and distant social relationships, increases loneliness, slightly decreases the level of social support’: in 2001, from the 13 million American teenagers, 2 million preferred to communicate with friends through the network than in person. The future would be a world of virtual communities, with the consequent destruction of the real community, direct contact, collective connection.” (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 123).

In the same Lyotard’s perspective, Lipovetsky also presents a critical approach regarding these transformed societies, but mainly regarding the excesses of individualism and consumerism. According to Lipovetsky’s criticism of societies of excess, today there is too much of everything. Excess is accurately a plethora, a social malaise, or discomfort caused by the excesses of everything. Hence the use of the prefix “hyper” by Lipovetsky to characterize contemporary societies. The problem is also due to the transformation of societies by consumption that has distorted the notion of culture. In Lipovetsky’s view, culture ceased to be elitist and became a world-culture, which unifies/uniformizes societies, on the one hand, and industrializes all activities (from fashion to tourism), as everything obeys the laws of the economy, that is, everything has to be profitable. Products are no longer sold; instead, a lifestyle is sold. They are societies based on a system of paradoxes.

### 12.8.1. The era of emptiness and hyper-modernity

Since 1983, the year of publication of the work *The Era of Emptiness: Essays on Contemporary Individualism*,<sup>198</sup> that Lipovetsky insists on the conviction that a new type of individualism is gradually asserting and practiced to the point that today it manifests itself as evidence. Lipovetsky diagnoses an exclusive concern of the individual only focused on himself, an affirmation of the Self that extends to a social phenomenon. The absence of reference systems capable of framing and guiding the individual and societies accompanies and follows the growing individualism, that is, there is an emptiness of values, ideals, and references. It is an emptiness of structural references.

According to Lipovetsky, emptiness characterizes contemporary societies. But there is no such thing as an absolute emptiness or an absolute disinterest, i.e. a Nietzschean nihilism. The problem is that people mobilize according to their interests instead of getting involved daily for the simple duty of citizenship. The theoretical framework in which Lipovetsky is inserted and its approaches is that of comprehensive and interpretive sociology, a critical perspective of contemporary societies.

In addition to a critical (but not apocalyptic) book, *The Era of Emptiness: Essays on Contemporary Individualism* is also a warning about the contradictory and disoriented course that societies and consumer cultures were in 1983 and still are. *The Era of Emptiness: Essays on Contemporary Individualism*, as well as other books published later by Lipovetsky, not only follows the same critical and worrying view about the effects of the transformations (at all levels) of modernity but also deepens this view. Consequently, Lipovetsky now refers to hyper-modernity. For Lipovetsky, the marks of modernity are exacerbated, i.e. everything is excessive and exceeds the limit of what is reasonable.

In *The Era of Emptiness: Essays on Contemporary Individualism*, Lipovetsky admonishes for the consumerist outlines that mark contemporary societies:

“What a mistake to have hastily proclaimed the end of the consumer society, when the personalization process continues to expand its borders. The current recession, the energy crisis, the ecological conscience, do not announce the burial of the age of consumption: we are destined to consume, even if in a different way, more and more objects and information, sports and travel, training and relationships, music and medical care. This is post-

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<sup>198</sup> Originally published in French as *L'Ère du Vide, Essais sur l'Individualisme Contemporain*, by Gallimard, Paris (1983).

modern society; not beyond consumption, but its apotheosis, its extension to the private sphere, even in the image and evolution of the ego called to know the fate of accelerated obsolescence, mobility, destabilization. Consumption of own existence through the proliferation of the mass media, leisure, relational techniques, the personalization process generates the emptiness in technicolor, the existential impression in and by the abundance of models, even if they are animated on the basis of coexistence, ecologism, of psychologism. More precisely, we are in the second phase of the consumer society, *cool* and no longer *hot*, consumption that has digested the criticism of opulence. The idolatry of the *American way of life*, triumphantly chrome cars, big stars, and Hollywood dreams is over; the *beatnik* revolution and the scandal of the avant-garde are concluded and all this gave way, they say, to a post-modern culture detectable by various signs: search for quality of life, passion for personality, ecological sensitivity, abandonment of the great systems of meaning, the cult of participation and expression, retro fashion, rehabilitation of local, regional, certain traditional beliefs and practices. Is it the eclipse of the previous quantitative bulimia? Yes, but with the condition that these phenomena are also manifestations of the personalization process, strategies that work to destroy the effects of monolithic modernism, gigantism, centralism, hard ideologies, the vanguard.” (Lipovetsky, 2000, p. 10).

The emptiness that Lipovetsky talks about in this book is also an emptiness of meaning and of communication/information:

“The modern era was obsessed with production and revolution; the post-modern era is obsessed with information and expression. As it is said, we express by ‘contacts’ at work, sport, leisure, in such a way that soon there will not be a single activity that is not marked with the ‘cultural’ label. Nor is it an ‘ideological discourse’, it is a mass aspiration whose last manifestation is the extraordinary proliferation of free radio stations. We are all disc jockeys, presenters, and entertainers; tuning in to the FM immediately assaults a cloud of music, phrases, interviews, confidences, cultural, regional, local, and neighborhood ‘affirmations’, school, restricted groups. (Lipovetsky, 2000, p. 14).

There is unprecedented democratization of the word: everyone is encouraged to speak or give an opinion on any subject. This admonition of risk has become a concrete and routine reality with the apotheosis of private consumption. There are also repercussions of this era on communication, that is, the nature, acts, and contents of the communication are also affected by the post-modern era:

“Unprecedented democratization of the word: everyone is encouraged to call [...] everyone wants to say something about their intimate experience, we

can all do as the broadcasters and be heard. But this is the same as the paintings on the walls of the school or the numerous artistic groups; the greater the means of expression, the less things have to be said; the more subjectivity is requested, the more anonymous and empty is the effect. Paradox reinforced even more by the fact that nobody is interested in this profusion of expression, with one important exception: the sender or the creator himself. That is, precisely, narcissism, spontaneous expression, the primacy of the act of communication over the nature of what is communicated, the indifference to the contents, the playful reabsorption of the meaning, communication without purpose or public, the sender converted into the main receiver. That is why this plethora of spectacles, exhibitions, interviews, totally insignificant proposals for anyone and that do not even create an environment: there is something else at stake, the possibility and the desire to express whatever the nature of the 'message', the right and the narcissistic pleasure of expressing for nothing, for oneself, but with a register amplified by a 'means'. Communicating for communicating, expressing oneself for no other purpose than mere expressing and being recorded by a micro-public, narcissism discovers here as elsewhere its coexistence with post-modern de-substantialization, with the logic of emptiness." (Lipovetsky, 2000, pp. 14-15).

The contemporary era is that of Narcissus. Narcissus is the symbol of individualization and individual emotional fulfillment. He contemplates himself, desires to be young, beautiful, and healthy, but abandons the ideals and interests of the community to which one belongs. Narcissus is absorbed, astonished, dumbfounded, numb, as are the individuals in contemporary mass societies.<sup>199</sup> According to *The Era of Emptiness: Essays on Contemporary Individualism*:

"Laxism replaces moralism or purism and indifference replaces intolerance. Narcissus is too absorbed in himself and renounces religious militancy, abandons the great orthodoxies, his adhesions follow the fashion, they are fluctuating without great motivations. Here too, personalization leads to the divestment of conflict, to distension. In personalized systems, schisms, heresies are no longer meaningful: when a society 'values the subjective feeling of the actors and devalues the objective character of the action it starts a process of de-substantiation of actions and doctrines whose immediate effect is an ideological and political relaxation. By neutralizing content for the benefit of psi seduction, intimacy generalizes indifference, following a disarming strategy that is at the opposite end of the dogmatism of exclusions.'" (Lipovetsky, 2000, p. 67).

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<sup>199</sup> The name of Narcissus comes from the Greek word *narkê* ("numb"), from where the word "narcotic" also comes from.

Paradoxically, “collective individualism” is accentuated. Individuals group and associate because they are equal, they are all Narcissus, they have the same interests, they follow the same lifestyles (social practices and standardized consumption), as in the groups of social networks. Impersonal and objective activities, practices, and consumption now become individualized and subjectified. According to Lipovetsky (2000, p. 47), Narcissus is the symbol of the contemporary era; he is searching for himself; he is obsessed only with himself and, therefore, prone to faint or sink at any moment.

### 12.8.2. The post-duty age

In *The Twilight of Duty*,<sup>200</sup> Lipovetsky makes the diagnosis of contemporary western societies. He presents a sociological analysis focusing on the moral issue. For Lipovetsky, we live in an age of post-modernity that is post-moralistic. Traditional religious morality has been rejected in favor of secular morality. Lipovetsky shows a critical perspective on society and the human condition, approaching the precariousness of the post-modern value system that underlies contemporary societies.

Lipovetsky argues that values do not disappear; they are transformed. The age of duty (of austere morals and collective virtues) has ended. We are now in the post-duty age; we are looking for a moral by which personal fulfillment guides culture. Lipovetsky mentions “new ethics” more concerned with the practice of life and the organization of daily life. This “new ethics” would be acceptable, insofar as it would configure a balance between the theory and practice of life or between the ideal and the possible.

According to Lipovetsky, the great ideologies of history and the great explanatory schemes that marked modernity (e.g. nationalism, socialism, revolution, progress) lost their importance in the contemporary world. It is the mistrust of the great ideologies of modernity and the progress of the philosophical systems of Kant, Hegel, or Marx.

The problem raised by *The Twilight of Duty* revolves around the questioning of the contemporaneity, i.e. its social values, moral principles, and cultural standards. Through this questioning, Lipovetsky notes:

- The development of individualism and culture of narcissism.
- The consumerism of the modern condition (the *homo consumericus*).
- The absence of rigid, indoctrinators, and generators values.
- The excesses of everything (e.g. goods, services, means, information, and consumption options).
- The lack of general interest to participate in the public sphere and the

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<sup>200</sup> Originally published in French as *Le Crépuscule du Devoir*.

loss of community ties and citizenship.

In *The Twilight of Duty*, the moral question predominates: is the human being a moral and ethical being even though he is individualistic? Lipovetsky refers to three ethical ages:

1. Ethical secularization phase (1700-1950).
2. Post-Duty Age (since 1950).
3. Contemporaneity phase, the twilight of duty.

“How can we designate a culture where the promotion of subjective rights leaves the tearing duty without an heir, where what is labeled ethical is assumed to be an invader, usurper, and where the requirement for commitment is absent? Post-moralistic society: meaning a society that rejects the rhetoric of austere, integral, Manichaeic duty, and that, at the same time, exalts individual rights to autonomy, desire, happiness. At its core, it is a displaced society from the minimalist exhortations, giving credit only to the painless norms of ethical life. [...] Post-duty is not synonymous with societies in communion in a permissive tolerance that aspires only to the expansion of individualist rights [...] Post-duty contributes, at its level, to fragment, to dualize democracies, while producing normalization and anomie, more integration and more exclusion, a greater hygienist concern and more self-destruction, more horror for the violence and a greater trivialization of delinquency, more cocooning and more homelessness. [...] The post-moralist era should not invite, neither to the dream of a resurrection of maximalist duty, nor to the aberrations of a ‘recovery’ of ethics; it must reaffirm the primacy of respect for man, denounce the pitfalls of moralism, promote intelligent ethics in companies, as well as in relation to the environment, to favor compromise solutions founded on basic humanist principles, but in line with circumstances, with interests and efficiency requirements.” (Lipovetsky, 2004, pp. 17-25).

The present age is that of the twilight of duty and it appears as an imperative arising from higher laws, in which we fail to recognize the obligation and the duty to connect with anything other than ourselves. “The era of mass happiness celebrates free individuality; it privileges communication and multiplies choices and options. [...] The culture of ‘light’ happiness induces chronic mass anxiety, but it does away with moral guilt.” (Lipovetsky, 2004, pp. 64-66).

The post-duty age is the age of freedoms and free individualities, the happiness of the masses, the multi-communications on social networks, and the search for media coverage. In *The Twilight of Duty*, Lipovetsky pertinently problematizes several aspects:

- If the culture of individualistic self-absorption and self-interest is, at this moment, predominant, how to explain the collective aspiration

to morality?

- How can individuals be turned towards themselves and indifferent both to their neighbors and to the “common good” and be indignant, show signs of generosity, recognize themselves in the ethical claim?
- What are the effects of the absence of moral values and citizenship on people’s education, i.e. on the acquisition of knowledge and cultural standards?
- Do the communication processes and techniques developments, as well as the excess of information, impose new methods of education and new requirements on schools?

The concept of “post-modernity”, first presented by Lyotard in *The Post-modern Condition*, raises many discussions, approaches, and conceptualizations. It is synonymous with “post-industrial society” for some authors, and characteristic of a time of the triumph of the spectacle, of economic and global neo-liberalism, of capitalism or consumerism for other authors. The concept of “post-modernity” and the understanding of post-modern society has become ambiguous and equivocal.

### **12.8.3. World-culture: the triumph of capitalism and individualism**

The contemporary era brought a new, modern, and unprecedented way of configuring different cultures and, in general, of the world. “The hyper-modern era has profoundly transformed the relief, the meaning, the social and economic surface of culture”, as recognize Lipovetsky and Serroy (2011, p. 7) in *World-Culture: Responding to a Disoriented Society*. This culture has become a world-culture, i.e. a world-culture of planetary technocapitalism, cultural industries, total consumerism, media, and digital networks, add Lipovetsky and Serroy. This world-culture is manifested by the exorcism of products, images, and information. It is a kind of universal hyper-culture that transcends the borders and confuses the old dichotomies (economy/imaginary, real/virtual, production/representation, brand/art, commercial and popular culture/high and erudite culture); it reconfigures the world in which we live and the civilization to come (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 7). According to *World-Culture: Responding to a Disoriented Society*:

“World-culture designates the era of the formidable expansion of the universe of communication, information, mediatization. The development of new technologies and cultural and communication industries has made possible an abundant consumption of images and, at the same time, the



multiplication of channels, information, and endless exchanges. This is the era of the hyper-media world, cyber-world, world-communication, supreme, and commodified stage of culture.” (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 10).

World-culture is a landmark of contemporaneity and cosmopolitanism. It is a unifying and agglutinating culture, composed of four major logics:

1. Hyper-capitalism.
2. Hyper-technicalization.
3. Hyper-individualism.
4. Hyper-consumption.

Consequently, in *World-Culture: Responding to a Disoriented Society*, Lipovetsky and Serroy argue and justify that:

“The hyper-modern world, as it appears today, is organized around four structuring poles that shape the physiognomy of the new times. These axiomatic are: hyper-capitalism, the driving force of financial globalization; hyper-technicization, a superlative degree of modern technical universality; hyper-individualism, realizing the spiral of the individual atom thereafter detached from the community coercions of the old times; hyper-consumption, a hypertrophied and exponential form of mercantile hedonism.” (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 32).

These logics are in constant interaction and are present all over the world. It is a world-culture because the planet is the same in all its regions. The sharp differences of the past between the West and the East are now diluted by the world-culture or hyper-culture, whose essential pieces are the cultural industries and the universe of cyberspace (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 68). In China there are cities like European cities, for example. It is the phenomenon of globalization in its cultural version, in its form or lifestyle, in the way of thinking and conceiving the world and being in that world that is more and more equal. The logic of profitability absorbs everything, including art (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 69). A trademark no longer sells just a product or service; it sells a culture, a lifestyle. We are at a time when creating products is no longer enough: it is necessary to create a brand identity or culture (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 95). Therefore, we invest more in brands<sup>201</sup> than in products.

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<sup>201</sup> More than brands, Lipovetsky and Serroy would mention “hyper brands”. The culture is a world-culture, a hyper-culture, a hyper-market with hyper-consumers. Thus, whoever wants to say what the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>

The most important thing is not the consumer product, its usefulness in satisfying needs, but what the product represents in terms of values for the world-culture. Today there is new capitalism, for which there is no alternative. Capitalism is the only major driving force; it works by injecting people with seduction and provoking desire and making them want it. However, capitalism creates needs and appeals to pleasures. Thus, the framework of values and the references of life is renewed. Capitalism has changed: from construction capitalism (mass industrial production of everything) to brand capitalism. Lipovetsky speaks of a massive state of hyper-consumption, characterized by excesses, namely the excess of choice regarding what is the same or similar.

World-culture does not mean the end of cultural identity, peculiar localism, and traditional characteristic and unique cultural traits. Paradoxically, world-culture brings societies closer and allows them to have the same brands and products, but it also contributes to the diversification of individuals, according to Lipovetsky and Serroy (2011, p. 125). World-culture does not imply the disappearance of cultural differences, but consumer traditions have changed. The excess that characterizes all dimensions of society is also present in people's freedom of choice. Today, individuals are freer to choose over everything in the world-culture. The consequence of the world-culture is increasing individualism and individualization.

In the thought of Lipovetsky, world-culture increases social disorientation; it makes societies disoriented, without solid pillars of support. In the world-culture, which is a culture of excesses, there is also an excess of information and an excess of wrong or false (fake news), incomplete or contradictory information. The same happens with communication: there is an excess of means and techniques of communication, but little is said (i.e. people say little in substantial terms). Paradoxically, we are more isolated. In the past, we live in villages where everyone knew each other. Today, the villages are global, as McLuhan argues. They are media-villages inseparable from a new form of modern culture, whose model is given by television. Contemporary societies are modeled by television.

“Since the 1960s-70s, television has established itself as the dominant model of mass media, communicating to an undifferentiated group of individuals the same content received at the same time. Simultaneously, the new media transforms the world itself into information: from then on, it is through the

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century ware like, explain Lipovetsky and Serroy (2011, p. 99), must necessarily say *Coca, Levi's, Vuitton, Apple, Sony, Nike, Dior, Rolex*.

image on the screen that the world exists and that men know it as it is seen, with vision, hierarchy, shape, strength that the image gives concerning the world.” (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, pp. 75-76).

Television transforms the world. With television, there is only what is seen on the screen and by the masses, considering that the television is the medium of the masses. As Lipovetsky and Serroy (2011, p. 76) conclude, it is the triumph of the society of the image and its powers. Television is a medium that opens to the world while transforming it.

#### 12.8.4. Global screen

With the passage of time and transformations in societies, technologies have developed and allowed the emergence of more effective, mobile (portable), digital, and global communication devices. This is the case of the screen, a technique for displaying images through various media, such as television, mobile phone, photograph and video cameras, or computer. In *World-Culture: Responding to a Disoriented Society*, Lipovetsky and Serroy (2011, p. 76) admit that, with the proliferation of screens from the 1980s-90s, the world has become hyper-world. Screens replace themselves as they improve: from cinema to television and then to the computer, the screen becomes individual, portable, digital, and ubiquitous. It is the result of the digital revolution fueled by the Internet. They are multiform screens, which make a world of screens and transform the *homo sapiens* into *homo ecranis* (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 77). It is the transition from the era of the mass media of unilateral and centralized communication (vertical model of media culture) to the era of the self-media of interactive and decentralized communication (horizontal model of media culture), based on the shared use of the network, i.e. a new culture “from all to all”.

In *The Global Screen*, Lipovetsky and Serroy recognize that:

“In less than half a century, we pass from the screen of the spectacle to the screen of communication, from the unique screen to the omnipresent screen. The screen of the cinema was for a long time the only and irreplaceable screen; today it has been diluted in a galaxy of infinite dimensions: it is the era of the global screen. Screen everywhere and anytime, in shops and airports, restaurants and bars, in the subway, cars and planes; screens of all sizes, flat screens, full screens, portable mini-screens, screens for the whole world and everyone, screens to do everything and see everything. Video screen, miniature screen, graphic screen, nomadic screen, touchscreen: the new century is the century of the omnipresent and multiform, planetary, and the multimedia screen.” (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2009, p. 10).

The global screen has several implications, namely that of referring to a new planetary domain of the screen, which Lipovetzky and Serroy (2009, p. 22) call the generalized screen-state. This state is due to the new information and communication technologies that produce and cultivate images in excess. In the thought of Lipovetsky and Serroy (2009, p. 73), we move from an era of emptiness to an era of saturation, of excess, of the superlative of everything. This new era is similar to the hyper-modern society, which is distinguished by a proliferation of hyperbolic phenomena characterized by being portable and digital, urban and artistic, biotechnological, and consumerist.

“The explosion of screens is such that, in ten years—the age of the Internet—we have witnessed an authentic Copernican revolution that has even changed the way of being in the world. In the 1960s, while television was expanding its borders, it was thought that the screen would become a screen, it would be a barrier between the individual and himself—dividing wall, filter of illusion, deception, propaganda, smoke screen, and that idea suddenly raises more and more objections. Can we speak today of subjective alienation, when the screen is created as a general interface that communicates with the world, providing us endless information, giving us the opportunity to express ourselves and dialogue, play and work, buy and sell, increase the interactivity of images, sounds and texts? The network of screens transformed our way of living, our relationship with information, with space-time, with travel and consumption: it has become an instrument of communication and information, the almost inevitable intermediary in our relations with the world and with others. To live is more and more to be glued to the screen and connected to the network.” (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2009, pp. 270-271).

Screens make societies more prone to visual practices and ways of life more mirrored in images. The screens transform human relationships and, because they are easy and simple mechanisms for disseminating information, they are adopted as a privileged technical device of communication. Better than a traditional telephone call between two distant people who have not seen each other for a long time, it is a video call with the image of the interlocutors.

What is the relationship between screens and individualism that many sociologists criticize in contemporary societies? The screens reproduce images, they show ostensibly and are more “eloquent”, objective, and understandable, in an immediate and unequivocal way, than words. When the information shared is predominantly personal and through screens, a cult of the image of the Self is promoted, practices of care regarding the personal image and, on social networks, practices of the cult of the image itself. The

Self becomes a star, a person made known by the media (a “mediated Self”) celebrated and contemplated in the image.

“The era of celebrity for everyone announced by Warhol has arrived. With its share of emptiness: being known for nothing, except for being known, as it was discovered in France with the first participants of the *Loft*, who became known without any talent, except to become known.” (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 85).

Like the *Loft Story*,<sup>202</sup> the *Big Brother* (with editions in many countries), the popular talk shows since the 1980s (like the one where Vivienne talked about her sexual intimacy to millions of viewers) or the *An American Family*,<sup>203</sup> many entertainment projects have become fashionable in this format of the mere exhibition and curious voyeurism of ordinary people’s private lives. This format popularizes participants just for appearing on television; it raises a lot of audience due to the spectacle and sensationalism associated with the images transmitted live about the intimacy of others.

In February 1968, when Andy Warhol presented his first international retrospective exhibition at the Moderna Museet gallery in Stockholm, his work already symbolized an emerging mass society. Warhol wrote in the exhibition’s presentation catalog the slogan/artistic manifesto “15 minutes of fame” that, according to the artist, everyone would be eligible to (Harris, 2010, p. 217). In today’s mass societies and cultures, this slogan/manifesto appeals for a time without immanence, without a present or a duration. Warhol’s slogan/manifesto or mere provocation about the unfolding fame desired by all comprises the media immediacy and instantaneity that today, more than in the 1960s-70s, characterizes mass media discourses. The meaning of Warhol’s expression seems to reside in his critical reading of a mass and emerging society of about 50 years ago, at which time the technological, social and global phenomenon of modernity began to intensify concerning societies and the means, techniques, modes, and processes of digital communication.

“Celebrities are individuals who are noted for their identity in the media” (Hartley, 2004, p. 26). Although the celebrity is distinguished from the “star” (like those of Hollywood), the media field underlies the idea of “instant celebrity”. Today we have celebrities in all areas and no longer just in Hollywood cinema (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 81). Anyone can live like a celebrity and be under the aegis of the spectacle, i.e. live like in the

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<sup>202</sup> French reality TV show.

<sup>203</sup> A 1973 reality TV show with the Loud family.

movies and fulfill the dream of cinema, which is the triumph of the spectacle. Hollywood represents the possibility of living the dream on the screen like a star. The star-system process is extended to all domains and beyond cinema. Thus, it is not the cinema that imitates life; it is the life that imitates cinema, because everyone wants to be a celebrity, stars, famous, renowned, and recognized.

For example, tourism is a representation of the dream of cinema. One travels to register in images and share on social networks mass experiences of trips that are configured as special. Fernando Pessoa, one of the main Portuguese poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, considers that the celebrity is plebeian (Pessoa, s.d., p. 66), i.e. a popular, ordinary, and common state. He emphasizes the popular character of the celebrity, i.e. the popularity that forms the celebrity.

In *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler predicts the emergence of the instant celebrity in developed and modernized societies:

“In a society in which instant food, instant education, and even instant cities are everyday phenomena, no product is more swiftly fabricated or more ruthlessly destroyed than the instant celebrity. Nations advancing toward super-industrialism sharply step up their output of these ‘psycho-economic’ products. Instant celebrities burst upon the consciousness of millions like an image-bomb—which is exactly what they are.” (Toffler, 1970, p. 153).

The world is constantly changing. In the last two decades, the transformations are more accelerated. In the cultural field, these transformations were and still are in quantitative and qualitative terms, with the transition of local cultures, with peculiar identities, history, and tradition, in global, popular, visual cultures. Lipovetsky calls them “cultures of the screen”, precisely because of some aspects:

- Proliferation and trivialization of screens, which are now everywhere (it is the global screen), a coexistence of screens (cinema, advertising, television, Internet, etc.).
- Banalization of images that feed the screens.
- Banalization of the private life that feeds the images (the banal becomes public), from personal and private life to impersonal and public life exposed in the media.
- Need for a (re)education to look at the global screen (a new iconophilia).
- With social networks, we move from citizen-spectator to citizen-actor, protagonists of life, and of what is seen and consumed in the media, living the dream of cinema on the screen.
- Virtuality of life, social experiences, and communicational interactions,

through the cult of the virtual image (rise of virtual relationships over personal relationships).

- “Destraditionalization” of behaviors (individualization).

Therefore, it is important to question and reflect on the effects of the proliferation and trivialization of screens on democracy and the new virtual configuration of the public space, i.e. to assess whether screens benefit or hinder democracy and participation in the public sphere, as well as elucidation and integral formation of public opinion.

In *The Global Screen*, Lipovetsky and Serroy demonstrate the importance of the screen in today’s cultures of hyper-modernity: giant, luminous, informative, interactive, tactile screens. If screens are everywhere and present themselves as forms of collective thinking, they propose or impose lifestyles and ways of thinking and seeing the world, tending to transform individuals and their independent and critical ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Screens are like cinema screens through which we see the world as if it were a movie. These screens function as an unconscious lens.

Contemporary societies are dominated by the imperative of communication. According to Juremir Machado da Silva, in the presentation of the Brazilian edition of the book *The Society of Deception* by Lipovetsky, we are in the era of media and the mediatization of life, even the private one. New communication and information technologies invade the private sphere and generate an obsession with interactivity as if it were imperative to always be connected. The spheres of the private and the public are confused. More and more people want to be protagonists and tell their private life on the network (e.g. through the blog or social networks), exploring the mechanisms of exposure about what was previously reserved for the family and the private domain. *The Society of Deception* refers:

“Since the 1960s, the situationists have joined in denouncing the isolation of human beings and the ‘communication without interlocution’ raised by the mass media. Today, American sociologist Jeremy Rifkin asks if the spirit of commercialization that plagues all ways of life does not lead to the atrophy of the instinct for sociability, the power of natural affinities, in short, of all the feelings that exist in man. There are those who claim that the hypertrophy of mercantile consumerism, the influx of media and cybernetics ruined the direct treatment between people, as well as the cultivation of sociability.” (Lipovetsky, 2007, p. 54).

In the context of sociology of mediation (or sociology of screens, by Roger Silverston), the role of screens and mediation in contemporary societies is questioned. It is proposed the need for a sociology of screens

due to the central role of television in the communication processes in today's societies. The institutionalization of screens as a support for all mediated forms of communication raises sociological themes and issues. The screen is the privileged element of communicative mediation.

The screen is thought of as a material object and technological product, but also and essentially as a social and symbolic object, as the focus not only of a series of communication practices, but also as part of the culture of housing, both private and domestic (Cardoso, 2013, p. 16). The network screen (via the Internet) is the focus of a series of interactive practices of communication, i.e. the production and consumption of shared information, in which the communication center moves from the passive media audience to the active media user.

In the thought of Lipovetsky, the Internet is a compressor cylinder: it levels (uniforms) all content and everyone in the face of social fashions and practices. An advantage of the Internet is the democratization of societies (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 182), insofar as the Internet is accessible to everyone (as a communication and dissemination channel) and everyone makes use of the Internet. Facebook, for example, works as a means accessible to citizens for governments and social-political institutions around the world to disseminate information. It is like "mandatory" participation.

Facebook is a self-portrait of its user's erotic identity, which passes from a mere spectator to an actor; increases narcissism, where personal tastes and preferences are exposed, everyday activities, etc. People allow themselves to define and redefine their concepts about themselves; it is an easy "self-definition" process that also consists of a form of self-motivation.

On social media, each user has a public portrait that is built, rebuilt, and maintained every day. There is certain greed for the notoriety on the part of ordinary citizens. Everyone talks about themselves and for everyone permanently and about all banal matters. It is like building a "social self", creating an identity from stereotyped profiles; a formation of identities eroticized by hedonism.

### 12.8.5. Paradoxical societies

In the thought of Lipovetsky, contemporary societies are based on a system of paradoxes, they are contradictory, disoriented, and marked by globalization. Social behaviors seek immediate satisfaction and ephemeral and superficial pleasures, through social practices of exacerbated and dehumanized consumption. In *The Paradoxical Happiness: Essay on Hyper-consumption Society*, Lipovetsky points out that:



“While confidence in the future weakens, fears of an ecological nature, appeals for another type of economic development are intensifying, but new religious movements, new spiritual aspirations are also emerging. All of these phenomena seem symptomatic of a crisis in the materialistic culture of happiness. Technological wonders are multiplying, the planet is in danger. The market offers more and more means of communication and distractions, but anxiety, loneliness, inner insecurity are also increasingly common. We produce and consume more and more, but that does not make us happier. Is it possible that the path followed by techno-commercial civilization is a fatal deadlock? Is it possible that the modern cult of *homo felix* is the instrument of our greatest unhappiness?” (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 287).

For Lipovetsky, today’s societies are hyper-modern, they are like a “system of paradoxes”. Contemporary societies are paradoxical societies of disenchantment, considering the following aspects:

- a) Fun-society (cheerful, with style, which is in fashion), but also a society concerned and anxious, depressed and anguished, with the consequent increase in the consumption of anxiolytics.
- b) The cult of the present is practiced (neo-Dionysian culture of the *carpe diem*, without concern for the future), but also the future is taken care of in terms of environment (the health of the planet), longevity, terrorism, reform (there are feelings of restlessness and insecurity about the future).
- c) A technological society that cultivates efficiency, where everything is done for the moment and with time savings and effort savings, but also a society where it is said that there is no time; everyone lives at an accelerated pace.
- d) Spirituality and spiritualism vs. materiality and materialism, i.e. both philosophies of life and spiritual forces and energies are valued as well as excessive consumption of material products.
- e) Care in feeding vs. obesity and excessive consumption of fast food.
- f) Democratic freedom of social actions and behaviors vs. policing (e.g. video cameras) of modern life.
- g) Tradition vs. fashion: respect for traditional values, celebrating and sacralizing everything (including mundane objects) and following, at the same time, sudden and ephemeral fashions and trends in consumption and modern lifestyle.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> According to Lipovetsky, luxury is sacred, it is the object of desire and fascination; it is in branded products, in the excesses of everything that is offered for consumption in societies, and in the sensations that consumers have for materiality.

- h) Institutionalization of cultural and religious habits and practices (of collective ways of life) vs. deinstitutionalization (individualization of habits and practices).

Hyper-modernity is approached, according to Lipovetsky, from the angle of the paradox. Contemporaneity is paradoxical, ephemeral, and generates more fashions, consumption, and human rights that signal excessive choices. Even time is lived and conceived in a paradoxical way, in accordance with the models of societies:

Past time	Present time	Future time
Traditional societies.	Post-modern or hyper-modern societies.	Modern societies.
Respect, preservation, and referencing of the past.	Concern and interest with the present.	Recourse to the values and ideals of the past and having the present as a reference to project the future.

**Table 12-7:** The three modes of time and the respective societies.

According to Lipovetsky, societies of the present time are more anguished with the weight of the past (they are nostalgic societies, full of museums) and with concerns about the future (it is time against time).

Consumption leads to the empire of pleasures, to the paradoxical happiness that characterizes the “civilization of desire”, which is satisfied with emotional consumption (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 31). New behaviors of ostentation, consumption, voracity, hedonism define hyper-modernity. For Lipovetsky, the consumer society underlies the *carpe diem* hedonistic and narcissistic society of Dionysus’s to the detriment of Apollo. As Lipovetsky states in *The Paradoxical Happiness: Essay on Hyperconsumption Society*:

“At the end of the 1960s, the figure of Dionysus broke into the intellectual scene to conceptualize the cultural landscape of democracies reconfigured by the expansion of hedonistic, dissident, and utopian values. The idea that new aspirations and ways of life are emerging, preparing a future in rupture with the technocratic and authoritarian society, is widespread. In place of

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In Lipovetsky’s perspective, luxury creates and defines a lifestyle and an illusory feeling of happiness.

discipline, family, and work, a new culture celebrates the pleasures of consumption and life in the present.” (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 177).

This opposition between Dionysus and Apollo was first explored by Nietzsche in an aesthetic sense. Nietzsche addresses the question of the importance of the work of art by relating it to its Hellenic origin and its pessimistic scope. The result is the consideration of the Greek tragedy<sup>205</sup> as an agglutinating synthesis of “*l’art pour l’art*”.<sup>206</sup>

Greek civilization is summed up in the coexistence of two opposing forces that Nietzsche classifies as “Apollonian” and “Dionysian”. The tragedy is the synthesis of Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies. The “Apollonian” (dream) and “Dionysian” (drunkenness) are the two artistic trends that, according to Nietzsche, originated the art.

In the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche (1998, p. 48) opposes Apollo and Dionysus:

Apollo	Dionysus
Order, measure, proportion, light, imagination, wisdom.	Chaos, shadow, excess, drunkenness, joy, vitality.
Apollo is the god of dreams and appearance.	Dionysus is the god of affirmation and creative force, the irrational and cosmic integration.
Artistic principle: dream (e.g. plastic arts). The artist as an interpreter.	Artistic principle: drunkenness = overcoming the individual (e.g. music). The artist as creator.

<sup>205</sup> For Nietzsche, the Greek people had the need to feel suffering and to be afflicted by the tragedy and, only in this way, they were able to build art and aesthetic splendor. Pessimism is not a sign of decline; on the contrary, it is a sign of elevation by art. Nietzsche recognizes a fruitful relationship between the Greeks and pain, from which their sensitivity develops, and the work of art is born. According to Nietzsche, the Greek people were characterized by a simultaneous sensitivity to suffering and art. The origin of art is a tragedy, the human suffering. Nietzsche understands Classical Greek Antiquity as the affirmation and acceptance of life as a tension of opposing forces.

<sup>206</sup> The sentence “*l’art pour l’art*”, in the original French, is translated in English as “art for art’s sake”. This expression summarizes the ancient idea that art has its own value and should be judged apart from any themes and values which it might touch on (e.g. morality, religion, history, or politics). It means that art must be judged only for its aesthetic value.

Psychological principle: unconscious human force and creator of forms and a world of appearances. Principle of individuation.	Psychological principle: state of ecstasy that destroys barriers that make us leave from ourselves. Principle of “de-individualization”, the rupture of the limits of the Self.
Cult of a vigorous and balanced personality.	An intense experience by following natural impulses. Denial of imperative morals (of asceticism and duty).

**Table 12-8:** Differences between Apollo and Dionysus and what each represents.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche develops the paradoxical issue concerning the people who valued reason, order, and the control of passions so much and who had the need to create art, the tragedy, where the irrational and the mysterious are expressed (Nietzsche, 1998, pp. 54-56). Nietzsche uses Greek tragedy to understand how suffering has made the Greek people so beautiful. The aesthetic dimension acquires an ontological perspective. There is a transition from the aesthetic to the metaphysical. It is about the categories of the beautiful that Nietzsche presents his metaphysical considerations.

Nietzsche understands art as metaphysics, a way of revealing what it is. Only art reveals the true nature of reality. *The Birth of Tragedy* is an “artiste’s metaphysics”: “metaphysics of art, as I repeat my earlier sentence that only as an aesthetic phenomenon do existence and the world appear justified” (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 113). Nietzsche refers to *The Birth of Tragedy* as containing this “artiste’s metaphysics”, a secularized and descendant metaphysics, an interpretation of the universal whole that follows the guiding thread of art. The work of art is qualified as a repetition or reproduction of the world and reflects this primordial suffering. The world only has metaphysical existence, i.e. it only exists as an aesthetic phenomenon. The man who fulfills his condition as a man is the artist; the man as an artist is one who frees himself from the individual will and is a spokesman of reality. Thus, the aim of art is not to educate or improve us, but to reveal the being. It is an art as an ontology, not as pedagogy.

Despite the emphasis given by Nietzsche to the radical confrontation between Dionysus and Apollo and the positive side of aesthetic production in allowing to reveal the being, Lipovetsky emphasizes only one side of this opposition: Dionysus. The objective is to criticize societies for tending towards hedonism. While Apollo represents order, logic, harmony, and reason, Dionysus represents chaos, madness, confusion, and drunkenness. Nietzsche argues that we need the two Greek gods. Lipovetsky criticizes societies for valuing, enjoying, and living only Dionysus.

## 12.9. Vattimo: the media, the transparent society, and the end of modernity

In *The Transparent Society*,<sup>207</sup> Gianni Vattimo starts by making a terminological state point to understand what is a transparent society:

“There is a lot of talk about post-modernity today; or rather, there is so much talk about it that it has become almost mandatory to maintain distances from this concept, consider it a fad, declare it once again an ‘outdated’ concept. Well, I consider it, on the contrary, that the term post-modern has a meaning; and that this meaning is linked to the fact that the society in which we live is a society of generalized communication, the society of the mass media. First of all: we speak of the post-modern because we consider that, in some of its essential aspects, modernity is over. The meaning in which it can be said that modernity has ended is linked to what is meant by modernity. Among the many definitions, I believe that there is one on which one can agree: modernity is the time when the fact that it is modern becomes a decisive value.” (Vattimo, 2011, p. 7).

Vattimo clarifies the use of “transparent society” to characterize contemporary societies where intensified communication predominates. In the thought of Vattimo, we are witnessing the development of mass media, which represents the advent of a new society: the communication society. This new society (of intensified and generalized communication) has implications for the meaning of the term “transparent” that characterizes it. Contrary to what one might think if we followed common sense and the generalized sense of the word “transparent”, Vattimo considers that in a transparent society there is a marked and accentuated development of the media, but this circumstance does not make society more transparent and self-conscious; on the contrary:

“What I intend to affirm is: a) that in the birth of a post-modern society a decisive role is played by the mass media; b) that they characterize this society not as a more ‘transparent’, more self-conscious, more ‘enlightened’ society, but as a more complex, even chaotic society; and finally, c) that it is precisely in this relative ‘chaos’ that our hopes for emancipation reside.” (Vattimo, 2011, p. 11).

Vattimo considers that the end of modernity is the result of the birth and development of the mass media.

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<sup>207</sup> Originally published in Italian as *La Società Transparente* (1989).

“What has happened effectively, however, despite all the efforts of the monopolies and great capitalist centrals, is that radio, television, newspapers have become elements of a great explosion and multiplication of *Weltanschauungen*, of worldviews. In the United States of the last decades, minorities of all kinds have become the word, cultures and subcultures of all kinds have appeared in the public opinion. It can certainly be objected that this position did not correspond to true political emancipation—the economic power is still in the hands of the big capital. It will be—I do not want to broaden the discussion here in this field too much; however, the fact is that the logic of the information market itself demands a continuous expansion of this market, and consequently requires that ‘everything’, in any way, becomes an object of communication. This dizzying multiplication of communication, this ‘taking the word’ by an increasing number of subcultures, is the most evident effect of the mass media, and it is also the fact that—related to the end, or at least to the radical transformation of European imperialism—determines the transition from our society to post-modernity. Not only concerning other cultural universes (the ‘third world’, for example), but also to the interior itself, the West is experiencing an explosive situation, a pluralization that seems irresistible, and that makes it impossible to conceive the world and history according to unitary points of view.” (Vattimo, 2011, pp. 12-13).

For this reason, the society of the mass media is the opposite of a more enlightened society. According to Vattimo, in *Ethics of Interpretation*, one of the most widely accepted characterizations about post-modernity is probably the one that presents it as the end of history (Vattimo, 1991, p. 15). It is a characterization with an apocalyptic nature, due to the loss or absence of mega-narratives that legitimized and explained the historical progress of humanity in emancipation (a thesis closer to the ideals defended by the left-wing ideology. In *The Transparent Society*, Vattimo clarifies his thesis:

“[...] In the media society, instead of an ideal of emancipation modeled by completely defined self-awareness [...] opens the way to an ideal of emancipation that has oscillation and plurality as its basis, and finally the wear and tear of the ‘reality principle’ itself.” (Vattimo, 2011, p. 15).

This new intensified and generalized communication society raises the viable hypothesis, according to which:

“[...] the intensification of communicative phenomena, the increase in the circulation of information until the simultaneous live television reporting (and McLuhan’s ‘global village’) is not just one aspect among others of modernization, but is in some way the center and the very meaning of that process. This hypothesis obviously refers to McLuhan’s theses, according to which a society is defined and characterized by the technologies at its

disposal, not in a generic sense, but the specific sense of communication technologies; this is why talking about a ‘Gutenberg Galaxy’ or a technotronic world doesn’t amount to underlining just one aspect, albeit essential, of modern and contemporary society, but rather indicates the essential character of these two types of society.” (Vattimo, 2011, pp. 24-25).

Vattimo recognizes that the society of unlimited communication is one in which the community of logical socialism takes place, it is a transparent society; one that, with the elimination of obstacles and opacities, also radically reduces the reasons for conflict (Vattimo, 2011, p. 32). Will intensified and widespread communication be the fulfillment and completion of the world? Is this ideal of self-transparency the direction in which the relationship between the communication society and the social sciences points?

The images of the world that are provided to us by the media constitute the very objectivity of the world. According to Vattimo:

“Instead of moving towards self-transparency, the society of the human sciences and widespread communication has moved on to what, at least in general, can be called the ‘world fable’. The images of the world that are provided to us by the media and the human sciences, although on different planes, constitute the objectivity of the world itself, and not just different interpretations of a ‘reality’ in some way ‘given’. ‘They didn’t just make us interpretations’, according to the statement by Nietzsche, who also wrote that ‘the real world has finally become a fable’.” (Vattimo, 2011, p. 38).

On the end of the great ideologies that mark the current era of the post-modern and secular emptiness, Robert Musil, in *The Man Without Qualities*, presents a pertinent reflection based on the role of intellectuals in the world:

“Philosophers are despots who have no armies to command, so they subject the world to their tyranny by locking it up in a system of thought. This apparently also accounts for the presence of great philosophers in times of great tyrants, while epochs of progressive civilization and democracy fail to bring forth a convincing philosophy, at least to judge by the disappointment one hears so widely expressed on the subject. Hence today we have a terrifying amount of philosophizing in brief bursts, so that shops are the only places where one can still get something without *Weltanschauung*, while philosophy in large chunks is viewed with decided mistrust. It is simply regarded as impossible, and even Ulrich was by no means innocent of this prejudice; indeed, in the light of his scientific background, he took a somewhat ironic view of philosophy. This put him in a position where he was always being provoked to think about what he was observing, and yet

at the same time was burdened with a certain shyness about thinking too hard.” (Musil, 1996, p. 272-273).

According to Musil, “today we have a terrifying amount of philosophizing in brief bursts” in such a way that shops are the only places where we can still get something without a worldview (“Weltanschauung”). As long as this happens, mistrust reigns in the great philosophy or in the great narratives about the world or ideological systems.

In the book *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, Vattimo links Nietzsche and Heidegger with an understanding of the end of the modern era and post-modernity. The relationship between Nietzsche, Heidegger and the post-modern is, precisely, the “discovery” and the emphasis of the prefix “post”, which means the attitude towards the heritage of European thought that both authors put into a discussion and that refused to its critical “overcoming”.

“The first decisive step in making the connection between Nietzsche, Heidegger, and ‘postmodernism’ consists in discovering why the latter term employs the prefix ‘post-’—for ‘post-’ signifies precisely that attitude which, in different but deeply related terms (at least according to my own interpretation), Nietzsche and Heidegger have tried to establish in regard to the heritage of European thought. Both philosophers call this heritage into question in a radical manner, but at the same time refuse to propose a means for a critical ‘overcoming’ of it. For both philosophers, the reason for this refusal is that any call for an ‘overcoming’ would involve remaining captive to the logic of development inscribed in the tradition of European thought. From the point of view of Nietzsche and Heidegger, which we may consider to be a mutually held one in spite of the considerable differences between the two philosophers, modernity is in fact dominated by the idea that the history of thought is a progressive ‘enlightenment’ which develops through an ever more complete appropriation and reappropriation of its own ‘foundations. These are often also understood to be ‘origins’, so that the theoretical and practical revolutions of Western history are presented and legitimated for the most part as ‘recoveries’, rebirths, or returns. [...] The ‘post-’ in the term ‘post-modern’ indicates in fact a taking leave of modernity. In its search to free itself from the logic of development inherent in modernity—namely the idea of a critical ‘overcoming’ directed toward a new foundation—post-modernity seeks exactly what Nietzsche and Heidegger seek in their own peculiar ‘critical’ relationship with Western thought.” (Vattimo, 1988, pp. 1-2).

The term “overcoming” means the conception of a course of thought as a progressive development. Post-modernity is deduced as overcoming of modernity. If any systematic knowledge of human action or trends in social



development is possible, Giddens suggests in *The Consequences of Modernity* that we look at Nietzsche and Heidegger's nihilism:

"In spite of the differences between the two philosophers, there is a view upon which they converge. Both link with modernity the idea that 'history' can be identified as a progressive appropriation of rational foundations of knowledge. According to them, this is expressed in the notion of 'overcoming': the formation of new understandings serves to identify what is of value, and what is not, in the cumulative stock of knowledge." (Giddens, 1996, p. 47).

Vattimo underlines that "things change" and the post-modern may be seen "not only as something new in relation to the modern", but also as a "dissolution of the category of the new", i.e. "as an experience of 'the end of history' rather than as the appearance of a different stage of history itself" (Vattimo, 1988, p. 4-5). Therefore, an experience of "the end of history" seems to be widespread and linked to the idea of post-modernity.

"From this point of view, contemporary history is not only the history of those years which are, chronologically speaking, closest to ourselves. It is, more rigorously speaking, the history of that era in which, thanks to the use of new means of communication (especially television), everything tends to flatten out at the level of contemporaneity and simultaneity, thus producing a de-historicization of experience." (Vattimo, 1988, p. 11).

The mass media also contribute to the affirmation of a post-modern era, in which everything is given exaggeratedly as a narrative or report intertwined with the tradition of the messages that language brings us from the past and other cultures, in a world of generalized exchanges, in a society increasingly transformed into a sensitive communication organism.

"In the world of generalized exchange-value all is given—as it always was, but now in a more evident and exaggerated fashion—as narration or *récit*. Essentially, this narration is articulated by the mass media, which are inextricably intertwined with the tradition of messages that language brings to us from the past and from other cultures: the mass media thus represent not just an ideological perversion, but rather a vertiginous form of this same tradition." (Vattimo, 1988, pp. 27-28).

Consequently, the media are not just ideological perversion, but rather a vertiginous form of this same tradition. The strength of the mass media is above all an aesthetic and rhetorical kind of strength (Vattimo, 1988, p. 97). It is aesthetic because it aims at seduction and its easier acceptance due to

the appearance pleasing to the senses;<sup>208</sup> it is rhetorical because it aims at persuasion and the same end of acceptance, but on the side of discursive strategy (form).<sup>209</sup> This strength of the mass media contributes, according to Vattimo, to the massification and secularization of societies, in an indifferent way in face of truth and values, on the one hand, for the benefit of spectacle and sensationalism, on the other hand.

Vattimo highlights an aspect that characterizes the epochal paradigm change or separates the modern from the post-modern: the crisis of humanism. If in the contemporary and atheistic world “God died, but man is not doing very well”, there is a marked and profound difference that goes through a certain denial of God or the register of his “death” with inevitable relationships to the irrevocable destruction of what is certain essentialism, that is, of what is human.

This idea about the death of God expressed by Vattimo and the thesis about the paradigm change (i.e. the entry into a time of crisis of humanism) underlie Nietzsche’s announcement of the death of God. Indeed, Nietzsche understands early the paradigm change, the transition from modernity to a more secular phase, but he also warns of the existential crisis related to the erasure or death of God. What did Nietzsche mean by “God is dead”?

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<sup>208</sup> About the aesthetics of discourse, note the term *pharmakon* used by Plato, which establishes three meanings of the discourses: medicine, poison, and cosmetics. The speech serves as: a) medicine or remedy for knowledge; b) poison when, through the seduction of words, it fascinates us and makes us accept what is said without asking the truth; c) cosmetics, makeup, charm, mask to charm and seduce, concealing or hiding the truth under words (Plato, 1997b, 230d, 237a, 257e, 274e). The term *pharmakon* is polysemic, but it indicates a substance that can both cures and kills, because “there is no such thing as a harmless remedy”, according to Derrida (1981, p. 99), considering that “the *pharmakon* can never be simply beneficial”. In the *Euthydemus*, Plato (1997c, 299b) refers to the hellebore, “a plant with both poisonous and medicinal properties, a proverbial treatment for mental disorders”, according to the notes of John M. Cooper for the English edition of the Hackett Publishing Company.

<sup>209</sup> Regarding rhetoric, Roland Barthes (1987, p. 20) considers it a metalanguage, whose object-language is the discourse (the discourse on the discourse). Rhetoric is a technique, an art (the art of persuasion, set of rules, recipes that, if put into practice, allow to convince the audience of the discourse, even when what is necessary to be persuaded is false). That is why the contemporary world is full of ancient rhetoric, according to Barthes (1987, p. 19) in *The Semiotic Challenge*, and there is a common point to which all connotative systems refer: ideology. All the meanings of the connotations lead to ideology. Ideology is the form of connotation meanings. Therefore, rhetoric is the shape of connotations.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes:

“*The madman*—Haven’t you heard of that madman who in the Bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, ‘I’m looking for God! I’m looking for God!’ Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated?—Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. ‘Where is God?’ he cried; ‘I’ll tell you! *We have killed him*—you and I! We are all his murderers.” (Nietzsche, 2007c, pp. 119-120).

According to this excerpt by Nietzsche, God and religion have lost space and importance in contemporary Western culture. In contrast, secularization and laicization have taken on a more prominent role. Scientific explanations for the occurrence of phenomena in the world are more easily accepted than mystical, metaphysical, or religious explanations. Likewise, objective knowledge reveals a greater capacity to understand the truth and reflect critically on social values and cultural standards than the framework of knowledge proposed by religion.

As recognized in *World-Culture: Responding to a Disoriented Society*, Nietzsche understands originally the anguish of the human being caused by the death of God, of which he is guilty (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2011, p. 31). In the thought of Vattimo, “although this sort of crude apologetics ought to be rejected out of hand, it is undeniable that a connection exists between the crisis of humanism and the death of God” (Vattimo, 1988, p. 31). The “death” of God announced by Nietzsche breaks with the humanism that accepts the human being as the holder of essentialism and as the center of reality, by virtue of a reference to a higher entity or reason that guarantees this role. This is the fundamental thesis of Jean-Paul Sartre in *L’Existentialisme est un Humanisme*,<sup>210</sup> there is no human nature or essence; there is no God to conceive it (Sartre, 2009, p. 29). There is no natural human essence, no innate trait in the human being. Such an essence would reveal a generality, a divine logical structure. Humanism is made with the free and random existence of everyone in the world. Therefore, existentialism (and not essentialism) is what is a humanism.

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<sup>210</sup> Original title and consulted edition translated into English as *Existentialism is a Humanism*.

## 12.10. Zygmunt Bauman: the liquid modernity

In the book *Liquid Modernity*, Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017) explores the concept of “liquidity” to characterize everything that exists and happens in today’s societies. Bauman takes liquidity as a metaphor for modernity, since the most prominent and obvious characteristics of a liquid state are transposed to characterize modern societies, which he calls “liquid societies”. Liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape neither fix space nor bind time; liquids are always ready for change, because the liquids are permanently moldable to the circumstances. The liquid is fickle, fluid, and without substance. Bauman’s *Liquid Modernity* states:

“What all these features of fluids amount to, in simple language, is that liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape. Fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time. While solids have clear spatial dimensions but neutralize the impact, and thus downgrade the significance, of time (effectively resist its flow or render it irrelevant), fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it; and so for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy: that space, after all, they fill but ‘for a moment’. [...] Fluids travel easily. They ‘flow’, ‘spill’, ‘run out’, ‘splash’, ‘pour over’, ‘leak’, ‘flood’, ‘spray’, ‘drip’, ‘seep’, ‘ooze’; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped—they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still. [...] These are reasons to consider ‘fluidity’ or ‘liquidity’ as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity.” (Bauman, 2006, p. 2).

As Bauman asks: “Was not modernity a process of ‘liquefaction’ from the start? Was not ‘melting the solids’ its major pastime and prime accomplishment all along? In other words, has modernity not been ‘fluid’ since its inception?

“It is the patterns of dependency and interaction whose turn to be liquefied has now come. They are now malleable to an extent unexperienced by, and unimaginable for, past generations; but like all fluids they do not keep their shape for long. Shaping them is easier than keeping them in shape. Solids are cast once and for all. Keeping fluids in shape requires a lot of attention, constant vigilance and perpetual effort—and even then the success of the effort is anything but a foregone conclusion.” (Bauman, 2006, p. 8).

The society of fluid modernity, as Bauman calls it, implies a mutual relationship between the new media and fluid relations. In Bauman’s view, it is not the new media that are responsible for social fragmentation, because the implications are mutual, they work in both directions: social media are

one of the products of social fragmentation and *vice versa*, state Lyon in *Liquid Surveillance*. “Social media depend for their existence on monitoring users and selling the data to others” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 12). In the Introduction of *Liquid Surveillance*, Lyon explains that there is a mutual relation between new media and fluid relationships and “while some blame new media for social fragmentation, Bauman sees things working both ways”, suggesting that social media are a product of social fragmentation (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 12).

In a world of electronically mediated social relations, in which we always expect more from technology than from ourselves and our social relationships, anonymity is already being auto-eroded on social networks and other social media.

“The conversations that follow consider a range of tensions and paradoxes in contemporary surveillance, using the ‘liquid’ metaphor described above as a probe. We begin the journey, as it were, right where we are, in the world of electronically mediated relationships. Bauman published a typically ironic piece in the summer of 2011, ‘On never being alone again’, that mused on surveillance drones and social media, and this topic will get us right into the subject matter. The drones can now be as tiny as hummingbirds but the nectar they seek is increasingly high resolution images of those in their path. But why would we care, anyway? After all, anonymity is already being auto-eroded on Facebook and on other social media. The private is public, to be celebrated and consumed by countless ‘friends’ as well as casual ‘users’.” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, pp. 18-19).

Repeating this last blunt part of Bauman and Lyon’s excerpt, “the private is public, to be celebrated and consumed by countless ‘friends’ as well as casual ‘users’”. It is in this sense that Bauman considers mobile and electronic communication devices as the new “portable electronic confessionals”. In contemporary times and liquid societies, people prefer to use these instruments to expose their individuality and privacy. It is a kind of “fetishism of subjectivity”, alluding to Marx’s fetishism of merchandise.

“The teenagers equipped with portable electronic confessionals are but apprentices training and trained in the art of living in a confessional society—a society notorious for effacing the boundary that once separated the private from the public, for making public exposure of the private a public virtue and obligation, and for wiping out from public communication anything that resists being reduced to private confidences, together with those who refuse to confide them.” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 31).

People's lives are currently divided between two universes, online and offline. These two universes are crossed without people noticing the change in the semantic field at each boundary crossing. Bauman states:

“Our life (and to a growing degree as we move from older to younger generations) is split between two universes, ‘online’ and ‘offline’, and irreparably bicultured. With our lives spanning two universes, each with substantive content and procedural rules of its own, we tend to deploy the same linguistic material when we move to and from, without noticing the change of its semantic field at each crossing of the boundary.” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 37).

According to Bauman, “a dedicated ‘active user’ of Facebook boasted recently that he managed to make 500 new friends in a day—that is, more than I’ve managed in all my 86 years of a long life” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 39). Human relations are electronically mediated by technological devices in the digital networks’ connections. As these devices are used in the network and it is global, the devices allow human and social relations equally and irreversibly global. But globalization both divides and unites, as Bauman (1998, p. 2) mentions in *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. For example, the differences between the community and the social network. Social networks are the result of the phenomenon of globalization and have changed the traditional ways in which people relate to each other in the community.

Do social networks make people feel closer or further away from each other? What is the effect of online on people and social relationships? According to Bauman, in *Liquid Surveillance*:

“Belonging to a community is a much more secure and reliable condition than having a network—though admittedly with more constraints and obligations. Community watches you closely and leaves you little room for maneuver (it may ban you and exile you, but it won’t allow you to opt out of your own will). But a network may care little, or not at all, about your obedience to its norms (if a network has norms to obey, that is, which all too often it doesn’t) and so it gives you much more rope, and above all will not penalize you for quitting. You can count on a community to be a ‘friend in need, and so a friend indeed’. But networks are there mostly to share the fun, and their readiness to come to your rescue in the event of trouble unrelated to that shared ‘focus of interest’ is hardly ever put to the test, and if it were it would pass it even less frequently. All in all, the choice is between security and freedom: you need both, but you cannot have one without sacrificing a part at least of the other; and the more you have of one, the less you’ll have of the other. For security, the old-style communities beat networks hands down. For freedom, it is the other way round (after all, it takes only one press

of the ‘delete’ key or a decision to stop answering messages to get free of its interference).” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, pp. 38-39).

In this perspective of Bauman, a paradox is understood, since neither security nor freedom are perfect: security is the community’s prerogative and turns us into slaves; freedom is a characteristic of the network and creates chaos. Modern societies, guided by electronically mediated social relations, are fragmented in a limbo between the two semantic universes: online and offline.

In the community, especially those of a traditional nature, a friend is for life and is authentic; on the social network, what matters most is what is fun and what fun is in a moment. In the community, people live and relate offline and create and maintain human bonds; on the social network, people must be online, connected to the network, making it as easy to connect as to disconnect. If social relationships in the network are disposable, people are also disposable, because there is an ease to eliminate, dislike, or ignore the other. This is the liquid modernity.

### 12.11. Byung-Chul Han: the digital mediatization

In the book *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, Byung-Chul Han questions the benefits and harms of digital mediatization in which we find ourselves today. This mediatization (a kind of pseudo-mediatization or absence of mediation) dominates our existential daily life and guides our social relations. Information sharing between digital users, whether digital natives or digital immigrants,<sup>211</sup> takes place through technological devices, resulting in changes in social behavior and relationships. The public space is virtual; now, the public space is social networks. The excessive dependence we have on screens also contributes to this situation (namely mobile phones, computers, and smart digital television sets).

Han’s initial thesis is that the digital revolution, the Internet, and social networks are transforming contemporary society due to the loss of respect in social relationships. How does digital mediatization affects respect in contemporary societies? According to Han’s *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*:

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<sup>211</sup> “Digital immigrant” (as opposed to “digital native”), according to the designation used by David Lyon in *Liquid Surveillance*, as someone “who has had to learn his way in a new culture, not a digital native, for whom Facebook is a taken-for-granted and indispensable way of connecting with others” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 42).

“Respect presupposes a distanced look—the *pathos of distance*. Today, it is yielding to the obtrusive staring of spectacle. The Latin verb *spectare*, from which *spectacle* derives, is voyeuristic gazing that lacks deferential consideration—that is, respect (*respectare*). Distance is what makes *respectare* different from *spectare*. A society without respect, without the pathos of distance, paves the way for the society of scandal. Respect forms the foundation for the public, or civil, sphere. When the former weakens, the latter collapses. The decline of civil society and a mounting lack of respect are mutually conditioning. Among other things, civil society requires respectfully looking away from what is private. Taking distance is what constitutes the public sphere. Today, however, a complete lack of distance and deference prevails: intimate matters are put on display, and the private is made public. Let’s call it a matter of stance: Without distance, it is impossible to be in good standing. Understanding also requires a distanced perspective. Across the board, digital communication is abolishing distance and distances. The corollary of dwindling spatial distance is the erosion of mental distance. Digital mediality works to the detriment of respect.” (Han, 2017, pp. 1-2).

If “respect” means “to look back”,<sup>212</sup> today we no longer look back, because the respectful contact of avoiding one’s own curious look has been lost. The universe of network users has free access to digital devices and mediatization allows any user to end anonymity and distance. On the other hand, human relations are being modified due to new forms of socialization; intimacy is discovered and susceptible to being appropriated by a false idea of closeness and conviviality. In this way, respect is compromised in the face of unpredictable reactions. For this reason, Han refers to “shitstorms” (mediatic storms of indignation), a set of hurtful behaviors and actions such as reflux associated with their destructive social effects: “Shitstorms occur for many reasons. They arise in a culture where respect is lacking, and indiscretion prevails. The “shitstorm” represents an authentic phenomenon of digital communication.” (Han, 2017, p. 3).

According to Han, the digital medium deprives communication of its bodily and tactile character and is moving us further away from the other. In addition, the digital medium makes an iconic inversion: it makes images look more vivid, beautiful, and better than reality itself, which is even perceived as deficient and neither interesting nor stimulating.

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<sup>212</sup> The term “respect” is derived from the Latin *respectus*, “action to look back”, consideration, attention, “to take into account”, that is, to look back to see the path that one is following, which way one is going, the actions, behavior, and attitudes that one had, the trail that is left and that affects or implies others.



“Today, images [*Bilder*] are not just likenesses [*Abbilder*] but also models [*Vorbilder*]. We flee into images in order to be better, more beautiful, and more alive. Clearly, we are enlisting not only technology but images, too, in order to drive evolution forward. Yet could it be that evolution is fundamentally based on illusion [*Ein-Bild-ung*]—that the imaginary plays a constitutive role in evolution? The digital medium is bringing about an iconic reversal that is making images seem more alive, more beautiful, and better than reality itself. [...] The digital medium creates more distance to the real than analog media. That is, less analogy holds between the digital and the real. We are now producing images in enormous quantity by means of digital media.” (Han, 2017, pp. 27-29).

As already mentioned, images predominate in contemporary societies, due to their mass production and consumption by anyone through a simple technological pocket device such as a mobile phone. Thus, the images are ubiquitous and have made what they display familiar to us, even when they are impressive images of disgust or shock.

“Today, images no longer trigger shock. Even repulsive images are supposed to entertain (for instance, *Fear Factor* or *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*). Even disgusting images have been made consumable, and the totalization of consumption is eliminating every form of immunological recoil.” (Han, 2017, p. 59).

The *Dschungelcamp*<sup>213</sup> TV program is a good example of the use and abuse of images for the entertainment of the masses, through the popular means of communication, television. Now, with digital, content and programs are more diverse, creative, and captivating, but also inauthentic.

“The efficiency and convenience of digital communication are leading us to avoid direct contact with real people. Increasingly, we avoid contact with the real, in general. Digital media are making our real counterparts fade more and more. Accordingly, digital communication is becoming more and more bodiless and faceless. Digitality radically restructures the Lacanian triad of real, imaginary, and symbolic. It dismantles the real and *totalizes the imaginary*. As a digital reflector, the smartphone serves to renew the mirror stage after infancy. It opens up a narcissistic space—a sphere of the imaginary—in which one encloses oneself. The other does not speak via the smartphone.” (Han, 2017, p. 22).

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<sup>213</sup> German television program RTL, started to be broadcast in 2004, in which people made known by the media and celebrities are placed in jungle conditions. This is the German version of *Fear Factor* or *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here*.

For Han (2017, p. 10), “the new mass is the *digital swarm*”. The new mass is in the digital. The new mass becomes a digital and globalized mass. We are currently forming a new mass, a new way of living in society: a digital swarm. Contradictorily, the digital swarm:

- It is formed by isolated individuals.
- It has no soul or reflection.
- It does not have a collective feeling (it does not have authenticity or social respect and responsibility).
- It does not work for common actions nor does it follow a direction (it has no direction).
- It is shaped by digital hyper-communication (excess of digital without meaning or coherence over the social).

An example of a digital swarm is the unconscious or thoughtless, isolated, individual, and self-centered participation of people in social networks, in a way shaped by social following, mimicry, and conformism.

The human being is undergoing profound changes in lifestyles and in social behaviors and actions, due to the development of new digital technologies that affect, in general, all societies. Thus, the human being becomes conditioned, unable to act alone as he did in the recent past, tending to simply type in the digital world. In this way, the human being is exploited by the use he makes of new technologies.

“Even though we now are free from the machines that enslaved and exploited people during the industrial age, digital apparatuses are installing new constraints, new slavery. Because of their mobility, they make possible exploitation that proves even more efficient by transforming every space into a workplace—and all time into working hours. The freedom of movement is switching over into a fatal compulsion to work everywhere. During the machine age, working time could be held in check and separated from periods of not working, if only because the machines could not move or be moved. One had to go to work on one’s own; this space was distinct from where work did not occur. Today, however, this distinction no longer holds in many professions. Digital devices have mobilized work itself. The workplace is turning into a portable labor camp from which there is no escape.” (Han, 2017, p. 34).

Digital devices bring with them new coercions, constraints, new slavery, new slavery. The digital revolution brings immediacy, superficiality, unrealism, simultaneity, virtual distance (a kind of “telepresence”), but interactive (remote and networked action or “tele-action”) (Ribeiro, 2005, p. 617). The relationships and dimensions of the human are transformed.

New conceptions and representations of the relationships arise, both with space and time.

The current digital paradigm by which societies are governed encompasses innately control and excessive use. “Big Brother has ceded the throne to Big Data” (Han, 2017, p. 71). Without respect, the “I” overlaps the “We”, the “private” and “banal” over the “public” and “important”. With digital, the human being looks away from the other and directs his eyes to the screens (especially the screens that mirror or reflect him). The social interaction of proximity is lost, and a new virtual configuration is acquired, difficult to define, but which is impacting (not to mention overwhelming), about the notion of reality and sociability.

### **12.12. Questions for review and reflection**

1. Do we live in modernity or post-modernity today? Is the time we live in reflected in the type of content and programs that the media transmit?
2. What are the limits of reality? To what extent is our perception of the world shaped or distorted by hyperreality?
3. What is it like to live in the simulation? If we live successive simulations provided by media images, how can we know or understand what is, in fact, real? And how can we know and be aware that we live in the simulation if it is alienating?
4. What is the relationship between screens and individualism in contemporary societies?
5. Is the screen a friend of democracy?
6. If the culture of individualistic self-absorption and self-interest is, at this moment, predominant, it is possible to aspire collectively for moral and social regulation, not to be indifferent to others and the public good, to be indignant, and to recognize oneself in the ethical claim?
7. What causes secularization, laicization, or the absence of moral values and citizenship?
8. Does the development of processes, techniques, and means of communication, as well as the excess of information and virtual modes of communication, impose new ways and lifestyles and new demands on human beings?
9. Will the intensified and widespread communication be the fulfillment and completeness of the world?
10. Do social networks make people feel closer or further away from each other? What is the effect of online on people and social

relationships?

11. How does digital mediatization affect respect in contemporary societies?
12. According to Lipovetsky, what are the typical characteristics of hypermodern societies?
13. Why does Lipovetsky understand that post-modern societies are structured by a system of paradoxes, they are centered on the present and have a neo-Dionysian culture?
14. With more individualism in human relationships or less respect in social media, will we be free to escape the digital swarm and be whoever we want, will we have an identity crisis or will we not know which way to go?
15. What are the advantages and disadvantages of social surveillance and control?



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### HYPERREALITY: WHEN THE VIRTUAL IS REAL

“Le virtuel ne s’oppose pas au réel, mais seulement à l’actuel.  
Le virtuel possède une pleine réalité, en tant que virtuel. [...] Le virtuel doit même être défini comme une stricte partie de l’objet réel.”  
(Deleuze, 1968, p. 269).<sup>214</sup>

In recent decades, social changes are faster and more profound. Since the emergence of the Internet, scientific advances and technological developments have allowed global changes in ways of life, to the point of neither being able to notice these changes nor reflecting on their effects. Societies are on their way to merge into one and become an *e-Sphere*, according to Joseph N. Pelton (2000, p. 1), a virtual<sup>215</sup> and contemporary public space characterized by the following aspects:

- Network, the web of electronic relations.
- Electronic communication (through technological and electronic devices).
- Connectivity and interactivity, the transition to an online state.

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<sup>214</sup> The term “virtual” in French, as used by Deleuze (“virtuel”) means “potential”, “what is possible”, “what does not happen”. Deleuze is the philosopher of the virtual, according to Žižek’s book *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. What interests Deleuze is not the virtual reality, but the reality of the virtual. Virtual reality presupposes the idea of imitating reality and reproducing experiences through an artificial medium. The reality of the virtual “stands for the reality of the virtual as such, for its real effects and consequences” (Žižek, 2004, p. 3).

<sup>215</sup> Following the previous note, the term “virtual” is ambiguous, but the etymology of this word is also polysemic and equivocal. The origin of the word reveals that it derives from the medieval Latin term *virtualis*, meaning energy, strength, power (in producing an effect), but it also derives from the Latin *virtus*, *virtutis*, which means the human quality of courage, value, merit, as in case of having certain virtues, i.e. moral excellence (Barroso, 2019b, p. 135).

- Global ways of thinking, feeling, acting, seeing, and understanding.
- Online collectivity or community, sense of integration, belonging, and interaction in an electronic culture (sharing a virtual space).
- Virtuality, a digital dimension outside time and space (hyperreality and possible worlds where one wishes to be and participate).
- Simulation, a set of simulacra (perceptions of appearances), which gives the perception of authenticity or does not even allow this perception (because it is distracting) or the distinction between reality and unreality (because it is an *analogon*).
- Virtual images that evoke imagination, fantasy, spectacle, a distracting and appealing component of the images that populate the virtual and contemporary public space and that absorb attention and interest (the synopticon).
- Contemporaneity, a time of immanence, immediacy, ephemerality, and superficiality (an epiphenomenon).<sup>216</sup>

If hyperreality is understood as a modern, visual, and attractive manifestation of the need for simulacra in a virtual world, that world is not and cannot be a reference. So, how is it that hyperreality and the spectacle, the simulation, and the appearance underlying the spectacle emerge from reality and present themselves in societies and in contemporaneity?

The question of hyperreality poses the problem, among others<sup>217</sup> of authenticity. What is authentic or real are issues raised using images and technological devices. The images are popular and amplify the effects of distraction and social alienation. The image is immediately absorbed, spectacular, attractive; it is an ephemeral and instant “ready-to-think” that eliminates or dilutes concepts and produces a liquid culture that is equally ephemeral and instant. The experience of hyperreality is appealing. It is a “new world” of possibilities that opens up, a world of all possible, of fantasy and the impossible that is reshaping and restructuring not only cultural patterns, social life, and social interdependence, but also the ways in which

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<sup>216</sup> The concept of “epiphenomenon” (*epi* means “at the top”, “on the surface”, “besides of” or “in addition to”), is opposed, at least in Marxist theory, to the phenomenon itself, i.e. it refers to the superficial appearance of something or situation and its underlying reality. Describing something as epiphenomenal does not mean that it is unreal; on the contrary, it is to affirm that it disguises a deeper determining reality (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 89).

<sup>217</sup> Other equally important problems are the effects of de-realization; not adding new knowledge about the real world; the indistinction between the real and the fictitious.

we see, think, feel, act or just want to communicate and interact with others and interpret reality.

### 13.1. Contemporaneity and de-realization

“Of whom and of what are we contemporaries?”, asks Agamben (2009, p. 39) in an essay entitled “What is the contemporary?”. To answer this question or just to understand its meaning, it must be recognized that societies, cultures, human beings, and their technical and technological productions are dynamic and permeable, are constantly changing (Barroso, 2019a, p. 38). Technological devices of communication become ubiquitous and familiar in modern lifestyles, social actions, and behaviors, cementing the present paradigm of hyperreality. In view of the global, technological, and communicational changes imposed by an emerging time, i.e. “in the face of modern technicalization and industrialization of every continent”, Heidegger (1982, p. 3) warns that “there would seem to be no escape any longer”.

According to Agamben (2009, p. 41), “contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it”.

“A good example of this special experience of time that we call contemporariness is fashion. Fashion can be defined as the introduction into time of a peculiar discontinuity that divides it according to its relevance or irrelevance, its being-in-fashion or no-longer-being-in-fashion. This caesura, as subtle as it may be, is remarkable in the sense that those who need to make note of it do so infallibly; and in so doing they attest to their own being in fashion.” (Agamben, 2009, pp. 47-48).

Like fashion, images that serve as models and show trends or suggest lifestyles are also a unique example. Fashion and images establish a peculiar and paradoxical relationship with time because they focus on disconnection, lack of articulation: “Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands”, says Agamben (2009, p. 40).

Therefore, there is a semantic association between the concepts of “contemporaneity”, “modernity”, and “secularization”. As explained by Giddens (1996, p. 1) in *The Consequences of Modernity*: “‘modernity’ refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence”.



The modernity of societies results from the disappearance of differentiating cultural elements and the loss of meaning in relation to the past. Technology, economy, and politics (that is, the neoliberalism of the global market) create social homogeneity in relation to the same interests (or global interests), needs, desires, consumption, lifestyles, habits, etc. (Barroso, 2019a, p. 39).

Nevertheless, contemporaneity is not an ordinary time. It is a time of instant, superficial and ephemeral experiences, and these experiences are global, massified, virtual; it is a digital homogenization of lifestyles. There is a displacement in time, a disconnection, or anachronism: only the non-real is contemporary. Only then can the non-real perceive and apprehend time (Agamben, 1999, p. 40). The disconnection or anachronism between the subject and his time does not mean that the subject lives in another time. At most, it means that he lives time and space in an alienated way, according to an inversion of reality that causes alienation. This inversion is in the direction of Marxism.<sup>218</sup>

The awareness and understanding of contemporaneity affect the recognition of hyperrealism that is abundant in contemporary, global, trivial, and common lifestyles. Questioning hyperreality as a technological dimension and its effects, namely on de-realization, presupposes understanding the effective changes in societies and cultures and in the perceptions or experiences of the world that, paradoxically, do not seem real.

A virtual world is an interactive virtual environment, a hyper-world, or “a 3-D computer-based platform that allows users to interact with each other in real time” (Hodge, Collins & Giordano, 2013, p. 6). A virtual world is a three-dimensional environment in which someone (an avatar, a virtual representation of someone, like a virtual ego, who can take any form as a desire) can interact with others and create objects as part of that interaction. A virtual world requires virtualization, which is the reverse movement of actualization, according to Pierre Lévy (1999a, p. 12), and consists in the transition from current to virtual, in an increase in power.

In *Becoming Virtual–Reality in the Digital Age*, Lévy refers:

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<sup>218</sup> The concept of “alienation” comes from the Latin *alius*, which means “other” or “strange”, deriving *alienus*, “from another place or person”. Etymologically, the meaning of alienation has spatial and existential correspondence. In Marx’s theory, the worker experiences the object of his work as being alienated: even if the object was produced through the work of the worker, the object is not accessible to the worker.

“A general movement of virtualization has begun to affect not only the fields of information and communication but also our physical presence and economic activities, as well as the collective framework of sensibility and the exercise of intelligence. The process of virtualization has even affected our modalities of being together, the constitution of a collective ‘we’ in the form of virtual communities, virtual corporations, virtual democracy. Although the digitization of messages and the extension of cyberspace play an important role in the ongoing change, the wave of virtualization taking place extends far beyond the field of information technology.” (Lévy, 1998, p. 15).

Lévy questions the general process of de-realization and shows that the virtual has little relationship to that which is false, illusory, or imaginary. “The virtual is by no means the opposite of the real”, says Lévy (1998, p. 16). On the contrary, the virtual is a “fecund and powerful mode of being that expands the process of creation, opens up the future, injects a core of meaning beneath the platitude of immediate physical presence” (Lévy, 1998, p. 16).

In the book *Virtual Worlds: A Journey in Hyper and Hyperreality*, Benjamin Woolley (1993, p. 53) says that the virtual “was and remains a much grander word, scandalously underused, a huge vessel of semantic vacuity waiting to have meaning poured into it”. The computer contributes to this meaning, adds Woolley. There is a wide variety of virtual worlds. Any type of world can be created virtually, that is, tailored to entertainment, social relationships, educational purposes, or professional training, but all include connection, interactivity, online community, communication, simulation, digital dimension, technological device or medium, virtual images, fantasy. Virtual worlds can be based on the real world or be completely disconnected from the real world.

With all these resources, a virtual world can also be called a digital world, simulated world, or hyper-world, where de-realization affects the subject and the object of such virtual experience. This virtual circumstance alters the sense of identity. Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche argue this idea of de-realization, but Nietzsche refers to it as the last breath of a vaporizing reality and the dissolution of the distinction between the real world and the apparent world. In the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche presents the history of this distinction, from Plato to his epoch. For Nietzsche, the real world has become a useless and superfluous idea:

“The characteristics which have been given to the ‘true Being’ of things are the characteristics of non-Being, of nothingness—the ‘real world’ has been constructed from the contradiction of the actual world: an apparent world,

indeed, to the extent that it is merely a moral-optical illusion.” (Nietzsche, 1998, p. 19).

Right after this statement, when Nietzsche refers to “how the ‘real world’ finally became a fable”, he adds about the real world: “The ‘real world’—an idea with no further use, no longer even an obligation—an idea become useless, superfluous, *therefore* a refuted idea: let us do away with it!” (Nietzsche, 1998, p. 20).

Hyperreality is a form of “hemorrhaging of reality” and “the conquest of space that follows that of the planet is equal to de-realizing (de-materializing) human space, or to transferring it into a hyperreal of simulation”, says Baudrillard (1997, pp. 123-124) in *Simulacra and Simulation*. Modern media make our lives easier by turning them into a simulacrum. However, it seems more important to understand this trend or movement towards hyperreality, because the medium of our electrical technology time, according to McLuhan, is reshaping and restructuring the patterns of social interdependence and all aspects of our lives, it is forcing to reconsider and reevaluate all thoughts, actions, and institutions previously considered to be guaranteed. Everything is changing profoundly. “Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication” (McLuhan, 1967, p. 8). Thus, technological devices predispose us to think and act automatically in certain ways.

Contemporaneity is increasingly visual, technological, hyperreal and seems indistinct and more and more real than reality itself (Barroso, 2019a, p. 55). Technological development is accentuated, and technology brings new communication devices and new ways to use them anywhere and anytime. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to see, think, feel, act, express/signify and interpret the real, on the one hand, and understand “of whom and of what are we contemporaries”, on the other hand. For this reason, Baudrillard argues that simulacra are ahead of us everywhere. Simulacra do not hide the truth; it is the truth (which is hidden) that is indiscernible, a belief about what does not exist. The contemporary world is increasingly hyperreal, full of simulacra and meanings (many of these meanings are subliminal). For this reason, the world is illusory. If the world is illusory, people misunderstand the world, i.e. they do not understand what the world and things really are or what really exists.

In *Becoming Virtual–Reality in the Digital Age*, Lévy highlights the potential of signs, which is even greater in the virtual world:

“Signs do not only evoke ‘absent things’ but scenes, intrigues, complete series of interconnected events. Without language we would be unable to

ask questions or tell stories, both of which are ways of detaching ourselves from the present while intensifying our existence. Human beings can partially detach themselves from current experience and remember, evoke, imagine, play, simulate. By doing so they travel to other places, other moments, other worlds.” (Lévy, 1998, p. 92).

In Lévy’s perspective, systems of virtual reality transmit more than images. These systems transmit a “quasi-presence”: “clones, the visible agents or virtual marionettes that we control by our gestures, can affect and modify other marionettes or visible agents and can even remotely activate ‘real’ devices and operate in the ordinary world” (Lévy, 1998, p. 39). Lévy’s thesis is that language (especially the signs) embodies operations that are nearly always at work in the process of virtualization. Lévy argues that all language <sup>219</sup> are dependent on such relations of correspondence, or substitution, between an order of signs and an order of things.

“Rhetoric designates the art of acting on others and the world by means of signs. At the rhetorical or pragmatic stage, we are no longer concerned solely with representing the state of things but also of transforming them, and even creating a reality out of language, that is, a virtual world, the world of art, fiction, culture, the human mental universe.” (Lévy, 1998, p. 104).

The world is created by language and it “will eventually function as a reference for dialectic operations or will be used for other creative activities” (Lévy, 1998, pp. 104-105). The birth of language is like the virtualization of the present:

“Three processes of virtualization led to the emergence of the human species: the development of language, the growth of technology, and the increased complexity of its institutions. Language virtualizes a ‘real time’ that holds the living captive in the here and now. In doing so it opens up the past, the future, and time in general as a realm unto itself, a dimension with a consistency of its own. Through the creation of language, we now inhabit a virtual space–temporal flux taken as a whole—that the immediate present only partially and fleetingly actualizes. We *exist*.” (Lévy, 1998, p. 91).

“Languages and sign systems make our intellectual operations possible” (Lévy, 1998, p. 124). Human intelligence possesses a significant communal dimension because we are creatures of language, concludes Lévy.

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<sup>219</sup> Including: “grammar (learning how to read and write correctly), dialectic (learning how to reason), and rhetoric (learning how to prepare speeches and convince an audience)”, as Lévy (1998, p. 103) explains.

Hyperreality prevails in the contemporary world and it is composed of signs (especially virtual images created by computer). Hyperreality forces us to escape or, paradoxically, to disconnect from time, space, reality, and referentiality. Only change our relationship with time and our meanings about the world, transforming reality or, at least, our collective way of seeing, thinking, feeling, acting, expressing/signifying, and interpreting reality (Barroso, 2019a, pp. 55-56).

As stated by Žižek (2013, p. 15) in *Interrogating the Real*, images are representations through which “the thing is more present in its symbol than in its immediate reality”. It is like a social (symbolic) construction of reality (Balandier, 1994, p. 160), considering that “reality itself is never fully constituted” (Žižek, 2013, p. 64). “When we want to simulate reality within an artificial (virtual, digital) medium, we do not have to go to the full extent: we simply have to reproduce features that make the image realistic from the spectator’s point of view” (Žižek, 2013, p. 323). However, the main questions are:

- How does appearance come from reality?
- What is the role of language in the symbolic social construction of reality, i.e. in the construction of the contemporary, hyperreality, and de-realization?
- What is the contribution of language to the emergence of appearance (or perception of appearance) from reality?

Language is a resource and, in this case, brings benefits:

- Language extends reality, creates possible worlds, and substitutes what is real for the fictional, what is represented (language is representation).
- Language is the *praxis* of the *logos*, it is *poiesis*, an action that transforms reality through a dialectical unit called *logopoiesis*, a way of producing the possible using signs, elements of representation.<sup>220</sup>
- Language makes the transitions of plans between what is lived and what is thought, which is only possible through the symbolic, what is typical of language, and is inherent in human experiences and interrelations.

“The symbolic is the activity by which experience is not only coordinated but also communicated”, states Umberto Eco (1986, p. 134) in *Semiotics*

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<sup>220</sup> The concept of *logopoiesis* indicates a process of producing meaning and thought through a communication or signification device like language, i.e. a poetic form of thought production and poetry that generates thought.

*and the Philosophy of Language*. The symbolic organizes and constructs the experience, making it thinkable and communicable. The human experience (which is an experience of adapting to contemporary hyper-environment, hyper-action, and hyper-interaction) is necessarily symbolic. If we experience something, it means that, according to Heidegger, that something affects us, dominates us, and transforms us. In *On The Way To Language*, Heidegger presents lectures bearing the title “the nature of language”. His objective is to bring us face to face with the possibility of undergoing an experience with the language. He points out:

“To undergo an experience with something—be it a thing, a person, or a god—means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of ‘undergoing’ an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making: to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens. To undergo an experience with language, then, means to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into and submitting to it.” (Heidegger, 1986, p. 57).

Furthermore, going through a virtual and digital experience in hyperreality is much more than that being hit by what happens or arises in us; it is much more transformative. In this transformation, one is passive, one is the object of experience. One receives from experience what reaches and submits him.

## 13.2. What is hyperreality?

In the concept of “hyperreality”, the prefix “hyper” emphasizes the main idea of combined reality and imaginary, a mixture of reality and signs of reality, in which signs represent reality. There is no clear indication as to how far reality goes and the signs that represent reality begin. Hyperreality refers to something that does not really exist. However, experiencing hyperreality can be so intense and realistic that it can confuse, even for brief moments, what is real and what is not real.

“Hyper” means “more in excess”, something excessive, extra, that goes beyond what is reasonable or is “excessive in extension or quality”, something that is “located above”. In turn, the term “reality” means an idea of common sense: “the quality or state of being real”, “the real nature or constitution of something”, “what has objective existence, what is not a mere idea, which is not imaginary, fictitious or pretended”, “what necessarily exists”.

What is the state of the hyperreal? If reality is the quality of being real or having a real and objective existence, hyperreality is a simulated reality above reality itself. About this issue, Deleuze (1983, p. 48) refers in his essay “Plato and the Simulacrum” that “the simulacrum is an image without resemblance”.<sup>221</sup> A simulacrum means an appearance without substance, it is vague, it is a resemblance, image, representation. There is no simulacrum without signs. In this perspective, a simulacrum is a sign and the proliferation of simulacra originates two things:

1. The rise of hyperreality and the possibility of virtual and simulated worlds.
2. The crisis of representation, that is, what Paul Virilio (1991, p. 112) calls, in *The Lost Dimension*, a crisis caused by modern media technology, diluting differences or not allowing us to distinguish what is real and true from that is fictional.

Therefore, the concept of “hyperreality” defines the perceptive inability to distinguish between reality and technological simulation. It is an artificialism in which reality and fiction seem indistinct. This concept is also used to mean the technological communication infrastructure that supports continuous and unified interaction between:

- a) Virtual people and virtual objects.
- b) Real people and real objects.
- c) Human intelligence and artificial intelligence.

Hyperreality is a new configuration of the human in the world that brings with it a different way of perceiving and living in that world. Hyperreality also brings with it a new communications paradigm. Schematically, hyperreality is a structure composed and defined by the following conjugation between the real and the non-real:

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<sup>221</sup> Etymologically, the concept of “simulacrum” comes from the Latin *simulare*, “to make like (likeness), imitate, copy, represent”, from the stem of *similis* “like, resembling, of the same kind”, that is, “to give an appearance of”. A simulacrum is an image, a form, a representation of something; shadowy likeness, deceptive substitute, mere pretense, a dissimulation. Cf. the Subchapter 12.3.1.

<b>Hyperreality</b> <b>Technological infrastructures of communication that mix and interact</b>	
Real (the factual): physical reality.	Non-real (the fictional or virtual): virtual reality.
Real people and real objects.	Virtual people and virtual objects (both are computer-generated).
Human intelligence.	Artificial intelligence.

**Table 13-1:** Synthesis about hyperreality as a composite structure.

Hyperreality is hypothetical; its realization as a technological infrastructure is in the future. “The technical challenge of hyperreality is to make physical and virtual reality appear to the full human sensory apparatus to intermix seamlessly”, says Nobuyoshi Terashima (2005, p. 7). Hyperreality provides a point or place for the unified interaction between human intelligence and artificial intelligence. It is the framing or environment of people, objects, and situations in physical and virtual reality, with human intelligence and artificial intelligence between facts and fictions, that results in processes of interaction and communication, as if everything were part of the same plane or world.

However, it is important to distinguish between what is real and what exists as effective, but it does not actually exist. This distinction is not guaranteed, because we live on a hybrid plane, where one cannot easily distinguish whether what one sees, hears, smells, and touches results from a physical world or a world mediated by information technology.

Can hyperreality become the dominant medium through which we know reality? Terashima points out that the term “hyper” in the concept of “hyperreality” emphasizes that hyperreality is more than the sum of physical reality and virtual reality; hyperreality is based on the systematic interaction between the two component realities; “it is predicated on systematic interaction between the two component realities”, it new form of reality that “has attributes above and beyond its component realities” (Terashima, 2005, p. 12). According to the article “The hyperreality paradigm” by John Tiffin:

“‘Hyper’ means an extra dimension beyond the normal. Hyperreality means a reality in which there is the extra dimension of virtual reality within normal physical reality. But this, as we have seen, is not a simple add-on of another set of capabilities. For the human species it will be a fundamental reformulation of their perception of reality and of the world they live in.” (Tiffin, 2005, pp. 41-42).

Hyperreality is only possible due to the development of virtual reality. Hyperreality is a technological meta-concept (and with the emphasis on the



prefix “hyper” to underline an extra dimension, in addition to the normal one). It is distinguished from the post-modern use of the term “hyperreality” and has a communicational scope. The objective is to solve the fundamental problem of communication between the real and the virtual (Tiffin, 2005, p. 41). Hyperreality means a reality in which there is an extra dimension of virtual reality within a normal physical reality.

The hyper-world is a consistent and coherent mixture of a real (physical) world and a virtual world. While a real-world consists of real and natural things and objects, i.e. what is present atomically in a set, being describable as such, as it is, a virtual world is what is present in a set as bits of information generated by a computer. A virtual world consists of images of reality captured by a photographic camera, which are visually recognized by the computer and, later, reproduced by the computer and transmitted by technological devices in virtual reality (Terashima, 2005, p. 8), being recognized as such, i.e. as something distinct from reality itself.

A field of coaction or joint action provides a common place for objects and inhabitants derived from physical reality and virtual reality and serves as a workplace or area of activity in which they interact. As Terashima points out:

“A coaction field is defined within the context of a hyper-world. It provides a common site for objects and inhabitants derived from PR [physical reality] and VR [virtual reality] and serves as a workplace or an activity area within which they interact. The coaction field provides the means of communication for its inhabitants to interact in such joint activities as designing buildings or playing games. The means of communication include words, gestures, body orientation and movement, and in due course will include touch. Sounds that provide feedback in performing tasks, such as a reassuring click as elements of a puzzle lock into place or as a bat hits a ball, will also be included. The behavior of objects in a coaction field conforms to physical, chemical and/or biological laws or to laws invented by humans.” (Terashima, 2005, p. 9).

The field of action provides the means of communication (including words, gestures, body orientation and movement, sounds, and touches) for its inhabitants to interact in joint activities (e.g. games). The behavior of people and the aspects of objects involved in the field are in accordance with shared natural (from the physics, chemistry, biology) and human laws, which govern the same elements of reality. This produces and reveals realism. In this perspective, a field of coaction or joint action is defined by the set of a field or place of interaction, real or virtual inhabitants (more than one), means of communication, knowledge (a system with purposes where the elements work according to the achievement of objectives), laws and controls (Terashima, 2005, p. 9). A field is the place of interaction and

serves as a goal of cooperation; it is a system with defined limits and known rules.

Hyperreality is distinct from virtual reality. Although hyperreality includes virtual reality, both are increasingly difficult to distinguish. It is even difficult to distinguish the virtual from the real. For example, real images without filters *versus* manipulated images on magazine covers, as in the case of *Vanity Fair*, where Oprah Winfrey and Reese Witherspoon have extra limbs, a technical and graphical mistake justified by “apparent editing errors”.<sup>222</sup>

Another case is North Korea’s recurring propaganda producing simulacra through the strategic manipulation of images. In May 2015, the transmission of false images conceived by the authorities of this country became paradigmatic, showing the launch of a submarine missile to demonstrate the technological progress achieved.<sup>223</sup> In 2017, North Korea’s official television broadcast a video that simulates a missile attack on the U.S. during a state event commemorating Kim Il-Sung’s birthday. The false images (conceived on purpose) were displayed with pomp and circumstance at the ceremony and were celebrated with apotheosis, even though they were known to be false, as if they were real.

In another situation, an image published in the online edition of the Iranian daily *Jamejam* showed three missiles launched during a test in the Iranian desert.<sup>224</sup> The same image was released by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, but digitally modified, adding a fourth successfully launched missile.

The development of digital photography has brought countless cases of manipulation of images disclosed as true, including in the mass media, as reproductions of events that have not occurred. This is the case of an image of Canadarm 2, the remote-control mechanical arm of the International Space Station.<sup>225</sup> The image was released in 2014 and has been digitally retouched to show the Canadian government symbol.

“We already live in a mixture of the real and the virtual”, argues Tiffin (2005, p. 32), but “the virtual realities generated outside ourselves are normally separated from our physical surroundings by some kind of frame”.

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<sup>222</sup> See the front page of *Vanity Fair* magazine, a photograph by Annie Leibovitz/Vanity Fair (cf. *The Guardian*, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

<sup>223</sup> Image obtained by the Yonhap News Agency (Photo: KCNA/EPA). Cf. *The Guardian*, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. *The Denver Post*, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>225</sup> The differences are notorious between the real photograph and the manipulated image with the Canadian symbol. Cf. *Ottawa Citizen*, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Therefore, “the long-term goal of HR [hyperreality] research, however, is that the frames will disappear and we will cease to be conscious of any seams between the virtual and the real” (Tiffin, 2005, p. 32).

Hyperreality is a technological paradigm. In fact, hyperreality is associated with the development of technology and implies profound transformations, i.e. it invites us to reflect on what it is (what its nature is and what its characteristics are) and how the future will be. Technique always brings a new way of thinking about it. In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger (1977, p. 13) states: “*Techné* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poetic”. *Techné* is part of the “production”, the *poiesis*. Each new medium is a poetic or “productive” communication technique that brings new procedures and new ways of being in the world; it invites reflection.

Hyperreality is also the era of new social relationships in a virtual world. Hyperreality seems to give primacy to the communication of the Self, contributing to form a selfish society. Tiffin and Terashima say in an article entitled “Hypermillennium”:

“The industrial society has been profoundly shaped by mass media, where the one to many modes of communication encourages a view of people as a mass audience. In contrast, hyperreality would appear to give primacy of communication to the self.” (Tiffin & Terashima, 2005, p. 146).

Considering that the real world and the virtual world are seamless, i.e. diluted in one another, unified, Cartesian doubts about the Self, the *cogito* and the perception of reality are again relevant in contemporary societies, because the knowledge of individual existence is the only reality that can be trusted (Tiffin & Terashima, 2005, p. 146). People tend to change their appearance to impress others. However, if the physical world imposes limitations on these changes in appearance (since it is not possible to change age, weight, body measurements, or gender), the virtual world allows all changes (Tiffin & Terashima, 2005, p. 146). Hyperreality thus appears as a supreme technology of self-realization.

In April 2017, the image of the top model Gisele Bündchen was projected on the Empire State Building.<sup>226</sup> It was a promotional action to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American magazine *Harper’s Bazaar*. The Empire State Building symbolizes the technological prowess and economic strength of the USA (Barroso, 2018, p. 101). However, in this promotional strategy, the building lost its identity and symbolism of

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<sup>226</sup> Cf. *Daily Mail*, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

American culture and financial power to become a means of projecting aesthetic, hedonistic, ephemeral, and immediate values, i.e. the content of *Harper's Bazaar* magazine: fashion, beauty, celebrities, modern lifestyles (image, appearance, vanity, glamor, ostentation, etc.).

This is a paradigmatic case of modernity, a process of secularization of values, ideals, and principles. It is indicative of a change in the social and cultural lifestyle. This case recalls another one that occurred in 1999: the projection of an image of Gail Porter in a naked and sensual pose on the facade of the London Parliament, during a guerrilla advertising campaign by the men's magazine *FHM*.<sup>227</sup>

In these two cases, there are some similar and interesting aspects:

- The use of large size images to represent fashion, female beauty, modern lifestyle, as if it were a celebration or cult.
- The implementation of an imposing strategy to appeal to the consumer.
- Modern and unlikely public spaces to make commercial and consumer appeals.

It is like Han (2017, p. 27) says in his book *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*: today, images are not just likenesses, but also models and we flee into images in order to be better, more beautiful, and more alive, which means that:

- We are producing more spectacle.
- We are increasingly familiar with the profusion of images (including shock images).
- We are living according to these images, that is, imitating them.

Since these are two large images projected (the one from *Harper's Bazaar* and the one from *FHM*), do we have the option of not seeing them? Can we refuse to see them while we circulate in the public sphere? The use of these images is strategic and, as such, it aims to determine our perceptions. In *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, Baudrillard (2005, p. 93) recognizes this situation as a violence of the image, based on the hegemony and omnipresence of the image (i.e. it is in the excess of the image itself, in the plethora), as well as in the content of the images (i.e. in what is done in the image, in what is shown through the image).

For Baudrillard, the image is an operator or the means of visibility, that is, of an integral visibility/reality:

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<sup>227</sup> Cf. *The Telegraph*, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

“In this sense, most photographs (but media images too, in general, and all that makes up the 'visual') are not true images. They are merely reportage, realist cliché or aesthetic performance, enslaved to all the ideological systems. At this stage, the image is nothing but an operator of visibility—the medium of an integral visibility that is the pendant to Integral Reality, becoming-real going hand in hand with becoming-visible at all costs: everything must be seen, everything must be visible, and the image is pre-eminently the site of this visibility.” (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 93).

The visual effects of the images are violent because they create illusions and “distort” the real. Images make the real disappear. The imperative of modern massification is that everything must be visible; everything must be seen, and the image is the means *par excellence* for this absolute visibility. It is a dictatorship of the image. Paradoxically, the image makes everything visible and is the medium responsible for the disappearance of reality.

It is in this perspective that Baudrillard identifies the avid and collective search for new forms of expression, as the images are today, with the culmination, the end or the death of the social (the social emptiness) and, in contrast, the apogee of the masses that just want spectacle which can only be provided by images. Baudrillard refers to an apocalypse of the image. In modern societies, where simulation is the central element for Baudrillard, the media are responsible for the unbridled production of signs that are no longer related to reality; the media create something else, another reality or, at least, another kind of reality. What is understood as hyperreal is produced with the claim to be more real than reality itself, which is no longer so. Baudrillard demonstrates that reality is superseded or hidden by imitation of the image, which is always new and more complete and, therefore, more interesting and captivating for popular and visual culture.

It is hyperreality, which is everywhere. According to Baudrillard, the world becomes hyperreal, riddled with simulacra, in which images (and the spectacles of images, for Debord) replace the concepts of “production” and “class conflict” as key components of contemporary societies.

A hologram<sup>228</sup> is a perfect example of hyperreality. For Baudrillard, there is no need for imaginary mediation to reproduce and represent what it represents. A holographic reproduction, says Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*, is no longer real, it is already hyperreal:

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<sup>228</sup> Term derived from the Greek *holos*, “all” (in the sense of the three dimensions), and *grafia*, “message”. An intermediate photograph that contains information to reproduce a three-dimensional image by holography.

“Nothing resembles itself, and holographic reproduction, like all fantasies of the exact synthesis or resurrection of the real (this also goes for scientific experimentation), is already no longer real, is already hyperreal. It thus never has reproductive (truth) value, but always already simulation value. Not an exact, but a transgressive truth, that is to say already on the other side of the truth.” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 109).

In this perspective, “Baudrillard has effectively *inverted* Leibniz by proposing that the latter’s question ‘Why is there something instead of nothing?’ has become ‘Why is there nothing instead of something?’” (Stolze, 2016, p. 91). The hyperreal replaces the real, that is, the immanent and the contingent, the substantial, and the necessary. This is what corresponds to the strength of the virtual, in which everything (events, events, or activities) can only come from the immanence of the world, as if the virtual were only the actualization of the real (Barroso, 2019b, p. 142). The virtual is what can transcend its own immanence.

### 13.3. The virtual and the problem of what is not true

The concepts of “virtual” and “truth” imply the distinction between what is the case (what is true, real, factual, or actual) and what is not the case (what is appearance, fiction, false, unreal, or illusion). If the virtual is an illusion, it is caused by the medium and its signs. The virtual resides in the capacity of the medium for virtualization. The ability of the medium to create an illusion is a process of virtualization. But the virtual is not, as Baudrillard (2005, p. 83) explains, “the ‘last word’; it is merely the virtual illusion, the illusion of the virtual”.

In *The Theater and Its Double*, Antonin Artaud (1958, pp. 48-49) compares theater and alchemy on the basis of what he designates to be a “mysterious identity” in the essence of both. Artaud refers to the power of both to be “virtual arts” that do not carry reality within themselves, but a virtual reality. With this analogy, Artaud was one of the first to use the term “virtual reality” long before this concept referred to what we now take for digital and technological culture.<sup>229</sup> It is that, only from traditional systems and models of communication and mediation to modern digital forms of communication and mediation, do the peculiar elements of today’s digital and technological cultures emerge:

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<sup>229</sup> Jaron Lanier was the first to use, in the 1980s, the term “virtual reality” in the sense that we now take and use in digital and technological cultures, i.e. as “the development of computer-generated environments in which real people could interact”, according to the interview he gave to *The Guardian*, on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

- Narrative artifacts and models of communication and mediation.
- Narrative and interactive virtual environments.
- Artificial memories expanded in cyberspace.
- More interactivity, sharing, and immersion.
- New levels of representation and virtual and interactive narration.
- Virtual experiences as superficial, disposable, immanent, immediate.

Let us remember the case of Zilla van der Born, a graphic designer who, concerned about the danger of manipulated images, retired to her apartment for five weeks in 2014, while posting information on the Internet, telling all her acquaintances (including her parents) that she was traveling through Southeast Asia.<sup>230</sup> The artist used social media and Photoshop to develop a project about the online malleability of truth, trying to answer the question “What is reality?”. Zilla van der Born argued that we live in a visual culture where mediated information and reality are intertwined. What intrigued her is the fact that a photograph has an insidious and ambiguous relationship with reality. There is a constant battle between two photographic considerations: a) making the photographed object as beautiful as possible and b) telling the truth. The result is that an image never shows the exact situation as it really is; on the contrary, it is a version with a real appearance.

People always look for perfect, beautiful, and spectacular photographs (particularly selfies)<sup>231</sup> using a panoply of filters to make them more perfect, beautiful, and spectacular before displaying and sharing them on social media. In doing so, people create hyperreality and live in it as in an ideal online world, which is false, distorted and has nothing to do with reality.

Considering that any representation is performed through signs and, therefore, presupposes referents (existing referents or non-existent, fictional referents), how does the psychological effect of de-realization occur? How do the images create structures or meaning forms that exceed or invert the representative and distinctive proportionality between the real and the unreal? Or, as Baudrillard (2005, p. 78) asks: “What are we to do with an interactive world in which the demarcation line between subject and object is virtually abolished?”

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<sup>230</sup> As reported by *The Washington Post*, on September 12<sup>nd</sup>, 2014.

<sup>231</sup> This practice is so modern and popular that people even use the “instagramable” neologism to qualify and describe an image considered perfect and susceptible to impress if it is registered in photography and published on the social network Instagram. With the recent digital revolution of photography, “today everything exists to end in a photograph”, as Susan Sontag (2002, p. 24) says.

Baudrillard understands that hyperreality is indistinguishable from reality, from images (i.e. from signs representing reality) and from the sensation of appearance in forms of simulation. However, if Baudrillard shows that reality is supplanted or retracted by the ever new and more complete imitation and, consequently, more interesting for mass culture, Umberto Eco, who also understands the indistinction between reality and hyperreality, insists on criticism to mass culture and spectacle, as Guy Debord originally did in 1967, in his work *The Society of the Spectacle*.

Modern societies are equipped with spectacle systems (including the mass media) and result from a culture of image, in which visuality is predominant. If there is visuality, there are images; if there are images, there must be perceptions and interpretations of what is given by the images to be perceived. Modernity is a period of hegemony and dominance of images that always and necessarily represent something (or represent everything, especially the private and trivial life of people on social networks in a virtual way and very different from factuality, from what reality is, because everyone wants to be famous). It is the splendor of the image. Paradoxically, the images of the world provided by the media, according to *The Transparent Society* by Vattimo (2011, pp. 13-14), constitute the adequate objectivity of the world, and not just different interpretations of a given reality in some way.

### 13.4. Cyber-culture: virtual reality and augmented reality

In a 30-second commercial for Calvin Klein, the kiss between Bella Hadid and Miquela Sousa may have seemed unrealistic to many viewers, but this advertising concept made a great impact. First, because Hadid is a supermodel and identifies himself as heterosexual; second, because Sousa, better known as Lil Miquela, is virtually manufactured. This is how, in the summer of 2019, *The New York Times* starts a news story by Tiffany Hsu (2019) with the title “These Influencers Aren’t Flesh and Blood, Yet Millions Follow Them”.<sup>232</sup> The journalistic text highlights the virtual influencers created for this purpose: to influence millions of people who follow them on social networks. Lil Miquela, for example, does not exist, but is an influencer and singer digitally created in artificial intelligence, having more than 2.7 million followers on Instagram and about one million monthly

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. *The New York Times*, on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



listeners of her songs on Spotify,<sup>233</sup> having already carried out campaigns for major brands (e.g. Calvin Klein and Prada).

This is the most recent and innovative strategy for companies to attract consumers. *The New York Times*'s news reveals that the fast-food chain KFC recently launched a modern and digital version of its founder, Colonel Sanders. The model was created from photographs of celebrities and Instagram influencers, to create a look that would attract “likes” and followers online.

These mentioned cases demonstrate the changes taking place in current social relationships, which are now virtual relationships. Communities are no longer traditional (based on institutional and formal identities, belongings, and participation) and become online communities with network interactivity.<sup>234</sup> The sociological understanding of cultures and societies requires the study of their transformations and the phenomena and factors that originate them, namely the development of information and communication technologies, as well as the consequences they cause in the structure of social relations. Information and communication technologies are now more versatile and effective, imposing a new reorganization of society, which appropriately acquires the designation of “information society”.

Information and its flows have always characterized societies, but never as in contemporary times, with the rapid rise and predominance of the Internet, social networks, and mobile communications. “The permutations offered by the new communications technologies are endless and extraordinary”, as four decades ago Toffler (1981, p. 426) already recognized. Regarding the technological development of networks, communication, and societies, Castells characterizes this recent network society in *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective*:

“A network society is a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication

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<sup>233</sup> Data from September 2020.

<sup>234</sup> Corroborating this perspective, the expansion of the Internet and its incorporation into everyday procedures brought the emphasis on network communication, according to Lidia Silva (2008, p. 358). Thus, it is necessary to understand a dialectical process between communication and the community structured by the networks that are established between the subjects. With the development of technology and telecommunications, the renewal of social ties on a global scale is generated, in a new cultural ecosystem: an invisible (de-territorialized) space, without borders, conducive to nomadism.

technologies. By social structure, I understand the organizational arrangements of humans in relations of production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power expressed in meaningful communication coded by culture. A network is a set of interconnected nodes. A node is the point where the curve intersects itself. A network has no center, just nodes. Nodes may be of varying relevance for the network. Nodes increase their importance for the network by absorbing more relevant information, and processing it more efficiently. The relative importance of a node does not stem from its specific features but from its ability to contribute to the network's goals. However, all nodes of a network are necessary for the network's performance. When nodes become redundant or useless, networks tend to reconfigure themselves, deleting some nodes, and adding new ones. Nodes only exist and function as components of networks. The network is the unit, not the node." (Castells, 2004, p. 3).

In another book, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Castells understands, when analyzing contemporary societies organized in a global information network, that the current era is that of information, marked by: "informationalization, globalization, networking, identity-building, the crisis of patriarchy, and of the nation-state" (Castells, 2010, p. 2). Castells explores some of these macro transformations, while attempting to explain them because of the interaction between processes characterizing the information age. Castells believes that the trends documented and analyzed in *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* "do constitute a new historical landscape, whose dynamics are likely to have lasting effects on our lives, and on our children's lives" (Castells, 2010, p. 2). It is a new kind of society, a new dominant social structure called "network society", which emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the revolution of information and communication technologies, with informational and global capitalism and with "real virtuality" immersed in an environment of virtual images. According to Castells:

"[...] by real virtuality I mean a system in which reality itself (that is, people's material/symbolic existence) is fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which symbols are not just metaphors, but comprise the actual experience. This is not the consequence of electronic media, although they are the indispensable instruments of expression in the new culture. The material basis that explains why real virtuality is able to take over people's imagination and systems of representation is their livelihood in the space of flows and in timeless time." (Castells, 2010, p. 386).

With the gradual predominance of visuality in contemporary cultures and societies, the disciplinary field of Anthropology (especially Cultural Anthropology and Visual Anthropology) arises precisely in a fertile period in which the image and visuality itself develop and become massified with innovative techniques to reproduce images (e.g. photography and cinema), from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1936, with the publication of the essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”, Walter Benjamin (2002, p. 104) designates this period as the “age of the technological reproducibility”. Technical reproduction, by industrializing the artifice of reproduction and by calling into question the aesthetic value and the authenticity value, is a visible part of post-modernity. This period extends to today with the phenomenon of globalization, which intensifies not only innovation and visual reproduction, but also digital and technological industrialization and the profusion of virtual images in the daily lives of cultures and societies that, in this way, are increasingly visual.

Globalization has brought transformations, including the transition from analog to digital. With the invention and use of photography and the cinematographic camera, societies and cultures became visual and visible, objects of registration, interpretation, and meaning. As José da Silva Ribeiro says, societies and cultures remained as if divided into predominantly observed (photographed, studied, cinematographed) and predominantly observers (photographing, studying, producing films), eastern and western, south and north, poor and rich, rural and urban, female and male (Ribeiro, 2005, p. 616).

In the thought of Pierre Lévy (1999b, p. 17), cyberculture is the set of techniques (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, ways of thinking, and values that develop together with the growth of cyberspace. Cyberspace is a construct, a vast and virtual space for action. According to the meaning attributed by William Gibson, the author who coined this term in 1984 in the book *Neuromancer*, cyberspace is “a virtual reality representation of a vast city which is perhaps best described as a totally immersive version of the Internet”, where “individuals can exist solely in this space, and even continue to exist after their physical death as what Gibson referred to as ‘constructs’” (Bell, Loader, Pleace & Schuler, 2005, p. 39).

“Cyberspace is a term used to describe the space created through the confluence of electronic communications networks such as the Internet which enables computer mediated communication (CMC) between any number of people who may be geographically dispersed around the globe. It is a public space (see public sphere) where individuals can meet, exchange ideas, share information, provide social support, conduct business, create artistic media, play simulation games or engage in political discussion. Such

human interaction does not require a shared physical or bodily co-presence, but is rather characterized by the interconnection of millions of people throughout the world communicating by email, usenet newsgroups, bulletin board systems, and chat rooms.” (Bell, Loader, Pleace & Schuler, 2005, p. 41).

Indeed, William Gibson (2003, p. 5) refers in *Neuromancer* to “a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix”. More important and comprehensive is the following reference:

“Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding...” (Gibson, 2003, p. 51).

Cyberspace is the network society, an electronic, virtual, and unlimited space for interactive communication, where technology and information converge and where people (Internet users or “netizens”)<sup>235</sup> interact when sharing or looking for the same interests (and not the same ideals, beliefs, values, and principles, as in the past). Cyberspace and cyberculture are the result of the recent technological revolution. Cyberspace is the communication space opened by the worldwide interconnection of computers and computer memories (Lévy, 1999b, p. 92). It is a vast and open communication system from all to all, that is, of all those who are interconnected. According to Lévy, communication takes place through shared virtual worlds. Virtual realities increasingly serve as means of communication (Lévy, 1999b, p. 105). In the same view, Joseph N. Pelton states:

“The exploding pattern of global change pervades our planet. It is coming to citizens and businesspeople from every direction. It is coming to us via cell phones, fiber-optic cables, high performance and personal computers, satellites, and the all-pervasive Internet. All these complex electronic and communications networks and the advanced software and processing power that support their operation is what is meant by the word ‘cyberspace’.” (Pelton, 2000, p. 3).

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<sup>235</sup> A “netizen” is an internet user, a citizen who uses the Internet for his activism. He is a kind of citizen of the cyberspace, a person who participates in a “cyberspatial communication”, including the discussion forums (Bell, Loader, Pleace & Schuler, 2005, p. 114).

Cyberspace technologies transform human. Information systems assume, at the same time, an omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent role.

“Their power, reach, and immediacy will create an overarching presence that transcends the Global Village paradigm that Marshall McLuhan defined for us some thirty years ago. McLuhan looked to the power of satellite broadcast television, which could let everyone on Earth receive the same message. Now the Internet and modern telecommunications and computer networks can let us think interactively. Now we are not a village that sees the same image, we are a World-Wide Mind that can think and interact together.” (Pelton, 2000, p. 4).<sup>236</sup>

Cyberculture is associated with both cyberspace and virtual. Immersion characterizes cyberculture and the virtual participation or presence in it. Cyberculture, cyberspace, and the virtual characterize contemporary culture and current technological modes of instant communication, digital mediation, and easy access to the world of network information.

In the book *What is Virtual?*, Lévy starts by assuming that virtualization spans all areas of human life: today, a general virtualization movement affects not only information and communication, but also bodies, economic functioning, collective structures of sensitivity or the exercise of intelligence. According to Lévy, virtualization even reaches the ways of being together, the formation of “we”: virtual communities, virtual companies, virtual democracy, etc. (Lévy, 1999a, p. 7). The digitization of messages and the extension of cyberspace play an important role in the ongoing transformation. It is a background wave that largely overflows computerization (Lévy, 1999a, p. 7).

Communities are now virtual, although physical presence and interaction continues. But virtual communities are organized into telematic communication systems<sup>237</sup> that seem to not only satisfy the needs for interaction and belonging/presence in the public sphere (which is no longer necessarily physical now) but are preferred because they are more comfortable, mobile, immediate and look like a modern lifestyle. As Lévy points out (1999a, p. 19), thanks to communication and telepresence techniques, we can be here and there at the same time.

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<sup>236</sup> A “World-Wide Mind” will be, for Joseph N. Pelton (2000, p. 208), a global conscience.

<sup>237</sup> Systems that combine telecommunication and information technology or computing.

“Intellectual technologies and communication devices are experiencing, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, massive and radical changes. Consequently, cognitive ecologies are undergoing rapid and irreversible reorganization. [...] A new communication device, which we will call ‘communication of all with all’, appears within the very large de-territorialized communities as one of the main effects of the ongoing transformation. This can be experienced on the Internet, on bulletin boards, in electronic conferences or forums, in cooperative work or learning systems, in groupware or collective programs, in virtual worlds and in knowledge trees. In fact, cyberspace in the making phase facilitates large-scale non-mediatic communication that, in our opinion, constitutes a decisive advance for new, more evolved forms of collective intelligence.” (Lévy, 1999a, p. 90).<sup>238</sup>

In a period of rapid and profound technological development, when people are present most of the time in a digital environment and with virtual experiences and interactions, the perception of reality (not to mention “unreality” or “de-realization”) is influenced (modified) and fragmented (parceled) by the devices and means of communication. Therefore, we participate in a virtual reality, an augmented reality, or alternative reality. None of these “realities” is properly the reality, the physical and concrete, that is, the traditionally perceived as that which is external to the subject who perceives it; they are virtual environments produced by technological devices and in which we immerse.

Augmented reality is defined by the addition (therefore it is augmented) of virtual elements, data, or information in the environment (called “reality”) where we immerse and interact with (e.g. Pokemon Go). In *Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality: Myths and Realities*, Bruno Arnaldi, Pascal Guitton and Guillaume Moreau characterize augmented reality as follows:

“The goal of AR [augmented reality] is to enrich the perception and knowledge of a real environment by adding digital information relating to this environment. This information is most often visual, sometimes auditory and is rarely haptic. In most AR applications, the user visualizes synthetic images through glasses, headsets, video projectors or even through mobile phones/tablets. The distinction between these devices is based on the superimposition of information onto natural vision that the first three types of devices offer, while the fourth only offers remote viewing, which leads certain authors to exclude it from the field of AR.” (Arnaldi, Guitton & Moreau, 2018, p. xxvi).

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<sup>238</sup> My translation from the Spanish edition consulted *¿Qué es lo virtual? [What is Virtual?]* (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós).

As for virtual reality, it is defined by what is not and cannot be tangible, so, in common sense, it is the illusory, the unreal, or what has no concrete material existence, because the virtual is what is “de-territorialized”. Virtual reality is characterized by immersion, which allows us to interact with an environment composed of images produced by a computer. Through immersion, we enter (taking the initiative) or are transported (only mentally, when guided by images) to a virtual dimension or “world”, as when playing a computer game or watching a three-dimensional film with appropriate glasses (e.g. Google Glass). In *The VR Book: Human-Centered Design for Virtual Reality*, Jason Jerald says:

“Virtual reality (VR) can provide our minds with direct access to digital media in a way that seemingly has no limits. However, creating compelling VR experiences is an incredibly complex challenge. When VR is done well, the results are brilliant and pleasurable experiences that go beyond what we can do in the real world.” (Jerald, 2016, p. 1).

Virtual reality allows its user to perform virtually a task. The user believes that he is acting in the real world, as virtual reality generates and evokes that sensation. The technology “tricks” the brain, providing information identical to the information that the brain would perceive in the real environment:

“We will first and foremost remind ourselves that the objective of VR [virtual reality] is to allow the user to virtually execute a task while believing that they are executing it in the real world. To generate this sensation, the technology must “deceive the brain” by providing it with information identical to the information the brain would perceive in the real environment.” (Arnaldi, Guitton & Moreau, 2018, p. xxii).

The concept of “virtual reality” is paradoxical, it contradicts itself, because what is reality (i.e. the state or quality of being real) cannot be virtual. Virtual reality corresponds to “an artificial environment which is experienced through sensory stimuli<sup>239</sup> (as sights and sounds) provided by a computer and in which one’s actions partially determine what happens in the environment” (Jerald, 2016, p. 9).

As a rule, and as it is traditionally studied and understood, communication is thought of as interaction between two or more people. However, communication is an abstract and polysemic concept. In *The VR Book: Human-Centered Design for Virtual Reality*, Jason Jerald defines it as “the

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<sup>239</sup> Just as it happens with the perception of reality itself.

transfer of energy between two entities, even if just the cause and effect of one object colliding with another object:

Communication can also be between human and technology—an essential component and basis of VR [virtual reality]. VR design is concerned with the communication of how the virtual world works, how that world and its objects are controlled, and the relationship between user and content: ideally where users are focused on the experience rather than the technology.” (Jerald, 2016, p. 10).

Virtual reality is communication. Traditionally, communication is an interaction between two or more people. Now, with new technologies, communication becomes more abstract and is also the interaction between human and technology or simply the transfer of energy or information between two entities: human being *versus* machine; real people *versus* virtual people; human intelligence *versus* artificial intelligence; physical reality *versus* virtual reality, etc.

### 13.5. Questions for review and reflection

1. What are the characteristics of contemporary time? What is it to be contemporary?
2. How are contemporary societies? Are they better (in social, cultural, and communicational terms) than the more traditional societies that existed before the Internet?
3. Is there enough media literacy for ordinary audiences to be able to discern what is true from what is false in the information conveyed by the media?
4. Is electronic communication irreversible? Will electronic communication be the dominant form of communication in all societies soon? Will electronic communication be the height or quintessence of communication?
5. Does permanent interaction through screens and at a distance demarcate or assimilate the subject and the object?
6. Does the power of communication decrease, remain identical or increase with the use of new technologies and means of information and communication?
7. Is it possible and easy to distinguish reality from virtuality?





# CONCLUSIONS

“We are in a universe where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.”

(Baudrillard, 1983, p. 95).

Societies started a long and complex development process from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when a set of transformations (social, economic, political, and technological) required adaptations for the social structures and living conditions. The ways of operation and regulation of societies have been profoundly transformed. Together with this development process and this set of transformations in societies, an unprecedented field of study has emerged. This field was conducive to a science of the social, i.e. to Sociology as a specific study on the intelligibility of the social. Regardless of how abstract and embracing the social is or how it presents itself as an object of study, Sociology appears with this rational, systematic, ambitious, and necessary design: to know and understand the different aspects of social life and collective organization.

Sociology emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with modernity. It arises precisely as a response to the development of societies and social transformations, such as industrialization, urbanization, political revolutions, and the introduction of new ideas and ideals (democratic rights, freedoms, and guarantees). The thinkers of that time directed their attention to the aspects of societies and social transformations, namely the new problems that came from the complex process of modernization and development of societies. Thus, the institutionalization of Sociology as a science of the social occurs effectively after the Second World War, based on the fundamental principle of knowledge to be able to predict and control social phenomena and processes.

Despite the late advent of Sociology as a science, the themes and issues related to the social (collective ways of life; social integration, order, and interaction; social practices and behaviors; social phenomena and processes; relationships between individuals and between individuals and social institutions in a common/public space, etc.) were studied early by many authors, from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (the thinkers of Classical Greek Antiquity) to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (the thinkers of the Enlightenment). The

authors that are considered the effective founders of Sociology (Comte, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber) appear after these, but in a context favorable to the emergence of a new and unprecedented science devoted to understand social themes and issues and the new social phenomena.

After these two phases (the antecedents and the founders of Sociology) and considering the field and object of study too vast for a science of the social, there is an epistemological need to branch this science according to more specific areas. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, once again with the emergence and development of a social phenomenon/process (the mass media), the scientific relevance for a new branch of Sociology is recognized under the influence of these media: the Sociology of Communication (or Media Sociology). Mainly from the exponential role of television in consumption habits and in social attitudes and behaviors, Sociology of Communication emerges as a response to a scientific need: to understand the interactions and influences between the mass media and people. The means of communication are mass media and, therefore, the extension of the media in social structures broadens the influences of the media on people and, more broadly, on societies. These societies become mass societies through the effects of mass media. Therefore, there are two other interconnected phenomena (the mass media, on the one hand, and the massification of societies or mass societies, on the other hand) that are specific to Sociology of Communication.

After the emergence and development of the mass media and after noticing the immediate and massive consumption, influences, and effects of these media on people, the 20<sup>th</sup> century records another important social phenomenon for sociological study and understanding: the globalization.

The social phenomenon of globalization is related to another social phenomenon, which is also specific to the Sociology of Communication: virtual societies. Societies have never ceased to be social systems and structures. Now they become social systems and structures that are not subject to conventional patterns of dimension and interaction. Technological processes expand the offer of information devices, promoting their exponential and more diverse use through connections to computer networks.

Sociology of Communication is also interested in this new virtual or digital aspect of societies, demonstrating that this scientific branch remains relevant and current. Taking as an example the new media's recent field of action and the space for social interaction of virtual communities, Sociology of Communication makes a valid and original contribution to understand societies, the media (both mass media and social media), and their respective and permanent transformations. Sociology of Communication

encompasses an epistemological and comprehensive frame under development. Technological societies themselves are still evolving towards an uncertain, dynamic, and modern future of computer-mediated communication in cyberspace.

Therefore, Baudrillard's epigraph at the beginning of these conclusions is as pertinent and relevant as paradoxical: "We are in a universe where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 95).



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