

Cyberculture theory and the actuality of mass culture debate

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ABSTRACT

The 1990's were witness of a polemics about new media technologies that continues today as dispute about cyberculture's meaning. There are, in one side, some theorists that see in new media an advance that cuts off with linear and vertical communication. Contrasting with those, there are others that see in it a modern form to promote our cultural alienation. We argue in favor of culture industry thesis in this article, adopting a critical instance towards the subject, but at the same time thought if cyberculture contemporary theorists aren't victims of a long term problem and that has to do with the intellectual closeness from which modernity may be prisoner as "cultural" epoch, according to Martin Heidegger.

Keywords: Cyberculture; digital media; communication theory

Being the cyberculture a present day intellectual phenomenon, the works on it are establishing a field of study out of which we are able to typologically distinguish at least three major tendencies or approaches.

1. The first of them would be that of literature of information. It is not the one technically specialized, but has the goal of providing the reader with a broad view of a field and of enabling him to intervene based on one or another empirical and axiological instruction.
Examples: Nicholas Negroponte [1995], Douglas Rushkoff [1994] and Howard Rheingold [1993].
2. The next related approach would be the scientific one, recognized by a strong empiricist attempt by which cyberculture is reduced to its phenomena and then studied with broader or more restricted epistemic purpose. It involves, with or without pragmatic interest, the ethnographical, sociological and historical perspectives.
Examples Smith & Kollock (1999), Wellman & Hawthornthwaite (2002), Woolgar (2003) and Silver & Massanari (2006).
3. The last related approach is that of moral and political literature, which is written more or less using a journalistic accent. It is so even though it may be more

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elaborately reflexive and divided in two branches when it comes to its attitude in face of the meaning of digital technologies of communication.

- 3.1 A technophobic attitude gathers together the prosecuting attorneys of the phenomenon including especially scholars in literature and intellectuals with a humanistic background, as for example, Paul Virilio (1999) or Hervé Fischer (2004).
- 3.2 The technophile attitude unites the defense attorneys representing a group especially of professionals and researchers with connections to the computing and communication businesses as, for example, George Gilder (2001) and Ray Kurzweil (1999).

Without being properly a tendency, we include along the approaches we have enrolled one that we name critical, in order to add to the research on cyberculture phenomena with objectifying attitude, characteristic of the second line of approaches, a debate on the matters and challenges brought by such phenomena to a category that, epistemically, functions as their philosophical basis and that tries to bring them closer to the last one: the subject, the individual (cf., for example, Hillis, 1999; Rigaut, 2001; Mosco, 2004; Rüdiger, 2008; Streeter, 2011).

Taking this essentially analytic schema and considering that specific cases may blend more than one approach, what follows is an attempt to detail a little further the distinction between technophobes and technophiles indicated in item 3. To do that we go through the analysis of the most central ideas of some of their spokesmen, from the perspective of the theoretical mark that informs critical studies of cyberculture.

It is so that we first argue that the confrontation between the two mentioned attitudes is developed in at least two phases.

- Tracing back to the beginning of the 90's, the first of the phases has focused especially on the meaning of new technologies as we argue basing ourselves in the writings as those of Mark Slouka (1995) e George Gilder (1996).
- More contemporary, the second phase is known for bringing to date the issue of the meaning of cyberculture build with their support, as we argue basing ourselves in writings as those of Henry Jenkins (2006), Andrew Keen (2007) e Dan Gillmor (2005).

In the sequence we shall develop the comments on those points of view trying to identify their inner limits as a key to the understanding of cyberculture itself and of the bets placed on it. Our effort is based on thinking of our present situation pointed out by the critique

on the cultural industry, stated originally by Adorno and, according to our understanding, underlying the confrontation with cyberculture indicated by Lee Siegel (2008).

As a closure to the article we question, otherwise, if the case we are examining, the present intellectual debate on the meaning of cyberculture, is only intended to ponder the maximalist pretensions of such perspective as, in one hand it allows reinforcing the argument of the collapse of culture in times of advanced capitalism, on the other hand it shows signs that this era of cultural industry advances based on the reproduction of tensions between high and low, serious and light, popular and erudite, classical and dischargeable that were in the routes of we understood originally as culture.

In other words, we flirt with the idea that the highlighted dualities, although they are certain to have novelty, maybe it is now time for a broader historical and intellectual cycle. It is marked by a recurring same structure that transcends the record of the cultural industry, having in essence more of the epochal closure represented by modernity as Martin Heidegger has asserted.

I

As the records can inform us, we are to identify historically that the emergence of a whole communication apparatus is related not only to the debate over its impacts in social life but also to the controversy on the values of the contents that from such moment on are socially agencied. The debates that followed the arising of the press and of television, for example, unfold till the ones on the social meaning of cultural productions as sentimental romances and violent movies.

The internet as much as the phenomena that derive from it are not an exception.

George Gilder was one of the first to organize a global view of its social impact, arguing that communication driven computing have a liberating meaning for the individual. In *Life after television* (1990) he announced the upcoming of a new era, in which there would be no place for communication top-to-bottom tyranny, as shown in the empire of television. Each media stimulates a pattern of social relationship: the change brought by digital media leads us to a less standardised and more democratic time. Counting on it each person is able to improve himself in terms of his need for information, leisure habits and of his own initiatives.

In the author's perspective microinformatics has solved the problem of lack of information by creating a new abundance, making the access to mass media and to the ways of

working them easier. As optical fiber networks magnify it they create a telecosm, an unlimited that will change the word through communication (cf. Gilder, 2001). The author does not consider the internet as a ground for interaction among social agents, highlighting the creative potential *per se* of technological resources of a new era of telecommunication. The blind and passionate faith on them gets the author to underline especially its market potential to enterprises and how they make the access to markets easy to both clients and consumers.

He believes that television won't survive this new phase tending to be trapped in repetitious discourse focused on a vague compliment to technical means. Nevertheless he observes the cultural impact of all these processes. The writer incorporates the leftist discourse in a libertarian individualistic capitalism driven framework making but clarifies, reviewing his first work, that:

Life After Television indicates not only a technical revolution but a cultural rebellion: a change of authority, from the elite and established powers to creators and consumers. [According to the book] New technologies perform drastic changes in the cultural power imbalance. By altering the main target of commercial artwork of vulgar taste and sensationalism to special interests, hobbies, ambitions and artistic ambition, multimidiatic digital machines shall transform markets and upper the level of culture. It is only holding to these new opportunities that companies will be able to prevail and prosper (Gilder, 1994).

Although the anticipated collapse of enterprises has not yet been verified, there is no doubt that has been a considerable change to the scenario. Internet has created a global computer network and the popularization of computer equipments is allowing millions to become active subjects engaged in the communication process. Knowledge is now horizontally distributed proving the subject with more power in comparison to yesterday's vertical, centralized institutions. We are, at last, "entering an unprecedented era, based on individual choice – and that is a good thing", as Chris Anderson summarizes (2007, p. 168).

In opposition to the worshipping of this new phase in the building process of social life there are, for example, the ideas brought a few years later by Mark Slouka:

My question with digital revolution, to go straight to the point, is that it offers so little and demands so much. It offers information, massive information, and a new kind, abstract one, of connectivity [among human beings]. In exchange, though, it demands that we leave the physical world in favor of the virtual one. It is a bad deal, not only because it does not consider our biological needs but because it limits our autonomy (1995, p. 147).

According to Slouka, technologies of information throw us into an ever more unreal world and filled with fantasy and that tends to deprive us from the competences based on which

we have developed our humanity. In first place the expansion of the cyberspace threatens to deprive us from the feeling of belonging to someplace, providing abstract situations in which it doesn't matter knowing where we are anymore. In second place it allows us to create and to relate to each other through virtual identities that deprive us from a sense of reality and, thus, of the feeling of responsibility in respect of our behavior.

In third place, the process is inclined to replace concrete and individually responsible organizations by abstract and undifferentiated communities that impose the primacy "of the cybernetic notion of global organism, of human hive made by millions of interconnected computers" (1995, p. 103). At last, the risk of the cyberspace is abandoning the concern with physical reality: "lost in a hybrid and strange world of the net we may come to believe that the virtual settlements are real, that a described conflict is not different from a real one and that virtual sex is not less possible than the thing itself." (Ibid., p. 53).

According to the author, there is a desirable relationship between us and the world and that is the one going through the reality check: it is only this way we are able to know where we live, who we are, what our priorities are and to which context do we belong. These thoughts are not of a new age puritan or a retrograde luddite, but of people that wish to see the technological progress be put to service of the satisfaction of our true needs. The machines that are good for us are those that do not intend to replace real life by the virtual world, or that deny or try to obliterate our desire for self-sufficiency.

In sum, we can conclude that these authors have in common, regardless of the judgment made over the phenomenon, a reflection focused on the meaning of communication informatics, much more than on the contents that it puts into action. The humanism, in the first author's perspective, shares with the sensuality present in the perspective of the second one the belief that the focus of the debate should be the use of technical means. Digital technology itself is seen by one and the other as an agent for change although its sign is different, here negative, there favorable to the development of what we consider to be our humanity, be it under the moral perspective or the intellectual and economic one.

II

In recent years, meanwhile, the focus of the debate on new media has been shifted from being over the media to the content, from being over the technique to that of the culture emerging

with the Internet. The controversy was then centered in the meaning of formation experiences started through cyberculture. As the access to the internet was broadened, commentators' emphasis was shifted from the technology to the practices and the meaning that such technology has been bringing with its use among the public in its digital and every time more daily phase.

Henry Jenkins, a much prestigious academic and enterprise consultant, is one of the main spokesmen of what he himself calls *critical optimism* regarding new technologies of information. Having directly inherited the ideas that, in the past, made the fame of authors like Ian Chambers and John Fiske, he believes that conflict time is over. Communication enterprises need to work together with their clients because they are becoming content creators. The perspective that has emerged with the expansion of the use of personal computers connected to a network is, in many ways, one of a culture of convergence.

The way we understand it, convergence is a process at the same time institutional, top-to-bottom, and of consumers, bottom-to-top. Institutional convergence coexists with the one emerging from daily life. Communication enterprises are learning how to speed up the flow of content through delivery channels in order to broaden income opportunities, gain markets and reinforce consumer fidelity. Consumers are learning how to use communication technologies to place communication flows under greater control and are learning to interact with other consumers (2006, p. 18).

Looking at Pierre Levy's concept of cognitive ecology with a clear market accent, the researcher sees in cyberculture the adequate scenario to the rising of a moral economy of information, in which ground there are good reasons to believe in a freer, fairer and more democratic flow of ideas. Cyberculture, in other words, may be an enabling vehicle that, founded in the initiative of the masses, may influence the daily impact of our major political and economical institutions.

In the author's perspective, the lack of political content in the practices where this phenomenon matters is not relevant, because when they become a focus of conversation they "indicate the change of level by which common people become able to include their images and ideas into the political process" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 222). Through the internet a new sense of duty and shared expectations is being born regarding what is "a good citizenship inside a knowledge community" (Ibid., p. 255).

Dan Gillmor had developed such perspective in *Nós, a mídia (We, the media)* (2005). The author understands that now, for the first time in history, anyone with a computer and a connection with the internet can be the owner of his own communication enterprise. From now

on, anyone can produce and publish news, he cherishes (Ibid., p. 41). The result is breaking the monopoly that journalism enterprises would have in this matter. People are not only being able to produce their own information but they are also redirecting themselves towards these new sources of knowledge that they themselves have become with the development of new technologies of communication. “Professional journalists continue to be perform an important role and, I hope it stays like that, but a broadened circle of interested people is emerging [interested in producing and spreading journalistic like material]” (Ibid., p. 80).

Taking examples that range from the simpler to the caricaturesque, as bloggers revealed the password to download music ciphered in Pepsi-Cola bottles (2005, p. 51), the author comments on the new advertising scenario along the emergence of the Internet. He worships what would be its subjects: readers, the old passive receptors of information, according to Gillmor. It is clear, the author observes, that the journalistic professional activity involves much more than having access to technical means regardless of the importance of its popularization. But even such activity will be improved with the growing intervention of these subjects because “readers make a better journalist, since they find out my mistakes, they tell me what I did not see and help me to capture the subtleties [of a given event]” (Ibid., p. 140).

Mentioning briefly the economic control perpetrated by enterprises (Ibid., p. 219), the author sums up his thesis stating that there is an information democratization process in progress that, following the adequate logic, personal sites can be vehicles to the building of a society with better civic consciousness. In blogs there is the danger of missing out on the journalistic principles, but what is more important is elsewhere, in the concrete emergence of the utopia that public knowledge can be born from citizen reporters correcting each other mutually (Ibid., p. 185).

To him and Jenkins, in sum, digital revolution takes organizations to decrease in power in favor of the public and in the end of communication specialists. The most important principle gained with cyberculture is that the public determines the shape and content of the medium, structures and controls communication.

III

Erik Neveu properly indicates that the false step given by mythology is very frequently known to their antipodes as well. The supposed anti mythologies are usually satisfied with an axiological

polarity inversion when approaching the communicational phenomena. After all, the author explains, their perpetrators share with the thinkers of the first common presuppositions, as the belief in the *omnipotence of technological determinisms*, a “blindness in relation to the evolutions in social morphology that makes the changes in great [communicational] imaginary referents possible” (Neveu, 2006, p. 77).

In the cyberculture environment that has been quite the case when it comes to its intellectual debate. In response to the boosterism over the phenomenon many voices have raised themselves in contestation to what is known as web 2.0. To them as well the problem is not with the net anymore but with the culture emerging from it, as their enthusiasts say. In this case, however, the appropriation of the right to speak, on the opposite direction of what was intended, does not have a positive sign, as well indicate the thinking of Jeron Lanier (2009) and Andrew Keen (2006).

Keen, for example, stands out as the last generation cultural conservative author, to whom it would be our “most relevant moral responsibility to protect traditional media from the worshiping of the amateur” (2006, p. 204). The matter of cyberculture would be stimulating gratuity and it is killing the professionalism and the rules that in relation to literary, artistic and intellectual production “not only provide it with an ethical standard but also assure a quality level to the public” (2006, p. 77).

Considering the line of analysis started by Neil Postman (1994), the problem with technological revolution is, to the author, the fact that it perpetrates a massification of cultural activities based in total mediocrity as especially the blogosphere presents to us, being the main expression of an era in which content is user generated. The moral structure of our society would be eroded because the web “gives the impression that we can live our most degraded instincts and it allows us to succumb to our most destructive addictions” (1995, p. 163). In the extreme, the cybercultural practices not only steal advertisers from traditional vehicles and extinguishes ethical responsible professionalism, but “they are creating a generation of computer robbers according to which all net content is a common property” (Ibid., p. 143).

Taking a closer look, the author believes that the cyberspace is becoming a scenario ruled by hiperssexualized young people, identity stealers, compulsive gamblers and other addicted creatures. This is not only eroding our shared values but ending the culture of professionalism of which they begin to depend on with modernity triumph. Specialized

companies and professional knowledge continue to “be necessary in helping us to set apart what is important from what is not, what is believable from what is trustable, what is worth of spending our time with from senseless noise, that can be ignored without further consequences” (1995, p. 45)

After all, while a newspaper or recording company, for example, follows professional standards and criteria watching over or regulating quality, blogs and amateur service providing sites are based on opinions with no control. The wish for self promotion and popularity achievement ruling on them lead to lowering moral and cultural standards and, most of all, to the weakening of traditional media, like newspapers, editors, record companies and even publicity agencies. (Ibid., p. 62-63).

Web 2.0, in sum, stimulates a kind of democratization that undermines truth, empties civic discourse and lowers talent putting to risk “the future of our cultural institutions” (Ibid., p. 15). Cyberculture is based on a narcissist circuit by which people forget that to only look for information in accordance to one’s beliefs and opinions does not represent a cognitive advance but yet losing touch with more neutral and objective facts, or diverse ones, that favor enlightened conversation or a well informed debate (Ibid., p. 83).

Taking that into consideration he concludes in a conservative way,

Our challenge is to protect the legacy left by our prevailing media and two hundred years of intellectual property rights within the context of digital technology of the XXIth century. Our objective should be to preserve our culture and our values without excluding the benefits provided today by the internet. We need to find out a way to enjoy the best of the digital future without destroying the institutions of the past” (Ibid., p. 185).

Like Keen, Jaron Lanier refuses the label of luddite and reinforces its belief in the freeing power of new technologies. He attacks, tough, with the same passion the massive appropriation and the daily practices that their resources enable as they enter the web 2.0 era. To him, *Google*, *Orkut*, *Youtube* and *RapidShare* are mechanisms that instead of generating social networks are extinguishing a creative and intellectual middle class, “killing the old media” (2010, p. 122). Web portals like these get rich at the expenses of the ones that create and provide them with the best content. The systematic process of joining content, which is their characteristic, prepares for the moment that even professionals specialized in computing will see their opportunities reduced as a result of free collaboration offered by internet gatherings.

Advocating for what is called technological humanism, the ex-prophet of virtual reality argues now that the ordinary appropriation of digital media must be reviewed:

I believe, most of all, that people shouldn't be reduced to pure mechanisms and that the best way to do this is believing that the engines at our disposal are lifeless instruments, useful only because people have the amazing ability of making meaningful communication amongst each other (2010, p. 154).

The recently established certainty that information must freely flow is an ideology and it hides the fact that it is not free *per se*. Meaning that what matters in this issue are people and their attitude. When the regulating standard is an individual responsibility everyone tends to loose in the perspective of a broader dynamic. Individual expression, in cyberculture, is most frequently copied, mixed, recovered by others according to some advertising schema.

Online culture is taken by trivial *mashups*² of the culture that preceded its emergence and by the ritual celebration of worshiping of their idols that only responds to the decayed products of centralized mass culture. (2010, p. 86).

The anonymous and irresponsible collectivity enabled by cyberculture is killing creative and individual expression. The quick and superficial reading that is stimulated in most of its environments is correlated to the trivial and repetitive content that fills them. People are encouraged to be participative but in a mechanical way, joining for or against like groups instead of going deeper into the matter to then build their own point of view based on reflection. The overall prevailing spirit is that of the crowds and it is as an anonymous collectivity that they tend to constrain our ability to offer alternative interpretations, to repress minority points of view.

The adepts of the convergence and collaborative networks defenders love to refer to its creative side, but the fact is that, in general, creations brought as example are really subproducts or a legacy of technologies born in the middle of fields more or less closed down, where some individuals were creating something new and working carefully on it before making it available to the public, as in the case of UNIX, that originated LINUX.

The author believes that the group enclosure, the intellectual restriction and holding the secret to a craft are necessary items, at least partially, to the creating of something relevant and new in the historical world. That is what free information principle irrational believers ignore as they publicize a cheap world that threatens to extinguish responsible individualism and thus culture really creative groups: a collective can copy UNIX but not invent iPhone.

² A *mashup* is a website or a web application that gathers content from more than one source to create a new complete service. N.E.

The metaphysical statement that information has to be completely free is, for that reason and ultimately, part of a new religious belief. Its most radical adepts are all the ones expecting to become immortals someday converting themselves into an algorithm of the global computer network and making culture restricted to what the technology world determines.

The real objective of all this is not to make life easier to people but to promote a new philosophy: the one in which the computer becomes a new way of life that is able to understand people better than they can understand themselves (Lanier, 2010, p. 28).

IV

Lee Siegel, at first sight, follows these last footsteps, also pondering that, to use the words of the previously quoted author, “democratization of information may rapidly degrade into a radical egalitarianism corruptive to the intelligence” (Keen, 2006, p. 186). In fact, it goes much further in the analysis of cyberculture, though. He highlights how such process depends on capitalist dynamics in terms that are related to the critique agenda in relation to the cultural industry as originally proposed by Adorno. The author criticizes the net as ideology in order to show the problems within its most central categories (as interactivity and participation).

In opposition to Keen and Lanier, Siegel realizes that cyberculture, in whatever perspective, is essentially a more advanced collective phase of a process of consciousness colonization perpetrated by the market and that is present already in traditional media professionalism. The spirit that drives the wisdom of the masses, in this new scenario, is the same that has motivated economical power of big companies for a long time. To critically point out the categories of its expression through the analysis of what spokesmen tell us or of its own statements seems to be the greater virtue of *Against the machine* (2008).

According to the author, the prophets of cyberculture argue that thanks to it we are entering an era of demassification. We are now able to make our own choices and freely build our personality. However, “what it is really creating is an even stronger way of homogenization” (Siegel, 2008, p. 67). To the author it is abusive to say we are moving from the condition of being passive receptors to become independent content producers. Simply because now with new media of communication we are able to share our ideas and images with people. In fact we observe then that our “leisure time is featured like a rational work to the market, measurable and conscious. [Taking a good look] you are [just] adapting your privacy moments to potential buyers” (Ibid., p. 69-70).

Siegel sounds naïve when he suggests that only with the web leisure is blended to business (Ibid., p. 61), that only now we are learning to represent ourselves to consumption (Ibid., p. 65). However he is able to hit the target when comments on the way digital culture is converting itself in a massive process of abstraction of the individual choice. The placing of individual choice as a value *per se*, departed from its objective context, of what is at stake in it, just shadows the fact that what really happens in this case is only “the adherence to familiar and well established formulas and styles of self-representation that are able to bring us popularity” (Ibid., p. 66-67).

In this sense cyberculture can be understood as an expression of mass culture whose characteristic is the drive for popularity based on market standards of audience gathering. “Pop culture has completely merged with the commercial one. The amazement through imagination has opened room to ego gratification. The vicarious transposition of the self was replaced by... your own self” (Ibid., p. 122).

According to Keen and Lanier, anonymous collectiveness in cyberculture has become the reference on what is true and what is not. It is the principle that rules interaction and socialization processes. Cultural conservativeness stops it from seeing that the establishment of popularity as value criterion, however, is something abstract if detached from its proper historical context. Siegel has the virtue of not falling for such a mistake, showing, even if in a less elaborated way, how the phenomenon fits a market rationality expansion over the daily life agency guided by the expression of individuality.

The rebellion of the masses against the cultural authority of celebrities found in cyberculture, observes the author, is based on the same category in which they are build: having popularity in the market communication has turned into.

Guiding the popularity gospel is a plea so that each one of us replaces the much inflated icons by the overflowing feeling of ourselves – have we or not the talent and the discipline [to be one] (Siegel, 2008, p. 119).

The fetishism related to the goods that is underlying it all may even be more degraded than what is imposed until now through the cultural industry. The participative and interactive practices that work as a massage to the ego and to achieve being a celebrity are inclined to create in fact a form of worthless subject, “that will pay to read their own texts and the answers made by the public” (2008, p. 138).

For that reason the most central concern in the cyberculture environment, watching it closely, wouldn't be in relation to creativity as their advertisers state but with individual expression since we depart from the presupposition that being yourself is enough to speaking to others and be worth of attention:

You don't have to be funny to be a comedian; all you have to do is to present yourself as one and insist that you are making a mockery. You don't have to show a perceptive, synthesizing and verbally quick mind to be a journalist. All you have to do is present yourself as a journalist and insist, in your blog for example, that you are practicing journalism (Ibid., p. 139).

To Siegel, in sum, cyberculture represents a rebellion of the masses against all form of hierarchy and authority, especially those based on knowledge and specialization. Its target is in the egalitarianism down to market terms and that just speaks in the name of democracy. Culture is a normative concept that presupposes authority to the risk of missing out a critical independent spirit without what is not possible to talk about it, as Adorno would say.

That is why, for example, newspapers are less devious [subjectively] regardless of all commercial pressures, as for their different centers of power, checking, and balancing. They are also less likely to suffer with hostile influences than the unlimited will and ego of a blogger's code (Ibid., p. 141).

V

Martin Heidegger has thought over the modern era and this may be useful to us if maybe framing it in a time period we can establish the previously debate presented. According to the philosopher modern times are characterized for compounding a unit, not dialectic, among many categories historically original, as, for example, statism and privatism, individualism and collectivism. But also, we could add in a legitimate way, between light and serious art, popular and erudite cultures.

Modernity would constitutively swing between both of these poles without having a solution in the horizon in favor of one or another, while: the essential would be the alternation and necessary game between categories if we base ourselves on what Heidegger states ([1995], p. 75-87) about other polarizations.

The theoretical reflection on cyberculture may be understood in reference to such a context, bringing it to a time in which not only our work is seen and realized as culture but culture since its origins can be understood as divided by a difference between the light and the

serious, the quick and the erudite, the classical and the dischargeable (cf. Lowenthal [1954]; Brantlinger, 1983; Burke, 1989).

According to Heidegger (op. cit.) it so happens that the practice of certain values, through which man cares for what is proper and free, is effective as one enters a game with no perspective of resolution. We become prisoners of a system usually driven by the continuing differentiation of values. The care that culture inspires and the interest it arouses result that culture establishes a field that not only refracts in many lines of action but leaves its meaning to be reflexively found in many perspectives.

As the consciousness advances, the work is thrown back and leisure differentiates itself a debate is established over the value and the impact of such practices in human life when they are stimulated by the contradictions itself originated from its dependence to the fortune of market economy. In the past we have stated that it has gathered the book and the movies, literature and film, not to mention television. Lately it involves digital technology and the expressions of cyberculture as we may find in the spokesman and interpreters.

Siegel indicates how the perspective of the critique over the cultural industry fits his analysis and his understanding about it but wouldn't it be revealing or even outstanding the fact that the debate on its meaning is not in essence more than the reviewing of those quoted above and that in general line would trace us back to the XVIIth century?

Since the internet began to spread itself as a daily resource for communication, in the middle 90's a public and academic debate on the nature and meaning of cyberculture has flourished. The phenomenon would be understood historically in our perspective through the convergence of cybernetic thinking and communication computing. The first was intellectually associated to the structure of a popular culture that has for a long time been organized according to the schema of what was called cultural industry by Theodor Adorno.

When technological progress and capital expansion converge towards the profiteering from communication computing field and, this way, digital apparatus are converted in mass consumption goods, the basis are set for the expansion of cyberculture, for the colonization of cyberspace through the practices and schemas of cultural industry. It has been for almost over a century converted into a systemic principle to the building of our social and historical world.

Cyberculture is really a recent phenomenon whose immediate meaning, however, gather few novelty from a historical point of view. The up-to-date technological gears that move it do

not coincide with the trivial nature of the actions related to it, with the inertia in its spiritual contents and the banality of most of the attitudes that underlie it. Upcoming practices that these gears entail usually resort to old cultural formulas. In sum, the reunion of all those elements, formulas, practices and technical means could be seen quite as the exercise of what was known as cultural industry in the recently emerged cyberculture realm.

Norbert Winner has proposed in the end of World War II western moral and intellectual investment in a new science or way of thinking, the cybernetic one, according to which our main social issues and political disputes could be solved technically, with the functional sublimation of the human into machine automatisms. The proposal has been well succeeded with the growing support of advanced technological research but also the support of politic, military and economic interests worried in exploiting and controlling collective life conditions in a market economy tracing a massification path.

That is why cyberculture corresponds to the phase in which such convergence leaves the scope of specialized content and starts to be worked from the bottom, thanks to the transformation of computers into domestic equipments. Nowadays as they are portable they are converted into a platform or into a democratic mores phenomenon in the systemic line of flight and molecular expression of capitalist society.

When we lose the sight of this and thinking of this subject stays restricted to seeing it only as a place for freedom and participation or, on the contrary, restricted to fighting it in the name of values and realities bound to be overcome – which is the case in some of the authors quoted above – the discourse takes on an ideological tone. Only with a more careful context exam and of the meaning of such articulation and its practices we believe its possible to perform a more critic, profound and wide range historical problematization of what is identified as cyberculture.

In anyway, though, the question remains if this articulation will be enough to theoretically account the phenomenon. If the cultural industry hypothesis predicts the fusion between the images of erudite culture to those of popular culture performing a marked synthesis for the technological good, it is a fact that even in an advanced phase of the process – the one represented by cyberculture, place to the triumph of the masses – such synthesis has not been successful in suppressing a notion of hierarchy that pathetically, it is true, reflects or is reflected

in thoughts as those offered by Henry Jenkins as much as Andrew Keen from the contradiction between high and low, trivial and valuable.

Leo Lowenthal has stated in 1954, during a new peak of a controversy started centuries ago, that

The debate over popular culture and over the range of mass media would continue to go round until a really new and systematic effort [was made] in order to end the prevailing confusion in the field and provided a more realistic debate to its respect ([1954] 1984, p. 55).

The recovering of a dispute born with modern times, man time, the controversies over the meaning of cyberculture as the one of digital technologies themselves maybe give us reason to think that as much as there are efforts on such direction the goal of overcoming them cannot be achieved as long the world is not a machine and our word keeps in touch with what makes us questioning and thinking beings.

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