

CULTURAL PROCESSES ON THE NET

Perspectives for a digital cultural policy

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It is – wants to be – the natural child of the network culture which nourishes it and consequently does not pretend to formulate answers but merely to suggest connections.

INTRODUCTION

“A good futurist is one who can predict the present”

Bruce Sterling.

To talk about culture in the context of the Web 2.0 has become a commonplace occurrence faced with diverse obstacles.

The first is tautological in nature, due to the intrinsically cultural dimension of the web 2.0 concept. Oftentimes, the discussions surrounding this phenomenon – in favour or against, revolutionary or opportunistic, marketing strategy or new paradigm – base their arguments on technical questions that debate the characteristics of the tools that make it possible. Second generation, pro-user, interactive tools - here again the terminology is prolific – that have, in short, made it possible for the average Internet user to participate actively in something that has been accompanying digital culture since its origins: the decentralised collaboration and exchange of knowledge. The problem is not whether the web 2.0 is intrinsically different but rather to what extent these new interaction possibilities can modify our habits and behaviour on and offline. In other words, *create* culture. From this point of view, the web 2.0 (or second generation) cannot be analysed only on the basis of a set of social software technologies but rather in terms of its *meme* dimension. In other words, in terms of a *cognitive replication unit* with the ability to represent the current changes and give them a charter of legitimacy as cultural transformation elements.

The second obstacle is the polysemic dimension of the term “culture” which conditions the manner in which one approaches the relationship between cultural change and technological intervention. Hence, from the art world people imagine the possibilities for the creative exploitation of these new media – once again, with a long list of terms which may not withstand the test of time: *net art*, *media art*, *new media art*, *network art*, *blog art*, to name just a few – and discuss the models for exhibiting and conserving them. Cultural law and culture management focus on the problems associated with the digitalisation of media and the rights of intermediaries, consumers and creators. The private cultural sector – cultural industries and media conglomerates - focus on the problems associated with the sectorial exploitation of digital cultural property (arte, cinema, music, editorial sector, video games, the media and other forms of multimedia entertainment) and with some hesitation explores the ways in which these technological changes can be adapted, optimising resources and creating products adapted to digital consumption habits. In the midst of it all, the discourses on “free culture” extol the need to guarantee open access to cognitive production resources and computer codes. Finally, cultural studies warn of the new forms of exclusion and invisibility accompanying the informational economy.

When we talk about digital culture, what is the idea of culture we are using? Is it synonymous with “cultural property”, identifiable and crystallised, the fruit of formal education? Or the set of processes which give meaning to social life? Since the early twentieth century, anthropology and philosophy have been trying to distinguish between two concepts, the objectual and processual, and to emphasise the limitations, from a social science standpoint, of viewing cultura as merely the *product of a process* rather than a *process in and of itself*. In the different approaches to digital culture, there are still some openly objectual ones that assimilate the new practices with a “set of digital cultural goods” which are therefore able to be exhibited, conserved and merchandised as though they were definitive and identifiable works. Consequently, the implications of the new generation web for the art world are analysed on the basis of specific technological innovations that add new supports for creating or distributing art without modifying either the content or the socio-semiotic environment in which the “artistic” gesture is produced.

On the contrary, processual approaches start from the socio-semiotic nature of culture and the consideration of the work of art not as an object in and of itself but rather as a social product, the result of a certain conjugation of forces. From this point of view, culture is identified with a group of relations involving the production,

circulation and consumption of meanings in social life, marked by a socially dynamic context in which *supports, contents, agents and uses* are permanently negotiating relationships of meaning which may never be complete. Hence, technical innovations are analysed as *factors of sociality and meaning* present in the cultural processes from the origin and not merely as more or less effective or “revolutionary” modes of transmission.

Except in the case of education (where culture is contemplated as part of a process that is related to sociality), by and large public policies take an exclusively objectual view of cultural phenomena: digitalisation of collections (museums, archives, libraries), technological literacy programmes (focusing on the acquisition of technical knowledge but not on the investigation of new techno-cultural forms) or investment infrastructure (networks, applications and computer equipment). For the most part, they have been and continue to be actions intended to foster the production of cultural objects and their conservation, more concerned with crystallising the work of art (and all of the mythology that surrounds it such as authorship, exhibition, archive or collectionism) than the underlying social processes.

The aim of this text is to propose some lines of thought that will help to move the central theme of the debate *from objects to processes*, which is where the relations of sociality and meaning that determine cultural change reside. This approach is not exclusive to the digital environment - or, of course, to the web 2.0 super meme – but rather is applicable to any past or present cultural form. The socio-semiotic conception proposes an integral (and disciplinarily borderline) perspective in which the digital revolution is interpreted in light of an entire spectrum of contemporary social transformations marked by economic tertiarisation (and even the appearance of a fourth sector dedicated to the commercialisation of meanings), the weakening of the cultural references of modernity and the semiotic capacity of technology. By understanding culture in this way, the conceptual horizon for contemplating the relationship between culture and the new generation web is broadened considerably, both in terms of studying the intersections between the new web and technology and the possibility of articulating transversal policies to accompany the new forums of socialisation and production of meaning in the digital age.

CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY AND HISTORICAL CHANGE

The new generation web cannot be analysed without taking into account the advent of the information society associated with the economic, political and

cultural transformations of the final decades of the twentieth century. In general, the concept of *informationism* is used to denote a *change of paradigm* in the socio-economic organisation of countries with advanced capitalism systems marked by the emergence of cognitive capital as the driving force behind the economy and the exponential development of information and communication technologies that are more highly perfected with each passing day.

To a greater or lesser extent, all human societies have been information societies based on the production and consumption of signs, particularly starting with the creation of the modern state, supported by the management of information through a complex bureaucratic organisation. But now, as Castells points out, “*for the first time in history, the human mind is a direct productive force, not merely a decisive element in the production system*”¹.

The term technology emerged in the eighteenth century as a result of the interaction between techno-scientific advances and the emergence of the productive systems of the first industrial revolution. Since the beginning, then, it has been closely related to the rise of *industrialism* as a model of society and at the service of its needs. Unlike science, which responds more to the will of abstract knowledge (although this does not make it less dependent social and ideological dynamics) technology is decidedly more operative and practical. Due to its keen ability to penetrate human activity, technology is not an autonomous device that manifests itself in specific innovations but rather inscribed in the dynamics of social processes: its power relationships, its organisation of productive factors and how its recipients use it.

For Mattelart², the idea of society as a network interconnected through techno-scientific mechanisms is prior to the so-called “information revolution”. According to this author, the *integral* and *systematic* articulation of all human realities through information flows circulating through a mesh of interconnected nodes (tables, databases, models, protocols or standards) is the natural result of the modernisation that began in the seventeenth century. Its guiding principles, from a practical point of view, would be the operating requirements of the capitalist market economy and the management of the society that supports it. From a theoretical-ideological standpoint, it would be the establishment of a way of viewing the world based on progress, science and what this author refers to as the “*romanticism of numbers*”.

One of the elements that characterises societies to which capitalism came late is precisely the application of industrial logic to all areas of human activity, including the implementation of affections and meanings. Hence, the contemporary evolution of culture is marked by that reciprocal movement that attracts two traditionally autonomous spheres: one economic-industrial (associated with values of use and change) and the other cultural (which focuses on the production of sign and symbol values). This displacement alters the rightful place of culture and redefines its position in respect of society, experience and life.

The artistic avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, such as those who espoused the Dada movement, were the first to note this curious fusion and its consequences for the art world. But it was primarily starting with the crisis (social and economic but also the value crisis) provoked by the Second World War when some European authors began to analyse the implications in more detail. They all started from the same premise: the cultural event cannot be analysed separately from the society that produces it. The place where the possibilities of social transformation come into play is no longer that of the political economy (as Marxist currents would think) but is increasingly found in the spaces where the mechanisms of meaning circulate. The data then shifts to cultural industries, mass communication media and the new middle class being lifted up by the consumer society.

This alliance between the register of the economy and those of symbolic production characteristic of the information society would be one of the principal indicators of cognitive capitalism, heir to the concept of *general intellect* or *intellectualism of the masses* which Marx would coin in 1863 in a stroke of intuition. In his "Fragment on Machines"³, Marx noted the growing application of science to the productive process, objectivated in the system of machines, so that "*general social knowledge has become an immediate productive force*". Along these same lines, years later, Guy Debord⁴ would affirm that: "*the spectacle is human communication transformed into merchandise*". This means that the mass media and cultural industries, which constitute one of the greatest sources of the creation of wealth in the global economy, trade in the human ability to communicate and the verbal and symbolic language as such. The spectacle is the characteristic product of cultural and knowledge industries. But within the context of post-Fordist productive organisation, human communication becomes an essential ingredient for productive cooperation that goes beyond its own sphere (that of cultural and similar industries) and affects the entire economy. "*The spectacle then has a dual nature: the specific product*

of a particular industry and the quintessence of the production mode overall."⁵.

And the productive forces that create the spectacle are increasingly the linguistic-communicative competencies and the *general intellect*. In the opinion of J. L. Brea, in "cultural capitalism" (which would be a specific form of the new economy), there is a collision of the "*economic-productive system and the subsystem of cultural and representative practices*"⁶. In other words, the processes of cultural capitalism occur when the economic-quantitative logic expands its scope of action and takes over fields traditionally beyond its reach, such as the production of identities and meanings.

In relation to the mercantilisation of everything social, a new type of superficiality emerges in the most literal sense of the word which makes modern ways of thinking about culture archaic. In the opinion of Jameson⁷, this has led to "*a new kingdom for the supreme sense of the contemporary age which is visuality*". A society centred on images transforms what is real into a "*collection of pseudo-events*" that intensifies the logic of capitalism. This produces a "*death of the tragic*"⁸ that dismantles the "*quasi-autonomy*" enjoyed up to that point by culture⁹. José Luis Brea goes so far as to note the emergency of a *fourth sector* composed of *subjectivity industries*¹⁰ that respond to social demands in the areas of mental and emotional life. Jameson insists that this transformation of the cultural sphere is not limited merely to a question of contents or to the activities that are the object of mercantile exploitation. He notes that there is "*a more fundamental mutation of the objective world itself, converted into a set of texts or simulations*". The value of change associated with the spectacle is generalised to the point where all memory of the value of use fades away. Images, converted into the final form of mercantile reification, takes the form of a *sham* culture based on the production and distribution of identical copies of originals that never existed. This transformation of the place of culture affects modes of abstract thinking "*Nowadays, abstraction is no longer that of the map, of the double, of the mirror or of the concept. Simulation does not correspond to a territory, a reference, a substance, but rather the model-based generation of something real without origin or reality: hyperreal.*"

APPLIED TECHNOLOGIES AND COGNITIVE TECHNOLOGIES

To address the relationship between culture and technology from a socio-semiotic perspective presupposes defining the concept of technology itself, distinguishing between *applied technologies* (like the printing press, the telegraph, the television or the Internet) and *cognitive technologies* (like the alphabet, the system of thought

inherited from the Enlightenment or the new forms of knowledge associated with the web 2.0).

In the history of human knowledge, the emergence of the alphabet meant the appearance of a cognitive technology that transformed human communication and separated written communication from the visual system of symbols, relegated to the world of arts and liturgy¹¹. With the invention and dissemination of the printing press, written culture was established as an intellectual artefact of learning, description, explanation and modification of the world around us. Hence, almost all social acts are accompanied by a written register that validates them and situates them in reality. Many years of training are dedicated to the development of the reading and writing skills which will be key instruments in the acquisition of formal knowledge. But writing, which we situate "*in a central place in our conception of ourselves as people in possession of culture*"¹², is nothing but an accumulation of suppositions which are the basis for many of the myths of western culture: from the supposed superiority of written cultures over oral ones to the relationship between literacy and economic development.

As McLuhan indicates, "*using a sign stripped of meaning linked to a sound stripped of meaning, we have built the shape and sense of western man*"¹³. Along with other authors from the Toronto School, he questions the psychological theories that associate writing and mental function, literacy and the capacity for cognitive development. In his opinion, the cultural differences between the peoples of oral tradition and those of written tradition can be explained in terms of *communication technologies*, i.e., in the manner in which applied and cognitive technologies are combined in certain social organisations.

In his history of reading between the ninth and eighteenth centuries (i.e. in the transition of written culture as the patrimony of just a few to its proliferation as a popular habit), Roger Chartier¹⁴ divides it into three levels. The first level would be that of an intrinsic analysis of works that focuses on style, content and discourse, ahistorical and disconnected from the economic, political and social conditions of the time when they were created. The second would consist of the formats which serve as the vehicle for the intrinsic content of the works, i.e., the media which have historically been used to transmit them and make them objects of consumption and identification (material, typography, size, shape, illustrations, etc.) And finally, the practices and uses through which the works are received and internalised

(reading aloud; solitary, intellectual, professional, intensive and extensive reading...). Chartier's theory is that in order to understand the way in which the multiplied circulation of the printed word transformed the canons of sociability and thinking of societies of the Ancient Regime, the study of it cannot be confined to an ahistorical and autonomous analysis of the works but must incorporate the external conditions that had an impact not only on the contents but also on the transmission conditions. Unlike a purely semantic and structuralist conception which considers that the public is faced with an abstract, ideal, intellectual work stripped of materialism, Chartier maintains that the technological and social mechanisms of production, transmission and reception determine their meaning. In written culture, these devices include the author's writing strategies, editorial and printing decisions and social reading practices. And the way in which they are articulated creates a space which is where the overall and historically situated meaning of the work is located. Changes in formal mores affecting the presentation of writing modify their register of reference and their codes of interpretation. With the triumph of whites over blacks, for example, the publishers of the Ancient Regime decided that dividing the page into paragraphs and sections would facilitate the reception of the discourse by the less knowledgeable public. By facilitating access to the work by new communities of readers, not only did they open up the commercial perspectives for their businesses but they also began to *suggest* a certain way of reading and understanding the works. Thus, the evolution of manufacturing and reproduction techniques, the transformation of forms and supports permitted unprecedented appropriations and creating new uses, new publics and new contents.

As we know, the digital culture brings with it an alteration of the *factors in the production of meaning* in the context of a global and technological cognitive economy and an immaterial, decentralised environment that resists hierarchical organisation, in which millions of signals which can be stored, hypertextual and infinitely reproducible, circulate leaving a trail. Their extensive use configures a reticular architectural space organised in nodes that can be travelled non-linearly through multiple pages, folds and interconnections. It also creates a relational and socialisation environment in which notions as disparate as those of the producer and the consumer, original and copy, and even fundamental categories of modern thought as private space and public space are confused.

With the rise of multimedia language, which incorporates hypertext, images and sounds, a new oral form appears in which different forms of communication,

previously separated into different domains of the human mind, converge to influence social relations and knowledge creation processes. But beyond its information transmission function, digital language (binary code or multimedia) is a space of action and reaction with the capacity to intervene in what is real, “*establishing or reconfiguring new relations, opening or closing universes of meaning, channelling modes of action and reflection*”¹⁵.

In the “Manifest for Cyborgs”, Donna Haraway notes that¹⁶: “*The dividing line between myth and tool, between instrument and concept (...) is permeable. Moreover, myth and tool are mutually constituted*”. According to this author, the technological determination is an open space for the game of writing and reading the world. In her opinion, technologies and scientific discourse can be understood in part as *formalisations* of the social relations that constitute them, but must also be seen as *instruments* for validating meanings. Furthermore, the Foucaultian concept of technologies reveals the manner in which power is articulated in the framework of social relations, cultural grammar, everyday practices and institutions¹⁷. Foucault reminds us that some machines have been operating so long in reality that they have produced orders and structures which we consider normal – *normalised* – while others that burst into the social context produce rejection or excitement about the changes they anticipate. In any case, we live among multiple technological systems that define and delimit *what we are and what we can do*. In Barandiarán’s opinion, new technologies are added to the pre-existing disciplinary technological systems and redefine the power structure. In the information society, “*cultural-institutional technologies and electronic-informational technologies are merged; furthermore, the technologies of production, the systems of signs, of power and of «I» are closely interwoven.*”¹⁸

THE ARTIST AS NETWORKER

One of the principal contributions of *media art* to the world of art is its capacity to approach art and communication jointly, one of the most recurring problems in contemporary creation. Works of *media art* often incorporate “*hybrid spaces*” that gather inside them a multitude of creative, formative and informative proposals without making distinctions between the frontiers of the two disciplines. The Uruguayan artist Clemente Padín¹⁹ uses the concept of *network* to express the way in which the connection between art and communication, characteristic of media art, are linked to the processes of meaning in the contemporary world: “*The network is the alternative art that puts the accent on communication. Communication is the*

message. The network emphasises art as a product of communication, the fruit of human toil (the “work”) and as a weft of relations between communicators, joined on the network, the circuit that interconnects them (the “net”). The same as a network of computers without a central unit in which each one (networked artist) acts as a switchboard for recycling and creating communication”.

It is not about the use of computers or other forms of technological reproduction but rather the *reproduction of processes for organising, storing, recycling and creating information*: a circuit of “networkers” that explore the new media which the communications industry puts in their hands. This corresponds with what José Luis Brea considers “*the new statute of artistic practices*” in the communication age, in which the artist has become a “*producer of media*” in the sense already used by Bertold Brecht: “*participant in the games of information exchange that generate critical disposition, takeovers that favour the intertextuality of data, the contrast of the ideas received.*”

Communication, notes Padín, is neither an entity nor an object but rather must be produced and distributed in order to be realised, consumed and legitimised as a product. Unless it is consumed and feedback is generated, there is no communication. In other words, the “network” can only exist on the net (physical or online) and this cannot exist without the active and essential participation of the spectators, in turn converted into media producers: “*each networker is a communicator*”. On the one hand, as a “*product of communication*”, the network is inseparable from the social production generated in the social weave of the author’s relationship with his/her environment – human, social and technological. On the other hand, it acts as a production aid by favouring or obstructing its processes referring to the interchange of procedures and ideas between the members of the community of which the network itself is a part.

David Ross²⁰, Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, notes that there are various distinguishing qualities of artistic languages such as *net art* or *media art*. In his opinion, net art is an accelerated and inapprehensive art that is not based on *objects* (web pages) but instead on *processes* (*network actions*) so that it is materially impossible to embrace all of its works. “*Net art is developed in an instant, resisting any attempt to be fixed in time (...). Each work is nothing more than a trace, a mark that is subject not only to the evolution of the artistic process (the author usually modifies the work periodically) but also to the erosion of the digital*

environment (change of URL). Collecting net art would be somewhat like collecting snake skins: you've got the proof, but the snake is somewhere else."²¹. This first characteristic alludes to one of the problems that is of most concern to cultural managers and art curators: the intrinsic impossibility of exhibiting and collecting works of net art. Antonio Cerveira Pinto²², in charge of organising digital art for the MEIAC in Badajoz (one of the first Spanish museums to acquire digital art), ironically expresses his frustration at not being able to exhibit these creations in the "original version". To guarantee their conservation, it is also necessary to buy the original technological medium (software, operating system and hardware) so that they can still be enjoyed when the technology changes. The net art is exhibited in museums on closed-circuit computers, which means that they cease to be net art in the strict sense of the word since they are no longer connected to the network. The only way to enjoy these works in their original form is via the Internet with the work on line, something which the visitor does not need to go to a museum to do.

This alludes to another characteristic of net art mentioned by Ross: free access to the works and the documentation. Since the Internet is at once the creative support and the exhibit place, the production of net art is permanently accessible to all users, an advantage which has no precedent in other types of art, technological or otherwise. Because of its link to the network culture that drove the emergence of the Internet – which could be compared to a sort of deontological code for net artists - most of the bibliography that refers to both the theory and practice of net art is freely accessible and subject to user intervention. Third characteristic: net art assumes the intervention of the user in the creation and legitimation of the artistic process. It is not necessary to fall into the Utopia of democratisation and global access of the new media to see that the network has expedited the artistic creation process, favouring the author's independence and his/her direct relationship with the spectator-user based on the pieces that lead the user spectator-user to *take decisions* and intervene in the contents. The works that fall into this category, in addition to articulating images and text in an imaginative way, are also participative events and communication processes.

What is interesting to note is that the network culture associated with the network and virtual communication enables *new models for the circulation of cognitive capital*. Pérez Tapias²³, in relation to political movements, indicates that "*the idea is not to create parties as companies but rather to organise parties as networks*". Similarly, cultural policies applied to the digital environment must be oriented toward

managing cognitive capital as what it is – a group of networks - taking advantage of social netting, pre-existing resources and the self-organising capacity of rhizomatic architecture.

FROM WHITE CUBE TO NETWORK CULTURE

With some exceptions, the ideas expressed here have not transcended the field of cultural politics but have had an impact on artistic practices and it is through them that the network culture is beginning to be taken into account by art centres and institutions. The reference to new artistic practices responds to the need to draft intervention policies and instruments based on a profound knowledge (lived and experienced) of network socialisation without which it would be difficult to articulate programmes relative to infrastructure, training and the promotion of new cultural manifestations.

Some artistic institutions have begun to include lines of programming that *explore and exploit* communicative processes as another artistic discipline. The aim is not to preserve or exhibit the final works which are the product of the communication itself (as in the MEIAC's case) but rather to emphasise their intrinsically artistic value separate from their materiality. Below I will give some examples of the possibilities offered by the network culture for cultural policies as they relate to the promotion of new practices and to cultural communication and democratisation.

The Fundació Antoni Tàpies of Barcelona was created in 1984 to “*promote the study and knowledge of modern and contemporary art*”. In December 2005, the foundation's management staff presented its new website, noting that it would not only serve to publicise the foundation's activities and as an exhibit space but would also be used as a networking space²⁴. First of all, the website was designed using the SPIP programme (Système Pour l'Internet Participative) developed by the Belgian company Constant. SPIP pertains to the generation of web 2.0 tools that prioritise the dynamism of contents and their accessibility, distancing themselves from the web publishing tools of the nineties, highly influenced by the audiovisual culture. While those tools placed greater emphasis on sophistication and aesthetics to the detriment of accessibility and browsability, new generation tools like SPIP are designed from the beginning as communication and accessibility tools. No complex technical knowledge or great bandwidths are required to use them and work with them. Anyone with a computer and basic connection can access them and become a content summariser and hence a producer of cognitive capital.

The second characteristic is that the foundation's website is a networking space for the institution's own employees, in keeping with the traits of the new cultural workers, "know-worker" par excellence. In addition to its public facet, this website is also – literally - a virtual office, a workspace for the different collaborators involved in the centre's work (curators, translators, producers, designers, etc...). To cite an example, the organiser of an exhibit, once the text of the presentation has been written, makes it available to his/her co-workers in the corresponding space on the website. The translators and designers get to work on the text, right in that space, and their work can be supervised at all times by the person responsible for the exhibit. The same is true of production tasks which require a great deal of organisation and documentation. Since all of the functions and stages of the work are located in a single virtual environment, coordination and management are greatly facilitated. These systems provide greater flexibility in time and space and adapt better to the circumstances of contemporary life²⁵. Private companies operating in all sectors are assuming these telecommuting practices that allow them to cut costs and orient production toward the management of cognitive capital. However, their use by cultural institutions, where they could be extremely useful, is still scarce and anecdotal.

Thirdly, the website of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies also functions as a network creation space for cultural producers as a whole, regardless of whether or not they work for the institution. The section dedicated to weblogs and, more specifically, the *Intermedial* section, proposes an interaction dynamic that calls upon internauts to collaborate in the contribution toward legitimising new artistic practices. Here again, there is a specific allusion to the condition of "explainer: commentator, narrator, lecturer, who speaks before, during or between the images for spectators. The forebear of the film narrator's voice, the voice in off. In Japan, the explainer, who is called benshi, also read the dialogue of all of the film's characters. Hence, the internaut, by taking direct and person responsibility for the cultural production, becomes a creative agent".

The case of the Madrid Medialab illustrates another way of incorporating network culture into cultural policies directly related to interdisciplinary and education in new media that is based on the aforementioned convergence of artists, researchers, scientists and users. Along with the training programmes and exhibits, meetings of *media producers* – in the sense of content catalysers in all of their facets - are organised. The activities may include projects on biology, geology, architecture,

philosophy, visual arts, music, theatre, design, communication, computer science and programming. A transdisciplinary and permeable research environment is provided which explores the intersection of art, science, technology and society, which is where the cultural dynamics occur. It is also part of a national and international collaboration network that exceeds local or national boundaries and, thanks to new technologies, enables Latin American and European artists to participate.

Like other media labs, the Madrid media lab rounds out its “in person” meetings with the creation of online files on digital culture, new media and the network society, providing the required tools and the knowledge free of charge, so that everyone can have access to these new practices ²⁶. And within the current context of privatisation of the spheres of knowledge and particularly of education, the ability to access this information from any computer at a relatively low cost is extremely valuable in terms cultural development and democratisation.

Finally, the Rhizome is “*an online platform for the global community dedicated to new media*” which is run by the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. In reality, what lies behind that ambitious definition is a resource and documentation centre, a digital publication, an employment, news and announcement forum, a discussion list and a centre for content production and financing of artistic projects. All located on a website that places these virtualised activities at the disposal of users: artists, curators, cultural producers, journalists, amateurs, onlookers, researchers and programmers. The key to its management lies in the fact that, in addition to its employees, Rhizome receives the selfless collaboration of the digital art community which sends information on its own projects and thereby contributes to the dissemination of its own work. It is, above all, a meeting place for people interested in this subject who can not only find practical information but also contact one another, easily and very inexpensively.

Rhizome is dedicated to new media and projects in which art and technology intersect. Obviously, its users are knowledgeable in the field. They know how to browse, find information quickly and find the people they want to contact. But the way it works offers management possibilities which would also be applicable, at least partially, to centres dedicated to other types of artistic fields. The virtualisation of some of the traditional activities of an art centre (e.g., the classic Club de Amigos and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao) make it possible to optimise and free up

resources. This virtualisation does not replace a walk through the physical space of the museum but can be a complement and opens up a world of possibilities for accessing and enjoying culture which are well suited to the needs of modern day life.

CONCLUSION

*“Stick close to your desk and never go to sea
and you all may be rulers of the Queen’s Navee”*

First Lord of the Admiralty

As demonstrated by the confusion among artists, scientists and social investigators, the frontiers between different fields of knowledge are becoming more inoperative by the day. And we forget that this is not due to an ontological fragmentation of reality but rather to the need to approach it in an orderly manner. The aim of the reflections presented here is to provide some keys for navigating the seas of the network culture. They are based on the conviction that the journey requires patience and an adventurous spirit and that it cannot be done from the shore or using ships built to sail other types of waters. Otherwise, we could end up like the captains of the British fleet who directed the fleet from land and were unable to protect the crown against the attacks of pirate ships, which were faster and more accustomed to navigation.

NOTES

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3 Marx, K. *“Elementos fundamentales para la crítica de la economía política” vol. 2, Siglo XXI, Madrid 1979.*

4 Debord, G., *“La société du spectacle”, Poche, Paris 1996.*

5 Virno, P., *“Gramática de la multitud. Para un análisis de las formas de vida contemporáneas”, Traficantes de sueños, Madrid 2003.*

6 Brea, J. L., *“El tercer umbral. Estatuto de las prácticas artísticas en la era del capitalismo cultural”, Cendeac, Murcia 2004.*

7 Jameson, F., *“El posmodernismo o la lógica cultural del capitalismo avanzado”, Paidós, Barcelona 1991.*

8 Martín-Barbero, J., *“De los medios a las mediaciones. Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía”, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 1987.*

9 Jameson, F., *op. cit*

10 Brea, J. L., *op. cit*

11 Castells, M., *op. cit.*

12 Olson, D., *“Desmitologización de la cultura escrita”, en “El mundo sobre el papel. El impacto de la escritura y la lectura en la estructura del conocimiento”, Gedisa, Madrid 1998.*

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14 Chartier, R., *"El orden de los libros. Lectores, autores, bibliotecas en Europa entre los siglos XIV y XVIII"*, Gedisa, Barcelona 2000.

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25 Telecommuting also opens up new possibilities for precarious labour relations but it is important to note that this does not mean that technology is, per se, a factor in that precariousness unrelated to social policies. The multiplication of precarious employment contracts in the field of culture is a recurring phenomenon in Spain and in other economically advanced countries, as demonstrated by the mobilisations of "intermittants du spectacle" in France, which ended with the cancellation of the Avignon Theatre Festival. But these should be interpreted more as the result of economic liberalisation and a disregard for workers' rights than a product of technological evolution, per se.

26 In the academic world, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has also joined this type of imitative. Since 2001, it has provided access to its Open Course Ware, a virtual space containing the didactic materials of 2,000 subjects, including science and humanities, also in Spanish. As indicated on its website, this is not equivalent to taking the courses at MIT and does not lead to the obtainment of a degree, but it is an indication of some of the public cultural possibilities offered by new technologies. Since it was launched, the MIT Open Course Ware has been visited by internauts from more than 210 countries, including students, professors and independent researchers. The courses include bibliographies, detailed syllabi and even recommendations on schedules and study times. See <http://mit.ocw.universia.net/>

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