CONTEMPORARY WORLD-SOCIETY: FROM THE GLOBALIZATION OF COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMUNICATIONAL GLOBALIZATION OF THE WORLD

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Introduction

The human societies and the forms of communication are in constant interrelation and evolution. Societies and communication are dynamic and dialectical. As a *techné* of discourse, dialectics fits in this task of relating society and communication, since dialectics is a method of reasoning. This preliminary observation justifies the title of the article.

Nowadays, when there is an intensification of the digital dimension of information and communication, it is notable a recent change of communicational paradigm: from traditional forms and means in the communication to the so-called new media or new information and communication technologies. The new paradigm is mainly that of the immanence and contingency of communication and social relations. What divides also unites. As in the thought of Bauman (1998: 2), globalization both divides and unites. If communication is diverse in the world and if it is peculiar to each culture, it now becomes uniform with globalization. The global social praxis is that of the hegemony of forms and means of communication. 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, 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 Luhmann (1981: 122) points out in the essay *The improbability of communication*: "without communication there can be no human relations, indeed no human life".

The importance of communication is raised in the social relations and in the social system itself. "Without communication there can be no social systems" (Luhmann, 1981: 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: 123). 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*, Vattimo highlights this idea of narrowing and dialectic between communication and societies. The human sciences and the social sciences seek to understand societies that today are reconfigured in communication societies. According to Vattimo (2011: 21), the relationship between the human sciences and the communication 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.

Therefore, this article argues the idea of a growing contemporary world-society, which is necessarily related to globalization, massification and communication as social phenomena that triggers reactions, effects, influences in collective life. The main methodological question is: How might a dialectic play out in communication and society interaction?

Communication is both a social phenomenon and a process. Communication is multiform, inevitable, and natural in the human being, who is essentially gregarious and, therefore, lives in society. With the present theoretical approach, it is intended to provide a synthesis of the main issues, components, and implications of the communication flow in contemporary societies. Developing a theoretical approach and following a conceptual and reflexive strategy, the main objective is to

recognize the importance of communication in the contemporary societies, due to the preponderance of flows and means of information and communication, and to 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. The strategy is to substantiate the main thesis of a contemporary world-society, i.e. the idea of the figurative formation of one single world, a large-scale social and cultural phenomenon to which the mass media contribute. Thus, the global society appears as the mass world. The mass media massify the world? The mass media are the result of the globalization of the world? What may the mass media have to do with the globalization of societies?

1. Conceptualizing 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 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 their homes from remote and exotic locations, even out of season. 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 21st century: the dizzying pace of social change and the deepening of a global society.

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 dependent 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.

The term globalization is widely used and names the shape of our contemporary world. It means we are now living in a deeply and increasingly interconnected, mobile, and hasty society driven by technology. Globalization is the name of our contemporary world-society since the early 1990s. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union fostered the globalization and the triumph of the capitalist system and its several effects, deeply transforming the world.

Furthermore, to understand the concept of globalization, Giddens associates the term with the idea of a worldwide accelerated social transformation. 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. In this regard, two main aspects must be underlined:

1. The theses of the historical development of Hegel and Marx underly to these ideas of "the end of the world" and "the end of history", as well as the theses of Fukuyama's "the end of history" presented in 1992 in *The end of history and the last man*;
2. The 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 Orwell, and *Brave new world*, by Huxley.

Hegel's thesis is that of the rational state as a superior state, Marx's thesis is the end of social classes caused by communism and the end of the division between labor and capital, and 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.

Long before these developments, Weber warned about the "disenchantment of the world" in the essay *Science as a vocation*. Weber's "disenchantment of the world" is a form of dystopia, i.e. a failure and disillusionment of utopias and ideologies that inspire social progress. "Our age is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and above all, by the disenchantment of the world", says Weber (2004: 30). The consequence is that "the ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn

from public life" (Weber, 2004: 30). Weber's concept of "disenchantment of the world" characterizes modern societies of rationalism. This disenchantment process is consubstantial to the development of societies. "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 19th century and is due to the rationality of societies (the idea of "dis-illusion"), the autonomy of the spheres of social action and the privatization of religion in modern societies. In *Runaway world: How globalization is reshaping our lives*, Giddens (2000: 1) says that we are living through a major period of historical transition, whose changes affect us and are everywhere. "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." (Giddens, 2000: 6).

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: 7). Globalization has been defined in contradictory terms. Essentially, it defines:

1. Homogenization (uniformization or, for the most critical, Americanization) of people's needs, the use of technological communication devices, information disseminated by the mass media, etc.;
2. 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;
3. Cosmopolitanism, in the opposite sense of localism, with a global "identity" (as opposed to the most peculiar and singular cultural and local identities).

Using McLuhan's term "global village" to refer to the expansion of the spatial dimension or scale from the local to the global, the transformation of local villages into global villages provokes 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" (1996: 64). For Giddens, this is a dialectical process. Local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the distant relations that shape them. 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. 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. Giddens 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.

Intensified globalization has been driven forward by the development of communication technologies that have intensified the speed and scope of human interaction all over the world. For example, the football World Cup is a global television broadcast watched everywhere at the same time by billions of people across the world.

Several factors are contributing to the increase of the globalization process:

1. Communicational factors (the spread of information technologies and the flow of information around the globe);
2. Political factors, such as the end of the Cold War, the collapse of Soviet-style communist regimes, and the growth of international forms of governance;

3. Economic factors (multinationals have grown, 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 (e.g. nation, family, work, nature, etc.) change in structural and functional terms. Globalization is a multiform phenomenon. 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 influence. 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.

1.1. Globalization and communication

Globalization and communication are two social and total phenomena. In addition to this similarity, they are complementary: 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. News or information is conveyed more quickly with the instantaneous electronic communication, whose existence alters the very texture of all our lives and our everyday experience. The reach of media technologies is growing (Giddens, 2000: 11). 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: 13).

Television, for example, has played a major role in advancing globalization, by transmitting standardized contents 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. It is the hypervisualization of the war (Baudrillard, 1997: 28).

Globalization isn't developing in an evenhanded way. It is by no means wholly benign in its consequences. On the contrary, "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" (Giddens, 2000: 15). The cultural expressions of globalization are American, says Giddens: Coca--Cola, McDonald's, CNN. This idea is corroborated by Hobsbawm. In *Globalization, democracy and terrorism* (2007), Hobsbawm 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.

1.2. Massification and global society

There is a close, if not cause-and-effect, relationship between the development of mass media and the massification of societies. The phenomena of communication and the massification of societies are interdependent. Communication is becoming increasingly global, massifying societies by the forms and contents of the communication. In *Networking the world, 1794-2000*, Mattelart (2000: 1-2) states that the internationalization of communication was spawned by two forms of universalism: the Enlightenment and liberalism, which are both aimed at the construction of an unrestricted global arena.

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 (Mattelart, 2000: 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 and, therefore, "improving communications necessarily promotes equality and democracy" (Mattelart, 2000: 17). Thus, "the nineteenth century was the age of the invention of news and the ideal of instantaneous information" (Mattelart, 2000: 23). "In the struggle against underdevelopment, communication became synonymous with modernization" (Mattelart, 2000: 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.

The mass media are an important and expanding industry, with clear social implications. The mass media are a very important industrial sector subject to massive consumption. Therefore, the mass society theory of media assumes that societies are massified due to the development of industrialization, including the media industry. The mass society theory argues that:

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

There is an interdependence of institutions that exercise power and thus the integration of the media into the sources of social power and authority. If the 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 (McQuail, 2010: 94).

Studying and discussing the world and the communication process of massification and the implications of a new global society led us to confront the globalization and the tradition. What is tradition? Tradition is the set of values, norms, uses, manners, actions, behaviors, memories, beliefs, myths, and legends belonging to a culture and passing on from generation to generation. Tradition is what is transmitted or delivered in the same way as before it was received; tradition is what is transmissible. This is the etymological meaning of the word "tradition". The concept of "tradition", from the Latin *traditio*, from the verb *tradere* in the past participle, means the "act or effect of transmitting", or "something that was delivered".

Traditions are integrators of individuals in cultures. Individuals follow them and do things (uses and behaviors) like others and, most importantly, like their ancestors, respec 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 preserved and followed with respect and conservatism over many years.

The invented tradition and the universal tradition are examples of the globalization of culture. Traditions are inherent and specific of cultures. Each culture has its own traditions. Different cultures have different traditions. In *The invention of tradition*, Hobsbawm and Ranger mention two types of tradition:

1. The genuine tradition, which is ancestral and maintains its original features over the years;
2. The invented tradition characterized by adaptations.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (2000: 1) say that "'traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented". Tradition is an invariable repetition and it has a significant ritual or symbolic function (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2000: 2). 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 simply implies a reorganization in which tradition is reworked.

In *Runaway world: How globalization is reshaping our lives*, Giddens (2000: 43) argues that two basic changes are happening today under the impact of globalization:

1. Public institutions and everyday life in western countries are becoming opened up from the hold of tradition;
2. Other societies across the world that remained more traditional are becoming detraditionalized.

The "detraditionalization" is a developing process which is at the core of the emerging global cosmopolitan society, as Giddens points out. It becomes a detraditionalising society, culture, and world (Giddens, 2020: 73).

Therefore, there is an opposition between novelty and antiquity, the global and the local, the globalization and the 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: 37). According to Giddens:

1. All traditions were invented;
2. There was never an entirely traditional society;
3. Traditions are penetrable to change, they evolve over time;
4. Traditions can be transformed or changed quickly; they are invented and reinvented;
5. So, there are no entirely pure traditions (cf. Giddens, 2000: 40).

For example, the Scots kilts, which was invented by an industrialist, who also altered the clothing that people from the highlands wore. "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: 36-37).

Furthermore, what is the implications between tradition and massification and global society, mass culture and mass communication? What is the relationship between tradition and globalization? How can globalization, being a social and total phenomenon, affects tradition, peculiar and local elements of cultural identity? Is globalization a risk to tradition?

The answers are what this article pretends to underline and demonstrate: 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. This discussion leads us to the thesis that there is a single contemporary world-society, i.e. a complex, multiform, and inevitable process which is developed from the globalization of communication to the communicational globalization of the world.

All these implications, especially the relations between culture and communication, are complex, multiple, progressive, intimate, and reciprocal. Cultures are related to each other through mediation and mediatization mechanisms. These mechanisms attribute meanings (including ethical and aesthetic values) to the cultures. These meanings and values take effect in daily life through collective and individual practices (Ferin, 2009: 9). There are inevitable interdependencies between the fields of communication and culture. Given these relationships 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: 10-11). Global and technically equipped communication interferes in the (new) global culture and in each (traditional) culture.

2. From the "global village" to the "*e-Sphere*":
   panopticon vs. synopticon

In *The Gutenberg galaxy: The making of typographic man*, McLuhan (1962: 31) 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 electronically interconnected, the world becomes a global village.

The idea of technological globalization had already been explored in the forties by Arthur C. Clarke when he refers to satellite communication. This idea is used to point out the potential of satellites for communication worldwide. In a book entitled *How the world was one: Beyond the global village*, Clarke starts by saying in the Foreword: "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' (Clarke, 1993: 11). It was in 1947 and the basic thesis of the talk was that developments in transport and communications had created or would create a single planetary society. At that time, "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: 11). The transistor and the microchip guaranteed this dawn of electronic culture, as Clarke admits, even though the world is still far from being unified. 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: 11).

"The same TV news networks cover the globe", says Clarke (1993: 11), and "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 products may be found anywhere. 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" and our "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" (Clarke, 1993: 11). A planet where long-distance travel was extremely difficult is no longer science-fiction or difficult to imagine. The development of efficient communications produces a single society.

Despite the linguistic, religious, and cultural barriers that still sunder nations and divide them into yet smaller tribes, Clarke considers that the unification of the world has passed the point of no return. "Our civilization could not exist without efficient communications", says

Clarke (1993: 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, Clarke (1993: 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".

In 1968, when Clarke wrote *2001: A space odyssey*, he summarized the rise of the human being: "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" (Clarke, 1999: 30). In this excerpt, the idea of a global village stands out.

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:

1. The ratio of inhabitants in the world to radio and television sets has increased exponentially in recent decades;
2. The contact power (individuals covered by messages) of electronic media is high;
3. Audience levels (or listening rate) are also high;
4. 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. Today, the world has become more globalized and unified in social practices, due to the most recent technological developments in

the field of communication. The original and septuagenarian idea that we live in a "global village" already seems worn out and hardly adequate to characterize the globalized world by communication. Now, the virtual and its need of connectivity shape a new public *e-sphere*. It is in this sense that Baudrillard (2005: 31) considers immersion, immanence, and immediacy as the characteristics of the virtual. In *The intelligence of evil or the lucidity pact*, Baudrillard (2005: 78) points out that the interactive world abolishes the demarcation line between the subject and the object. Following Baudrillard's questioning and discussion, will we live, as he says, in the hyperreality of simulations? Everything will become an image/sign, representation, and "trans-aesthetic" object? Images will tend to replace the meaning and authenticity of the human experience?

The representation of our social life is stimulated and simulated through images/signs and it is also blessed with the spectacle transmitted by these images/signs, i.e. by the format and the content of these images/signs. Such representation of our social life becomes an ideological discourse. In addition to the spectacular, excessive, distracting and alienating representation of our social life, another consequence is the impoverishment of the experience, which 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: 12).

As Joseph N. Pelton (2000: 39) claims, to understand this new age in which we live and to which this author calls *e-Sphere*, we must recognize that it is founded on the origin and development of communication. Pelton (2000: 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 *World-Wide Mind* that can think and interact collectively. A "World-Wide Mind" will be, for Pelton (2000: 208), a global conscience.

The global village of McLuhan is characterized by the *panopticon*; the *e-Sphere* is characterized by *synopticon*. Although still relevant in modern societies, the *panopticon* (few watch the many) gives way to the *synopticon* (many watch the few). In *Globalization: The human consequences*, Bauman says that the *panopticon* was by its nature a local establishment and 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" (Bauman, 1998: 52).

While the *panopticon* forced people into the position where they could be watched, the *synopticon* needs no coercion, it seduces people into watching. 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: 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 *panopticon*. 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 (Baudrillard, 1997: 30).

In the history of media, if television broadened the worldview, the Internet created another world (a virtual world without borders, the cyberspace) 30 years later (in 1969). The Internet is like an industrial revolution, it is the digital multimedia world (the new information and communication technologies). As Castells (2001: 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 the first communication medium that allows the communication of many to many, in chosen time, on a global scale (Castells, 2001: 2). "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" (Castells, 2001: 3). The use of the Internet exploded in the closing years of the second millennium.

Today, the number of Internet users is very high. 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 world-wide 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. Communication is the foundation of sociability; it is the latest mobilizing instrument, available to provoke consensus effects that are universally accepted.

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 of interpersonal relationships is a generalized deficit in interpersonal relationships. According to Castells (2001: 116), "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".

In *The internet galaxy: Reflections on the internet, business, and society*, Castells states that there has been so much enthusiasm about the freedom brought by the Internet that we have forgotten the persistence of authoritarian and surveillance practices in the workplace (Castells, 2001: 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. A significant proportion of our everyday life takes place on the Internet (cf. Castells, 2001: 180), i.e. they are online (virtual) and offline (real) interactions. As we cannot live without others, life in an electronic panoptic is equivalent to having half of our lives permanently exposed to monitoring and this exposure, according to Castells (2001: 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; the most worrisome aspect is the absence of explicit rules of behavior (Castells, 2001: 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 the social status of deprivation, oppression, and totalitarianism exercised over people.

In fact, 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: 426) already recognizes in *The third wave*. 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 technologies" (Castells, 2004: 3). By social structure, he understands 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.

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 patriarchalism, and of the nation-state" (Castells, 2010: 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: 2). It is a new type of society, a new dominant social structure called "network society", which emerges in the second half of the 20th 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, "real virtuality" means a system in which reality itself (i.e. 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" (Castells, 2010: 386). He argues that this is not the consequence of electronic media, although they are indispensable instruments of expression in our new culture.

3. Toward the communicational globalization of the world: the global screen

With the modern time and deep social transformations, technologies have developed and allowed the emergence of more effective, mobile (portable), digital, and global communication devices and means. This is the case of the screen, a technique for displaying information (specially images) through various media, such as television, mobile phone, photograph, and video cameras, or computer. With the proliferation of screens, the world has become hyper-world. Effectively, screens are everywhere and multiform. 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 last decades, we pass from the screen of the spectacle (the unique screen) to the screen of communication (the omnipresent screen). It is the era of the global screen, which is everywhere and anytime, of all sizes, flat or full screens, portable mini-screens, screens for the whole world and everyone, screens to do everything and see everything (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2009: 10). The new century is the century of the omnipresent and multiform, planetary, and the multimedia screen.

The explosion of screens is an authentic Copernican revolution that has even changed the way of being in the world. The network of screens transformed our way of living, our relationship with information, with space-time, with travel and consumption. It is the almost inevitable intermediary in our relations with the world and with others, and to live is more and more to be glued to the screen and connected to the network (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2009: 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.

The world is constantly changing. In the last two decades, the transformations are more accelerated and global. 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. They are "cultures of the screen" based on some aspects.

1. Proliferation of screens (the global screen), coexistence of screens (cinema, advertising, television, Internet, etc.) and trivialization of images;
2. Publicity and banalization of the private sphere in the images and media (the banal becomes public);
3. Social networks and virtuality of social experiences and communicational interactions.

Therefore, it is important to question 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.

Contemporary societies are dominated by the imperative of communication. We are in the era of media and the mediatization of collective life and private life. 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.

In the context of mediation, the role of screens in contemporary societies is relevant. For example, the central role of television in today's societies and communication processes shows the institutionalization of screens as a support for all mediated forms of communication. The screen is the privileged element of communicative mediation.

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: 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.

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*, as previously mentioned. A virtual and contemporary, yet global, public space, which is characterized by an online existence (the network of electronic relations based on connectivity and interactivity, global ways of thinking, feeling, acting, seeing, and understanding). That is the contemporaneity of the public space, a time of immanence, immediacy, and ephemerality.

4. Contemporaneity, virtual life, and world's de-realization

Societies, cultures, human beings, and their technical and technological productions are dynamic, permeable, and constantly changing. Technological devices of communication become ubiquitous and familiar in modern lifestyles, social actions, and behaviors. 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: 3) warns that "there would seem to be no escape any longer".

According to Agamben (2009: 41), contemporariness is a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. Images that serve as models and show trends or suggest lifestyles are an example. "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: 40).

Therefore, there is a semantic association between the concepts of "contemporaneity", "modernity", and "secularization". As explained by Giddens (1996: 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. Contemporary globalization creates social homogeneity in relation to the same global interests, needs, desires, consumption, lifestyles, habits, etc.

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: 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. We become *alius*, "other", "strange", according to the Latin term *alienus*, "from another place or person".

In *Becoming virtual: Reality in the digital age*, Lévy (1998: 15) refers "a general movement of virtualization" that has begun to affect everything, including "our modalities of being together, the constitution of a collective 'we' in the form of virtual communities, virtual corporations, virtual democracy". Lévy questions the general process of de-realization.

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. The real world has become a useless and superfluous idea (Nietzsche, 1998: 19). Right after this idea,

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: 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: 123) 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: 8). Thus, technological devices predispose us to think and act automatically in certain ways.

Conclusions

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. Social life is now globalized. It is a unique society that is created and coincides with the planet: a world-society. This is a single society, a single, homogeneous, and uniform world regarding the uses and customs. Global ways of thinking, feeling, acting, seeing, and understanding seem to be imposed. Thus, nothing that happens in the world is foreign to us. Communication systems on a planetary scale is the decisive and determining factor for this complex and social phenomenon called globalization. Therefore, globalization

is directly and causally related to the development of communication. Globalization and communication are two social and total phenomena. These two phenomena are complementary: there is no development of the process and the phenomenon of globalization without the development of the process and the phenomenon of communication and vice versa. The globalization of communication is a consequent transition process through a communicational globalization of the world.

The globalization divides and unites the societies, the cultures, and the world. The globalization divides rich and developed countries from poor and underdeveloped countries, provoking social asymmetries, but is also unites the social behaviors, the expectations, interests, needs, uses, customs, or preferences, the cultural patterns and dilute the cultural differences between the most developed and capitalist countries. A synonymous of globalization is homogenization, i.e. a process of uniformization of people's needs, uses, and customs around the world. In each society, people and their visions, mentalities, cultures, and ways of being, thinking, acting and feeling (based on traditions, patterns, needs, uses, and customs) change. With the globalization, the changes are increasingly profound, including the intensification of a new type of worldwide social and virtual relation. 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".

The changes imposed by globalization to the human forms of life worldwide are more and more accelerated and global transformations in all domains: technological, communicational, social, cultural, economic, political, geographic, etc. All these changes lead us to this article's thesis of a growing contemporary world-society, arguing the dialectics between the development of globalization and the development of communication as two social phenomena that trigger irrefragable and inexorable reactions, effects, influences in the collective world-life.

Today's societies of communication are based on the importance of the media technology, i.e. on the influence of the medium on the society.

For McLuhan, communication supports and technologies are decisive. The electronic means of communication create a global village due to the medium's predominant role on the message. In brief, 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.

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 20th century records another important social phenomenon for sociological study and understanding: the globalization.

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