

CULTURAL STUDIES AS THE NEW HUMANITIES¹

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to argue that Cultural Studies may be regarded as the new humanities. Cultural Studies focus on ethnic, post-colonial, communication, anthropological, ethnographic and feminist studies, and only 'very marginally' have they shown an interest in literature and literary studies (Aguiar & Silva, 2008). But those fields, which 'Social Science' rather than the 'Arts' have invested in (Ibid., p. 254), are the touchstone of modernity. Today, the concept we have of humankind is, to a large extent, played out in these areas. The questioning of both humankind and modernity has as backdrop the technologically-driven shift of culture from word to image (Martins, 2011 a). My proposal takes into account this debate, while underscoring how Cultural Studies are engaged in what is current and contemporary, which means, in the present and everyday life.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Studies; new humanities; Information and Communication Technologies; current; contemporary; image

INTRODUCTION

The literary humanities are imbued with a sense of preservation of a *corpus* of knowledge, built over the centuries and meant to be passed on to the younger generations. But it is not only that which is at stake today. As an example, a closer look at the site of the PhD programme in Cultural Studies jointly offered by the Universities of Minho and Aveiro shows that it is a sense of awareness of the need to respond to the challenges brought about by contemporary society that underlies its purposes:

- (1) "The Doctoral Programme in Cultural Studies is geared towards the training of future professionals in the areas of cultural creation, cultural promotion, cultural animation, cultural mediation and cultural dissemination, as well as professionals who will be qualified to work in public libraries, book publishing, the production of information and cultural events, cultural associations, embassies, institutes, foundations, cultural centres, the tourism and hospitality industry, among others";
- (2) Furthermore, "The training of researchers in this field is also aimed at equipping experts with the skills required to work in multidisciplinary teams as problem-solvers in the areas of sustainable development; business ethics; film and genre studies; media studies; internet studies; post-colonial studies; conservation, management and promotion of material and immaterial heritage, etc.";
- (3) and to conclude: "Research in this field will also seek to meet the need for qualified researchers capable of conducting studies in environments that require articulation between various scientific fields such as Communication, History, Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Literature or Heritage" (<http://estudosculturais.com/portal/apresentacao/>)²

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² Within the framework of this Doctoral Programme in Cultural Studies (University of Minho/University of Aveiro), the setting up of the *Rede em Estudos Culturais/Cultural Studies Network* in December 2014 is worth emphasising. It is a

First and foremost, I would like to underline the fact that no mention at all is made of teacher training, which was, nonetheless, practically the sole objective of the humanities courses in the past. It is true, on the other hand, that both classical and contemporary philologies have always served as an introduction to one's own culture and thinking as well as to that of other peoples, who are both remote and in proximity in terms of time and geography (Fidalgo, 2008, p. 10). But in the current post-colonial circumstances, in a world mobilised by a vast array of technologies, particularly by communication, information and leisure technological devices, one has to question western rationality from the standpoint of non-western worlds, taking into account the intricate relationship they maintain with the former colonial peoples.³

In the fourth and last chapter, “ Tomorrow”, of *Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture*, George Steiner also has a word to say, which is at once lucid, tragic and heroic, as he opens a last door on the night, with technology being the night which he steps into with us: “We cannot choose the dream of unknowing. We shall, I expect, open the last door in the castle even if it leads, perhaps *because* it leads, onto realities which are beyond the reach of human comprehension and control. We shall do so with that desolate clairvoyance, so marvellously rendered in Bartók's music, because opening doors is the tragic merit of our identity” (Steiner, 1992, p. 141)⁴.

Taking up Steiner' suggestion of opening doors in the castle of culture, the door in the castle that today most certainly needs opening is that of technology, which is what my proposal concerning the new humanities aims to do: discuss technicity and the role

cooperation network involving cultural, educational and artistic institutions which lays the groundwork for the production of scientific knowledge about art, culture and society from the Cultural Studies perspective. This Network enables students on the Doctoral Programme in Cultural Studies to conduct research on the artistic, educational and cultural processes undertaken at partner institutions or to study their artistic, bibliographical and documental archives. On the other hand, the Network will promote the sharing and dissemination of information pertaining to the cultural agenda of each member on the site of the doctoral programme. Finally, the Network will comprise an advisory board to support the research lines of this Doctoral Programme in the upcoming years , actively collaborating in the academic development of the Programme. <http://estudosculturais.com/portal/redes/cultural-studies-network/>

At the present time , the following entities make up the Network: Culturgest; Teatro Nacional S. João; Fundação Serralves; Casa da Música; Instituto Internacional Casa de Mateus; Museu de Aveiro ; Teatro Aveirense; Museu da Imprensa, Teatro Circo de Braga; Centro Cultural Vila Flor de Guimarães; Casa das Artes de Famalicão; Irenne – Associação de investigação, prevenção e combate à violência e exclusão; INATEL; Movimento Democrático de Mulheres; Direção Regional da Cultura da Zona Norte; Direção Regional da Cultura da Zona Centro.

³ In this regard, I would like to draw attention to the doctoral thesis in Communication Sciences, in the specialty area of Intercultural Communication, presented at the University of Minho in 2013 by Maria de Lurdes Macedo, titled “Da Diversidade do Mundo ao Mundo Diverso da Lusofonia: A Reinvenção de uma Comunidade Geocultural na Sociedade em Rede” [From the world diversity to the diverse world of Lusophonia: the reinvention of a geo-cultural community in the network society] (Macedo: 2013) <http://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/handle/1822/28851>

⁴ George Steiner wrote this essay on contemporary culture in 1971, a long time before the subversion of cultural practices and consumption effected by electronic technologies. Its title, *In Bluebeard's Castle* is at once suggestive and unsettling. We all remember the traditional fairy tale in which a sinister lord kept a terrible secret well locked up in a room in his castle. It was in that veritable room of horrors that he hid the butchered bodies of all the women he had married and eventually murdered. The Hungarian composer, Bella Bartok, made this fairy tale into a libretto for one of his operas. And Steiner, at the beginning of his essay refers to one of Bartok's characters with the intention of making the meaning of the journey he wanted to embark upon with us all the more clear. He writes: “We seem to stand, in regard to a theory of culture, where Bartok's Judith stands, when she asks to open the last door on the night” (Steiner, 1992, p. 5). Opening the last door on the night! That is precisely what Steiner does in this essay, which is a door open onto the “ The Great Ennui” (title of the first chapter); onto “A Season in Hell” (second chapter); onto “A Post-Culture” and onto “Tomorrow” (fourth and last chapter). On this subject, I wrote “Technologie et Rêve d'Humanité” (Martins, 2011b).

new technologies, including media, have in redefining culture, i.e., in delimiting humankind. We can do nothing other than open this door as it is “the tragic merit of our identity”, to put it in Steiner’s words.

It is my view that the *novum* of contemporary experience consists precisely of this, the fusion of *technê* with *bios*. We are at a moment in time when, thanks to biotechnologies, there is much talk about cloning, replicants and cyborgs, hybridity, post-organic and transhuman, and, thanks to the new information technologies, there is an increasing miniaturisation of technicity and immaterialisation of the digital, thus in this age of biotechnologies and new information technologies there is a full immersion of technicity in history and in bodies.

This immersion of technicity in life — the fusion of *bios* with *technê* — is particularly clear when it comes to biotechnologies, implants, prostheses and genetic engineering. But it also comes through in the new image technologies. What is known today as communication and information technologies, namely photography, film, television, electronic games, multimedia, cybernetic networks and virtual environments work as emotion-producing prostheses, as contraptions generating a crank-handled sensitivity in us (Martins, 2002b, pp. 181-186; 2007b, pp. 5-7).

This thesis can be uncovered in a close reading of *La Monnaie Vivante* by Pierre Klossowski (1997): “desire, value, and simulacrum”, here is “the triangle which has dominated and constituted us doubtless for centuries of our history” as pointed out by Michel Foucault in the letter which introduces the work (Foucault quoted by Klossowski, 1997, p. 9).

The questioning of both humankind and modernity within Cultural Studies is essentially due to the embracing of the principle of historicity of knowledge (Martins, 1994), on the one hand, and to the technologically-driven shift from word to image, on the other (Martins, 2011a).

The principle of historicity of knowledge means that knowledge is above all experience and the true experience is the experience of the limits or the finiteness of being human.

For its part, the technologically-driven shift from word to image, taking place in western civilization, is a movement that, even though it mobilizes individuals for the market while disengaging them as citizens (Martins, 2011a), has considerable ‘humanistic potential’ (Fidalgo, 2008, p. 7). In fact, to no lesser degree than the traditional disciplines such as Literature, Philosophy and History, Cultural Studies also build models to describe and solve problems, devise strategies to address the dilemmas facing human beings, both individually and collectively, and raise and articulate essential issues about the values, objectives and meaning of human action.

My proposal is, thus, to discuss technicity and the role that new technologies, including the media, have in redefining culture, i.e., in delimiting humankind, underscoring how Cultural Studies are engaged in what is current and contemporary, which means, in the present and everyday life.

1. TECHNOLOGICAL MOBILISATION

Fuelled by information and communication technologies, modern civilisation is infinitely accelerated and humankind is fully mobilised towards the present and the market (Virilio, 1995; Sloterdijk, 2000; Martins, 2010b)⁵, both of which are ceaselessly moving from “atoms to bits” (Negroponte, 1995, p. 10). Immersing our lives and bodies in technology leads to ideology being displaced for “sensology”, i.e., ideas for emotions⁶; similarly, a society of universal purpose is displaced for a society of means without ends (Agamben, 1995), with technology disengaging the teleological and eschatological principles that founded Western Civilisation and the end of history, with genesis and apocalypse, being dismantled and giving rise to instantaneism.

It is in these circumstances that the human logos (human reason) is faced with a crisis, with man having ceased to be an ‘animal of promise’ as defined by Nietzsche (1887, II, § 1), because his word is no longer able to promise. In fact, the present time has seen a shift from a regime of the word to one of the technological image. This shift has left us “suffering for lack of finality” (Lyotard, 1993, p. 93; Martins, 2002a, 2002c).

In a lengthy newspaper article on what he termed “The Crisis of the Humanities”, Carlos Reis, Full Professor at the University of Coimbra (*Público*, 25.10.2005), considered a number of reasons for the crisis, among which “the progressive delegitimisation of the written (and read) word in favour of discourses where it is the image that prevails”, as well as “the gradual loss of the symbolic power held by fields of knowledge that traditionally had a standing in Western culture (Philosophy, Literature and History)” and also “the hegemony of television and the remorseless tabloidization of public life which is whittled down to its most indigent state”.

In fact, the word had provided the West with a story that had sense, between a genesis and an apocalypse. It had also provided it with a system of analogy, in which all things referred back towards a creator and every word had a sense/a unique path. We were guided by the stars in the sky, particularly by one, which having been born in the East guided the West for over two thousand years.

In contrast, the regime of the technological image is an immanent one, self-sufficient in terms of meaning, comprising profane, secular and mundane images. Instead of

⁵ The phrase “Total Mobilisation” was first used by Ernest Jünger in the essay “Die Totale Mobilmachung” in 1930. In it Jünger makes reference to the lesson he had learned from fighting in the First World War. The Great War converted life into energy and fully mobilized it thereby making a total connection with the world of work: “The unlimited marshaling of potential energies, which transforms the warring industrial countries into volcanic forges, we perhaps find the most striking sign of the dawn of the age of labour. It makes the World War a historical event superior in significance to the French Revolution”. Furthermore, in this whole process, the human response, i.e., the fact that the worker is willing to be mobilised, is just as important, if not more so, than the technical aspect which is the active side of mobilisation (Jünger, 1990, p. 115). As for the acceleration and mobilization to be felt at the time, we can recall Jünger’s own words: “total mobilisation [...] in war and peace, it expresses the secret and inexorable claim to which our life in the age of masses and machines subjects us” (Jünger, 1990, p. 108). On “endless mobilisation in a society without ends”, see, Moisés de Lemos Martins (2010b), as well.

⁶ ‘Sensology’ was discussed by Mario Perniola in his essay *Del Sentire* in 1991. It considers the increasing importance of sensations (and emotions) within a movement shifting away from ideology. However, in this shift from ideology to ‘sensology’, the experience that Perniola sees is one of repeated actions, the experience of the ‘already felt’ and not an original experience, as if it were impossible to experience anything whatsoever for the first time.

looking at the stars, we look at the screens, the runways and the simulacra that play out on them. Instead of the star that for two thousand years has illuminated the West, what we have now are the spotlights of the grand media parades whose light only strikes us as being artificial when there is a power cut.

Expelled from the regime of the word, we are afflicted by instability and disquiet and we tend to relate above all to figures that accentuate our transient, groping, contingent, fragmentary, multiple, labyrinthine, enigmatic, imponderable, nomadic and solitary nature.⁷

2. COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AS THE NEW HUMANITIES

Cultural Studies are an epistemological tradition of the Social and Human Sciences, which, from the nineteen sixties and seventies of the 20th century onwards, shifted the reflection on culture from a view focused on the relationship culture/nation and on the teaching of language and literature to one that brought culture closer to the lifestyles of different social groups, thereby drawing attention to the daily life of the masses and to social change. This attention was particularly focused on the reception and consumption of media, on the public and on audiences.

In fact, more so than any other theoretical views within Social and Human Sciences, Cultural Studies stand out by inhabiting a territory which is current and contemporary and by being embedded in the present and the everyday (Martins, 2011a). Also, both the origins and the fate of Communication Studies are inextricably linked to the growth of Cultural Studies. It is certainly no coincidence that the first British journal on Cultural Studies, founded in 1979, has the revealing title *Media, Culture and Society*.

Given this link between Communication Sciences and Cultural Studies, it is common today for Communication Sciences to be regarded as “the new humanities” (Fidalgo, 2008). Communication Sciences fit into the Social and Human Sciences epistemological tradition which “ since the 1960s and 70s has not ceased to de-essentialize and de-elitize cultural territories by moving culture studies away from an exclusive focus on the national language, national literature, the literary text, the great works of art (music, painting, sculpture), writers, musicians and artists and by bringing to the foreground the public, the users, the amateurs and the creativity abounding on the margins and in minor arts, such as photography, comic strips, cartoons, popular fiction, pop art , pop music, graffiti, graphic design....” (Martins, 2010c, p. 80).

It is, also, a tradition that subverts “the supposedly natural codes of masculinity and femininity as well as the rigid and dominant definition of sexuality”; it is a tradition that actually risks “flowing to other worlds other than the West through the intricate relationships these worlds have with former colonizers, with ethnic minorities and with multicultural identities” (Martins, 2011a, p. 41-42).

⁷ In this regard, see my study on British designer Alexander McQueen’s fashion shows, which illustrates our transient, labyrinthine, enigmatic and solitary nature. (Martins, 2013). <http://estudosoculturais.com/revistalusofona/index.php/rlec/article/view/12/38>. See, as well, “Médias et Mélancholie”, which reveals the tragic, baroque and grotesque vertigo of the human condition by analysing the song ‘Mercy Street’ by Peter Gabriel (Martins, 2011c). <http://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/handle/1822/23866>

Communication Sciences are contemporaneous not only of the global acceleration of cultural goods, brought on by the technological mobilization of the planet, and of the expression of collective solidarity aimed at ensuring our global security, but also of the internationalization of ecological and environmental risks. On the other hand, they are mindful of our current uneasiness regarding the social and cultural consequences of biotechnologies, which produce an amalgamation resulting from the fusion of human and non-human (Martins, 2010c, pp. 80-81).

It is undoubtedly because Communication Sciences are engaged in what is current and contemporary and are embedded in the present and the everyday that they are associated to new research territories in the Social and Human Sciences: new social groups (that produce, create and disseminate culture), cultural consumption (reading habits; theatre, film and concert-going habits; going to museums and art exhibitions; internet usage habits), lifestyles, cultural tastes, the publics of culture, gender studies, youth subculture studies (urban and non-urban), studies on media reception by youth and adults and by specific publics such as children, the elderly and ethnic minorities, studies on the use of technological communication, information and leisure devices (the Internet, iPod, iPad, mobile phones, etc.), studies on ethnic identities, post-colonial studies, studies on cultural industries: fashion, tourism, holidays, museums, advertising, film, television, radio, press, new media, electronic games. Communication Sciences are, thus, bound to further enhance the individual, the publics, media consumption and, ultimately, screen cultures (Martins, 2011a, p. 42).

As a theoretical construct, which adopts the historicity paradigm, Communication Sciences downplay classic sociology's unit of analysis, the social class, and give more weight essentially to age, education, gender and ethnic identity. Similarly, ideology, a category which is mainly associated to social class, is given less attention and the focus is, rather, on hegemony within a specific field of power and domination relations, based firstly on the Gramscian notion of hegemony and then analysed in light of Foucault's views on power and also resorting to Bourdieu's characterisation of "power relations", within a specific social field of asymmetric positions (Ibidem)⁸.

3. THE CONTEMPORARY — A MELANCHOLIC IMAGINARY

Aristotelian tradition on which the West is grounded is based on the sovereignty of *logos*, with its logical forms and clear premises which conclude what is right and true. It is equally based on *pathos*, ordered by the redeeming synthesis of *logos*, and on *ethos*, consisting of elevated and superior forms, defined by *logos*, and geared towards action. In contrast, current times, which are an expression of a media and technological society, are dominated by *pathos*, with sensations, emotions and passions dislodging the centrality of *logos* and *ethos* (Martins, 2002a).

Richard Rorty (1994, p. 37) pointed out that "To a large extent, much of the rhetoric of contemporary intellectual life takes for granted that the goal of scientific inquiry

⁸ This section, "Communication Sciences as the new humanities" draws on the arguments presented in two studies I have published (Martins, 2010c, pp. 79-81; 2011a, pp. 41-42)

into man is to understand “underlying structures” or “culturally invariant factors”, or “biologically determined patterns”. ‘Underlying structures’, ‘culturally invariant factors’, ‘biologically determined patterns’, that is to say, an objective reality, which knowledge would be in alignment with.⁹

By saying that we have abandoned a regime revolving around the word, the literary one, and have moved to one based on image, it means that we have replaced a world rooted in the affinity between reason and truth, with knowledge matching an objective reality, for a world grounded on the principle of historicity of knowledge, in which reason is viewed as an interpretation (Martins, 1994, p. 7).

The view that the truth of knowledge is an interpretation is an achievement of our time, having been discussed and worked on for over a century. The most emblematic names associated to this achievement are Nietzsche, with his critique of metaphysics and his concepts of play, interpretation, and sign without present truth; Freud, with his critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity, of self-proximity and self-possession; and Heidegger, with the destruction of metaphysics, of onto theology, of the determination of being as presence (Derrida, 1967, p. 412).

Cultural Studies are encompassed in this historicity paradigm, adopting the point of view that there is an inextricable link between understanding and situation, interpretation and prejudice, knowledge and belief, theory and practice (Gadamer, 1976, p. 139). This is to say that Cultural Studies are engaged in what is current and contemporary and as such are situated in the present and the everyday.

The regime of the word provided us with a safe foundation, a familiar territory and a stable identity. Leaving it behind and replacing it for a regime of the image entails moving to a clearly different world, unsafe, unfamiliar and unstable. Considering Cultural Studies as the new humanities expresses the nature of a sensitivity that discloses the vertiginous unsteadiness of contemporary culture, with human beings being increasingly identified by their unstable, rambling, viscous, faltering and labyrinthine character.¹⁰

In this context, the narrative regime grounded on classical forms, with straight lines and clear surfaces is also subverted. Increasingly its place is being taken by baroque forms with curved lines and folds, and concave and sombre surfaces. Similarly, the dramatic forms, in which the characters struggle with contradictions that are settled by a redeeming synthesis, give way to tragic forms where the characters face contradictions that no synthesis will settle. Furthermore, it will be increasingly uncommon to find sublime

⁹ Nowadays, the ‘objective reality’ pertains, essentially, to “practical social needs”. And by practical social needs I mean the demands of the market for ‘quality’, ‘excellence’, ‘employability’, ‘competitiveness’, ‘efficiency’, ‘performance’ and ‘achievement’. This seems to be the ersatz for the ‘underlying structures’ and the ‘cultural invariants’, which knowledge has to accommodate itself to for being, *soi-disant*, in alignment with it.

¹⁰ In this regard, I can refer to two texts I have published. In the first one, titled “Médias et Mélancolie - Le Tragique, le Baroque et le Grotesque” the song ‘Mercy Street’ by Peter Gabriel is analysed, as mentioned before, (Martins, 2011c, pp. 17-21) while in the second one, “La Nouvelle Érotique” it is the album “All is full of Love” by Bjork (Martins, 2007a, pp. 21-27). The following extract from the *Book of Disquiet* by Bernardo Soares is also fitting: “I have to tell you that I have in fact travelled. But it all feels as if it is said that I have travelled, but I did not live the experience. Back and forth, from north to south ... east to west I have carried with me the weariness of having had a past, the boredom of living in the present and the unrest of having to have a future. But try as I may, all of me remains in the present, killing the past and the future within me” (Soares, 1998, p. 482)

forms shaping the narrative and pointing towards an elevated world. Instead, grotesque forms, disproportionate and hideous, become progressively more evident.¹¹

Abandoning the regime of the word, i.e., the literary regime, certainly entails abandoning classic rationality grounded on *logos*, a discourse which is also reason. It is based on truth and falsehood judgements, on rhetorical and argumentative strategies, with effects that are persuasive. It is concerned mainly with the validity of its propositions expressed by means of rhetorical reasoning. This rationality connects the subject who produces the discourse to the one who receives it and is articulated with an *ethos* that establishes the should-be logic.¹²

Discussing the dislocation of the centre of gravity from *logos* and *ethos* to *pathos* raises the issue of the curtailment of reason, which is problematic when it comes to the issue of community, i.e., issues regarding the public sphere, public opinion, citizenship and democracy. In the regime of the image, the questioning of the human does not cease. However, it is no longer only a matter of building the human community in Aristotelian terms, through rhetorical syllogisms, which are based on verisimilitude, and their argumentative strategies; it also involves building it through dreams, i.e., through the figurative paths of images, through the imaginary (Durand, 1969).

Reason (*logos*, even if it is the rhetorical *logos*, and *ethos*) demonstrates and persuades, whereas the image (as a sign within a particular type of imaginary, i.e., a system of dreams) allures and fascinates.

Accordingly, media and the image industries (photography, film, television, video, the computer, multimedia, advertising, electronic games, virtual environments, fashion, tourism, holidays...) are both image and word devices. However, although they do demonstrate and persuade using the word, as is the case with slogans, what most often happens is that they allure and fascinate us. When using media, citizens are confronted with (conscious) rhetorical strategies but they are equally confronted with a crossing as they make up a territory entangled with images, allowing for a wide variety of different (unconscious) figurative paths.

This view is developed in my book, *Crise no Castelo da Cultura — Das estrelas para os ecrãs* [Crisis in the Castle of Culture — From the stars to the screens] (Martins, 2011a). It discusses the movement from *logos* and *ethos* to *pathos*, from propositions to images, from the conscious to the unconscious, from rhetoric to the figurative path, from persuasion to allurement and fascination, from media as exclusively argumentative discursive devices to media as image devices with a “ sensory, emotional and body memory”.¹³

¹¹ On the issue of the tragic, baroque and grotesque forms of contemporary culture, see Martins, 2013, 2011c, 2007a, 2002d.

¹² Undoubtedly because it adopts language as a model for the analysis of all the semiological systems, including the analysis of image systems. In “ Rhétorique de L’Image”, Roland Barthes argued that it was absurd to show images without words: “Images without words can certainly be found in certain cartoons, but by way of a paradox; the absence of words always covers an enigmatic intention (Barthes, 1964, p. 43, note 4). In keeping with Barthes, I also used language, analogically, as a model for analysis of other semiological systems in *A Linguagem, a Verdade e o Poder - Ensaio de Semiótica Social* [Language, Truth and Power - An Essay on Social Semiotics] (Martins, 2002b).

¹³ This phrase is the title of the Preface I wrote (Martins, 2006) for the book *Marcas e Identidades* [Brands and Identities] by Teresa Ruão.

4. THE AESTHETICIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE

Throughout the ages, civilizations have always questioned themselves about human nature. The civilization of the image can, thus, hardly fail to confront us with this issue. The debate problematizing the human community, i.e., questioning the relationship between the public sphere and public opinion and the manner in which we organize ourselves in communities, has led many researchers to talk about “a tenable democracy”, “political revitalization of the public sphere”, “democratic regeneration of the public sphere”, insisting on the intervention of the public in politics and pointing out forms of resistance and of political reinvention.¹⁴ These are also the terms governing the debate both in the field of media education or media literacy and in the field of political economy.¹⁵

In the age of technology, the issue of public sphere, of public opinion and of the organisation of life in communities may be problematised considering at least three strands of meaning: a strand combining technicity and ethics; another articulating aesthetics and ethics; and a third strand in which technicity and aesthetics operate on the same level.

The strand combining technicity and ethics is line with the epistemological framework of modernity. It represents historical emancipation through technological injection and mobilisation. Technicity is understood as modern technological devices, including media, that ensure the symbolic mediation of our current experience. From this perspective, it is the role of ethics to examine the universal standards governing technological activity, media activity.¹⁶

The strand articulating aesthetics and ethics points towards a postmodern thought framework. Maffesoli's (1979, 2000) hedonistic and aestheticizing pragmatics could be regarded as an illustration of this theoretical attitude, which, according to Len Ang (1998, p. 78), is a conservative attitude. Its social and cultural optimism would allow it to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards the consumer society, interpreting it as a positive response to consumer wishes, on the one hand, and as a response promoting social changes, in

¹⁴ See João Pissara Esteves in *O Espaço Público e os Média* [The Public Sphere and the Media] (2005:25,35,39,94,100). Referring to the front page of an edition of the New York Times, Pizarra draws one's attention to the “ emergence of a second world superpower- Public Opinion, to be precise” (Ibid., p. 25)

¹⁵ Sara Pereira *et al.* (2014) maintain: “Media Education is a pedagogical process that seeks to empower citizens to be more critical and proactive in their experience of current day ‘communicational ecology’”. And in the preface of a work by Manuel Pinto *et al.* (2011, p.?) Estela Serrano writes: “Media literacy, understood as the competences and knowledge which enable citizens to use media in a conscious and informed way, is an essential component of the Communicative process”. She concludes: “The importance of media literacy is today acknowledged as an inalienable component of citizenship, having been the focus of Directive 2007/65/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council, which states “Media-literate people are able to exercise informed choices, understand the nature of content and services and take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies. They are better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material”.

As far as political economy is concerned, one can refer to *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications*, edited by Janet Wasco, Graham Murdock and Helena Sousa (2011), particularly to the study conducted by Helena Sousa and Joaquim Fidalgo (pp. 283-303). In their analysis of “journalistic regulatory structures” in Portugal, the authors question the point of the codes of conduct, the ethical councils and the newsroom councils, both professionally based ones and those that are state-centred, that are “ supposed to promote the quality of the media discourses and, therefore, the overall quality of democratic institutions” (Sousa and Fidalgo, 2011, p. 284).

¹⁶ Some take the view that the technicity-ethics strand is “post-metaphysical” (Esteves, 2005, pp. 39; 92). I do not see it that way, since the strand of meaning is based on a strong rationality, resorting to the criterion of the final judgement and having universal standards which statements are measured up to, as well as statements that have an exclusively cognitive content.

fashion, in lifestyles and in products, on the other. It is a response which “succumbs to an ‘anything goes’ attitude”, concludes Ien Ang (Ibidem). *Autopoietic* in nature, it does, in fact, call for an “ethics of aesthetics” (Maffesoli, 1990) and points to a dilettante and disengaged relativism consuming itself, with evident delight, in a pluralism of games and simulacra. The issue of public sphere and of citizenship, in other words, the issue of a democratic community does not have a place in this system of thought. Post-modern tribalism engenders a “transfiguration of the political” (Maffesoli, 1992): the sense of community does not extend beyond those who are close to me, those with whom I share some kind of emotion. Within the ethics-aesthetic framework, technicity is merely ludic and magical in nature, whose function it is to re-mythify and re-enchant the world.¹⁷

The strand that has technicity and aesthetics operating on the same level is also, in my view, modern. It is, however, characterised by historical pessimism. As it is “motivated by a deep understanding of the limits and failures of what Habermas calls ‘the unfinished project of modernity’” (Ien Ang, 1998) this epistemological attitude opens up to some of the essential contemporaneity debates. Since it does not point to universal standards that measure all statements, this strand of meaning deceptively portrays the public: it is “the phantom public” for Lippmann (1925); “simulacral public”, for Baudrillard (1981, p. 42); ghostly and “simulacral survival”, in the case of Bragança de Miranda (1995) .

It is my understanding that, of the three strands mentioned, the strand that combines technicity with aesthetics is the only one which questions the current nature of technicity. The technicity-ethics strand moralises technicity: on the one hand, it seeks to control it through universal standards; on the other hand, it fosters its good use. For its part, the ethics-aesthetics strand celebrates technicity as a re-mythification of existence joining archaism and technology.¹⁸ In contrast, the technicity-aesthetics strand problematizes the nature of technicity, seeing in it the realisation of reason as control (the ‘controllvernunft’ discussed by Odo Marquard) and, at the same time, the shaping of our sensitivity and emotion so as to produce the increasingly far reaching effect of aestheticization of the world.

Among the essential contemporaneity issues that this strand seeks to address, the following may be highlighted: the nature of technicity in the computer age and a new theory of image; the “hallucinatory block” constituted by linking technicity to aesthetics (with precise references to Benjamin, McLuhan, Debord and Deleuze, for example); a review of the theory violence, of dominance and of control; a problematisation of human experience and its progressive impoverishment by reactivating certain concepts and refining others: alienation, anaesthetisation, narcosis, simulacrum, the dissimulated freezing of the world- a path taken by Benjamin, Musil; Debord, Klossowski, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Perniola and Agamben, among others.

¹⁷ For Maffesoli, technology falls into the realm of the festive, of jubilation and intensity: “The imaginary, fantasy, the wish for communion, the different forms of solidarity, the charitable mutual assistance [after all the domestic, banal and proximity values of everyday life) generally find particularly performative vectors on the Internet and in ‘cyberspace’ (Maffesoli, 2000, p. 14).

¹⁸ As Michel Maffesoli (2011, p. 17) points out , “ post-modern technology participates in the *re-enchantment of the world*”.

In my view, the idea of the crisis of modernity as “manipulation” and as “the locking down of democracy” to which the media have greatly contributed, cannot be solved by acts of faith in the future, by self-reflexivity and by ethics, as is the case with the issues discussed within the technicity-ethics strand.¹⁹ The epistemological option that is grounded in the technicity-aesthetics strand has clear emancipatory effects, albeit with the advantage of not having the dramatic structure of a final redemption since it expresses tragic modernity, which is typical of the media age, a modernity which expresses the crisis of the age, its malaise, its melancholy (Martins, 2003, 2002a, 2002d). Nevertheless, having been precipitated into immanence and with everything riding on the present (Maffesoli, 1979), this modernity cannot but portray the horizon of a shared community dreaming of the redemption of the human. It is also moved by a commitment to freedom and is buoyed up by the joyous erotica of a body that has to be imparted to the community. As I see it, this media age, lacking as it is in universal standards to guide it, is put to the test in the struggle for a “democracy to come” (Martins, 2003).

As mentioned above, the way media are currently operating revolves around the idea of the crisis of modernity. The theme is by no means new: in the mid-19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville considered the split between criticism and opinion as irreversible.²⁰ And in Vienna at the beginning of the 20th century, Karl Kraus, heading the *Fackel*, maintained that journalism ate up thought (Bouveresse, 2001).

I am fully aware that our modernity has considerable potential for self-reflexivity. For instance, in what he terms as a “rewriting of modernity”, Jean-Francois Lyotard (s.d., p. 202) brands “the project of emancipating humanity through science and technicity” as a myth and points out that the critique of this simulacrum “has long been provided by modernity itself”,²¹ I am, however, not fully convinced that the idea of modernity as an unfinished project, or as an unfinishable one, can be grounded in a universalist concept of freedom. The universalist idea of freedom has reached a crisis point precisely due to its universalist nature, making it suitable for a global emancipatory mobilisation, which is itself undergoing a crisis. In my view, the whole idea of a global project is problematic, in sociological terms. It is my understanding that, for a sociologist, the conditions of possibility for a community matter less than the concrete conditions of existence for that community, which comprise a field of social forces inherent to that specific field. It is in this sense that I understand the work and the legacy of Michel Foucault (1976), firstly, and of Pierre Bourdieu (1989) later.

¹⁹ This perspective does have its firm supporters, however. João Pissara Neves is one them, as can be seen in *O Espaço Público e os Media* [The Public Sphere and the Media]. After pointing out that the current crisis of the public sphere is due to “the betrayal of the universal principles comprising the actual idea of Public Sphere (liberty and equality)” he concludes that by responding to its own crisis (given all the revitalisation signs and efforts) “the public sphere is revealing the primary motivation for a richer citizenship experience that inspires and updates the aforementioned principles: a civil society (identities, associations and social movements) mobilised around a broader system of liberties and creating the conditions for more equality in social relations” (Esteves, 2005, pp. 100-101).

²⁰ For Alexis de Tocqueville (1981, pp.17-18), criticism gave way to opinion, whose force “no longer persuades by the strength of the conviction but rather imposes it and makes its way into the minds by a kind of pressure that is applied on our intelligence”.

²¹ In this regard, see “Comunicação e Cidadania” [Communication and Citizenship] (Martins, 2008, pp.20-21).

That is not to say that it is possible to consider historical emancipation in terms of interests, isolating it from epistemological considerations. Elaborating on Michel Foucault, Paul Rabinow (1985, pp. 93-94) draws on Max Weber: the Capitalist, he claims, “was not only the *homo economicus* who traded and built ships, but also looked at Rembrandt paintings, drew maps of the world and worried a good deal about their destiny”. These activities, Rabinow (Ibidem) goes on to say, “were strong and effective forces in what they were and how they acted”.

It is precisely because they establish a sense of personal identity, as well as a sense of the reality of the world, that epistemic practices establish an interaction scheme, that is, they produce a meaning. Thus, the object of inquiry of social sciences, i.e., the issue of social action, forces one to consider how a particular society’s way of life is based on a certain regime of perception: modes of speaking (rhetorics) and modes of understanding (hermeneutics). By questioning the interests that govern a society’s way of life, one is, therefore, also taking account of epistemic considerations.

In light of this, Bragança de Miranda’s (1995, pp. 129-148) view seems to be perfectly in tune with a rewriting of modernity as he considers the current technological utopia of a virtual *agora* to be the final form of the simulacral survival of the public sphere. What is at play in this technological utopia is the old mythical scheme which, from the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel and its current shift into the cyberculture ideology, fantasises a society of total knowledge and universal communication (Martins, 1998).

In the 1970s, when Pierre Bourdieu (1973) wrote “L’opinion publique n’existe pas”, what I believe was at issue then was the indictment of an idealistic and universalist fiction of public sphere, a fiction to be found in the polls, which the media permanently feed on and were actually responsible for creating. In the same spirit, Daniel Bounoux (2002, p. 277) over a decade ago talked about the fatal collusion between the media, polling companies and politicians.

Undeniably, the media do more than just contribute to locking down democracy. There is potential to be found, despite the equivocality of their role nowadays. Having moved lock, stock and barrel to the realms of power, the media stage the real country and its specific problems in a way which does not have any correspondence to reality. Furthermore, they envelop the public sphere in armour plating thereby keeping the citizens’ voice out. Meanwhile the usual media regulators, money (i.e. the Market), on the one hand, and politics (i.e., the State), on the other, are not up to the task of explaining the aestheticization of politics and the public sphere: the strand of meaning that combines technicity with ethics enables one to raise the aesthetics issue but does not allow one to solve it. As I see it, the dissolution of the aesthetic ideology, discussed by Paul de Man (1998) and Terry Eagleton (1993), entails initially examining the block that is currently made up of technicity and aesthetics.

5. TECHNICALITY AND AESTHETICS – REREADING BENJAMIN

Habermas (1962) levelled criticism at the bourgeois notion of public sphere for its false universality and for requiring that it be truly materialised. What this claim does is

revisit and expound Marx's views on the end of capitalism: it would trigger the end of the separation between State and Civil Society and lead to the disappearance of the State itself.

From a communicational point of view, this position is reductionist in that it fails to consider technical and aesthetic reasons. Marshall McLuhan (1962, 1964) does take them into account, however. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, not only is modernity inextricably linked to the mechanisation of writing, i.e., to the Gutenberg press, but that mode of expression is also well suited to the classic public sphere, where the press plays an essential role. While it may be true that the sphere cannot be fully accounted for with a technical explanation, it seems unquestionable that the former is inseparable from the latter. And further transformations of the public sphere are to be expected as new media technologies emerge. In *Understanding Media*, on the other hand, the fusion of *techné* and *aesthesis* is already visible, with the media being depicted as extensions of human faculties.

The association between technicity and aesthetics is previously brought to the fore by Walter Benjamin as early as the 1930s when he examines the emergence of photography, film and radio, new media at the time — at the very moment when fascism was taking hold in Europe. Benjamin shows us that the type of subject to be expected in the literary age, a rational subject exercising self-control, is far more representative of the collective will than empirical individuals. When considered together, the individuals immediately disappear, sublimated by a “discussion” in the public sphere. When it comes to photography, film and radio, which arouse and administer emotions, individuals are not mobilised together but individually. As Siegfried Kracauer (1963) correctly observed, individuals can still be seen as “ornaments” in Leni Riefensthal's films, but the underlying logic of this process is that mobilization bears upon every individual, each of whom is now emotionally engaged. In other words, in the classic era, subjects tend to be rational, but they become completely rational as a collective subject. In the new technological circumstances, it is no longer possible to convene individuals politically. At most, they can be grouped economically or statistically. In sum, the classic view of public sphere is illusory but no less so is a view that insists on a public sphere in the new technological and economic circumstances.

On the other hand, convoking aesthetics within the technological context is by no means to be confined to this discipline's epistemological profile. When I speak of aesthetics I do so to encompass sensitivity, emotions, senses and affection. That is why the new sensitivity is said to be hybrid - machines produced by science are what mobilises affections and monetises them.

Walter Benjamin (1936) takes this view when he criticises the manner in which aesthetic categories are used politically. He claims that the new technical media, which triggered the disenchantment of the world by nullifying the “metaphysical” categories of “creativity, genius, eternal value and mystery” (Benjamin, 1992, pp. 73-74) — the categories comprising what he calls “aura” — are used in certain circumstances to enthrall the masses. By staging a spectacle, in which the masses mistakenly believe to be participating, the new technical media permanently re-enchanted the world, thereby bringing the archaic back to the current. It does not follow from this analysis that the sole effect of the

emergence of the new technical media is to “disconnect the masses”. On the contrary, they also help the masses take their place in history by enhancing their right to assert themselves as a subject. This triggered the crisis of property relations on which the values of “creativity, genius, eternal value and mystery” were founded.

Benjamin focuses on this tension, which is inherent to photography, film and radio (and, nowadays, to other new media) and condemns the policy of enthrallment of the masses, which stems from the use that the dominant powers make of new technology. It is true that for Benjamin the vanguard have a shock effect in the struggle against the re-aurification (re-enchantment) of the world. However, the new technologies, as is the case of film, provoke the shock themselves, leading one to the “optical unconscious” (Ibidem, p. 105), to the all-enveloping concealed reality of phantasmagoria.

Benjamin’s analysis has, thus, a twofold dimension: the acknowledgement of the enthrallment of the masses, engendered by the media, as well as the “revolutionary” potential which Benjamin sees in the new technologies. In the words of this German writer, film can, in certain cases, foster a “revolutionary criticism of social conditions and even of the distribution of property” (Ibidem, p. 96). If one takes into account the context in which it is used, this extract does not appear to be very forceful and is rather wavering. Notwithstanding, it is of primary importance since it meets the issue which concerns us head on: the potential new technologies have for critique and rupture, for producing what is human.

The text in question mainly analyses film, with Benjamin seeking to determine its “revolutionary functions” (Ibidem, p. 103). And it does not seem fitting to conclude that criticism of the new emotional dominance is what prevails in Benjamin’s work. As I see it, this view misses the point, since Benjamin considers that technologies are able to change even our experience of reality: “film furthers insight into the necessities governing our lives by its the use of close-ups, by its accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects, and by its exploration of commonplace milieux through the ingenious guidance of the camera; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of a vast and unsuspected field of action. Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris” (Ibidem, pp. 103-104). Benjamin goes on to consider connected issues such as “tests”, “exams” and “distraction”, topics which derive from this “optical unconscious” of reality (Ibidem, pp. 105) introduced by film. It is the optical unconscious that opens one up to the “instinctual unconscious”, a concept drawn from Freud, and upon which the spectacle is set up.

6. CULTURAL STUDIES AS THE NEW HUMANITIES

I have argued that Cultural Studies are to be considered as the new humanities. I do not believe that my point of view has broken entirely new ground, however. Other researchers before me have sought a similar path. Two cases come to mind: a 2008 study

by António Fidalgo and Sofia Sampaio's more recent (2013) work. Both seem to advocate a similar point of view to the one I am arguing for. It is true that Sofia Sampaio's proposal is watered down when compared to António Fidalgo's. In a study published in 2013 in the journal *Culture Unbound* with the title "Portuguese Cultural Studies/Cultural Studies in Portugal" (Sampaio, 2013), Sofia Sampaio appears to focus more on the connection between Cultural Studies and the "new economy": Cultural Studies are concerned with the cultural industries and these become part of the "new economy" as "creative industries" (Sampaio, 2013, p. 83). This was "a model developed by Tony Blair's New Labour in the late 1990s, officially arriving in Portugal during the 2005-2011 Socialist government led by José Sócrates" (Ibidem, p. 79),²² Drawing on Miller & Yúdice (2002), Garnham (2005) and Ross (2009), Sofia Sampaio (Ibidem, p. 79) points out that the "new economy" is largely dependent on "the expansion of the new information technologies (mostly software, computer games and electronic publishing) and the extraction of value from intellectual property rights". On the other hand, she states that it was the elevation of culture to a "key economic activity" that shaped the cultural studies agenda in Portugal (Ibidem, p. 83).

Nevertheless, taking into account the arguments put forward by Sofia Sampaio, a researcher at the Centre for Research in Anthropology (CRIA), I would say that it is plausible to draw the conclusion that Cultural Studies are the new humanities for the simple reason that, in general terms, we are in the presence of a movement that brings the latter close to the four pillars proposed by John Fornäs (1999, p. 132) to define the former: "culture, communication, contextualisation and critique".²³ This movement, given its "complexity" (Grossberg, 2010, pp. 16-17; 30; 40), and the effects of the market-turn in the academia would have the distinction of saving the humanities "from the decline of the literary-studies" paradigm" (Sampaio, 2013, p. 80) and from the flashes of resentment that have tormented it (Sampaio, 2013, p. 83).

Similarly, in a text written in 2008 which he called "The New Humanities", António Fidalgo was not far from the view that Cultural Studies may be regarded as the new humanities. He took, however, a more radical stance by considering Communication Sciences as the "New Humanities" *tout court*.

²² Although Sofia Sampaio considers that "the adoption of the creative industries policy model has been responsible for this sudden institutional interest in cultural studies" (Sampaio, 2013, p. 79), she believes that the Bologna Accords, signed in 1999, setting out the construction of a common European Higher Education Area, also played a significant role in this turn in the humanities, particularly by encouraging interdisciplinary approaches and a more flexible curriculum (Ibidem).

²³ Sofia Sampaio (2013, p. 76) points out, however, that in terms of critique and contextualization, Cultural Studies are mostly associated to Social Sciences research centres, with the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS) of the University of Minho, the Centre for Social Studies (CES) of the University of Coimbra and the Centre for Research in Anthropology being given as examples. In fact, it is actually quite common for Cultural Studies to cause some discomfort in Faculties of Arts, particularly in literary studies and in "English and American studies" (Sampaio, 2013, p. 74). Accordingly, she regards the doctoral programme jointly launched by the Universities of Minho and Aveiro and directly linked to Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS) as being stronger on critique and contextualisation than the doctoral programme of the Catholic University in Lisbon, launched in the same year, but directly linked to a literary studies centre, the Centre for the Study of Culture and Communication (CECC). According to Sampaio, the theoretical framework of the latter programme draws from German Kulturkritik tradition and its relationship with cultural studies is "rather ambiguous"; and the programme "is weaker on either contextualisation and critique", but focusing more clearly on "an entrepreneurial job-orientated agenda" since its main objective is the " ' professional integration of students' " (Ibidem).

I myself took this line of reasoning, which posits that Cultural Studies materialize a shift that occurred in the humanities and inflected them towards the Social Sciences, namely to Communication Sciences. I did so in two studies undertaken in 2010 and 2011, the first of which when the joint doctoral programme in Cultural Studies at the Universities of Minho and Aveiro was set up (Martins, 2010a) and the second when it became the main argument of a book I then authored (Martins, 2011a)²⁴.

In keeping with the tradition of Cultural Studies, the link which needs clarifying whenever addressing the question of culture is its relation with power, that is to say, the focus should always be on the appropriations of culture in everyday life by a wide range of actors and social agents, be they groups or movements (Martins, 2010a, 2011a).

However, the development of Cultural Studies in Portugal still remains blurry and there are still ambiguities surrounding the concept itself.²⁵ Accordingly, Sofia Sampaio states that some research projects in Portugal (particularly teaching projects) equate Cultural Studies to mere studies of culture (Sampaio, 2013: 76), which I believe is a misapprehension that my proposal has sought to clear up: Cultural Studies depict the vertiginous flurry that is current human existence and as such may be regarded as the new humanities.

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²⁴ In the first part of the book *Crise no Castelo da Cultura- Das Estrelas para os Ecrãs* [Crisis in the Castle of Culture- From the stars to the screens] (Martins: 2011 a) the relationship between “Cultural Studies and Communication Sciences “is established. This part is divided into five chapters: (1) Cultural Studies; (2) “Communication studies and the contemporary”; (3) “Communication Sciences- a modernity project”; (4) The visible and the invisible in social practices”; (5) “Towards a methodological ‘polytheism’ in Cultural Studies”.

²⁵ In the opening lines of a study conducted in 2009, Maria Manuel Baptista (2009) observes: “The field of Cultural Studies is inherently paradoxical, being the subject of discussion and uncertainty . It features a strong academic presence in intellectual discourse and shows the deep internal disagreements that there are regarding practically everything : what purpose it serves, whom its results are supposed to serve, what theories it produces and uses, what methods and objects of study are deemed appropriate, what its limits are, etc.”.

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