

Citizens of Europe

Culture e diritti

a cura di Lauso Zagato, Marilena Vecco

Cultural Mutation

What media do to Culture

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Abstract We are now living during a great 'cultural mutation'. The concept of 'cultural mutation' may seem like an oxymoron. However, in a sense, human cultures have always flourished in areas where the boundaries between voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious factors were relatively subtle and unstable. While something of the sort has always occurred, over the last two and a half centuries or so – first in West and then in the global world – the phenomenon has acquired macroscopic proportions. Recently, the central role of the so-called 'creativity' in culture policies, as well as the industrialization of creativity itself, are, at the same time, a symptom and a further cause of a deep change. The semantic of the words 'culture', 'art', 'creativity' has different and even opposite meanings, due to the deep mutation produced by the current aestheticization of life and the economicization of art and culture. The setting up of a concept of 'medium' philosophically developed beyond the usual 'mediological' studies and in synergy with the concept of 'genealogy' allows to understand conditions and causes of these current mutations in culture and in art; to glance into the complex intermedial apparatus of our society and its internal conflicts; to detect possibilities of resistances and alternatives to the aestheticization of economy and the economization of culture and art.

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Keywords Cultural policy. Art. Creativity. Participation.

1 Issue

Culture and research spark innovation, and hence create jobs,
foster progress and development

(from the *Italian Manifesto per la cultura*
by *Il Sole 24 Ore*; my translation).

Similar statements, indeed quite common in many texts of Western culture policies, sound peremptory. Should we conclude that any culture which does not trigger innovation and development is doomed and excluded? Is it

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really obvious that any culture which is able to promote peace is a culture which produces 'progress' and 'development' (according to the dominant meaning of these words)?

The term 'cultural mutation' may seem like an oxymoron. Do we not use the word 'mutation' for those changes that occur independently of our awareness and will in irreversible physical processes, such as 'genetic mutations'? By contrast, is culture not a means to nourish freedom, and everything arising from it - free thinking, moral responsibility, democracy, and so on? Indeed, actions and voluntary behaviours, but even human practices which become unconscious habits or forms of imitation, are usually considered to be cultural only when one is able to identify, or to reasonably posit, a point where things could or can be done differently, thanks to a different awareness and will. Cultures are studied in order to identify different possibilities in given conditions. The use of the word 'nature' differs from the use of the word 'culture' insofar as it is a non-conscious, non-voluntary determination.

But it is not always easy to draw a line of demarcation between 'cultural' and 'natural' in human life (nor is it a trivial task to distinguish human culture from animals' processing of the environment, as though this were determined only by nutritional, reproductive needs or environmental adaptation. For example, it is not possible to deduce how each individual blackbird develops its own singing, by simply reducing it to the function of courtship and reproduction or even sheer chance).

In a sense, human cultures have always flourished in areas where the boundaries between voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious factors were relatively subtle and unstable. For example, the memory of a conscious choice can be buried forever in a habit, which may affect subsequent generations even physically. In these areas an analogy may be drawn with genetic mutations, based on the sort of non-conscious, non-voluntary components through which a cultural change may come to resemble an irreversible mutation.

While something of the sort has always occurred, over the last two and a half centuries or so - first in West and then in the 'global' world - the phenomenon has acquired macroscopic proportions. Yet, this has not always been noticed and evaluated with due attention.

International legal conventions (CICH, CCD, FC) and policy statements (GPCCI) continue to employ the word 'culture' by assigning it a value that is presupposed and unquestioned: as if it had more or less retained a meaning common to Greek *paideia*, the Latin *studia humanitatis* and to the freewill of mankind according to Humanism; as if culture could free mankind from states of dependency and servitude by enriching it with knowledge, ethically educating it, and promoting open discussion and

respect.¹ It seems to me that this is the meaning implicitly assigned to ‘cultural rights’, which are undoubtedly conceived as part of ‘human rights’ (UDHR, FC). At the same time, however, the word ‘culture’ is used – even in some of the same texts – in another sense: as man’s processing of the environment, oriented towards self-reproduction. In some texts, this processing is seen to push in the direction of ‘identical’ repetition. This view is expressed in the ‘definition’ of «intangible cultural heritage» in the CICH, Art. 2:

1. The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity.

So expressed, this concept of culture seems closely linked with the nineteenth-century Western model of the external observer of ‘indigenous’ populations living in closed environments or with only limited or slow exchanges with other populations and cultures (Goldoni 2008). This ‘definition’ reveals a concept of culture that is profoundly different from the ‘Humanistic’ one. It speaks of a response to the environment that passes on from generation to generation and is useful for the self-reproduction of a society or people. It applies a naturalistic-functional conception of life to culture that is incompatible with the ‘humanistic-democratic’ perspective. This is the case with some features of the Nazi model for instance, which is very much oriented towards an integration with the environment and the transmission of identity from one generation to the next. This concept of culture even fits with every model that – in practice if not in principle – is self-sustaining and self-reproducing through the forced standardization of behaviours, opinions and choices. The globalized Western economic system, in its self-reproduction according to the prevailing notions of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ and their dominant political and economic applications, may well be seen to fit with this model.

Not only any closed ‘indigenous’ culture, but also Nazi culture, the Jihadist and that of dominant global capitalism are all identity-building cultures, albeit with enormous differences in their ways and means of en-

¹ The notion of Humanism is ambiguous: there have been nationalist, identitarian and Eurocentric uses of this concept. I use the word with an open, non-identitarian meaning. (Cfr. Romano 2014, Borutti 2014).

asuring this identity. They are mutually incompatible. No cultural identity can really accept differences, contrary to what the CCD suggests:

This intangible cultural heritage [...] constantly recreated by communities and groups [...] provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

As one would expect, the CICH states that the heritage of a cultural identity will be defended only if it is compatible with 'human rights':

For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

It is clear, however, that 'human' has different meanings in different cultures. Nazis and Islamic fundamentalists, like Christian fundamentalists before them, feel that they have a clear idea of what is human and non-human. Many political versions of Marxism also purported to have very clear ideas about what is human. Even the various champions of the liberal state, from Hobbes onwards, of capitalism, from Smith onwards, and of well-being, from Bentham onwards, have maintained that they have a clear idea of what is human. But what culture has the right to decide what is human? By what means or arguments and through what forms of power will it assert such right?

Just to avoid possible misunderstandings: all conceptual confusion aside, the UDHR and DF declarations and the CCD, CICH and FC conventions offer juridical and political tools to safeguard – now contingently and provisionally – the intangible cultural heritage of mankind, protect ethnic minorities against the destructive effects of globalization or intolerant attitudes and actions, and defend many ways of living against the violence that continues to be perpetrated across the world. One might say: we can – indeed, *must* – be satisfied with this. But contentedness can also be risky, if conceptual confusion prevents us from seeing what was smoldering under the ashes and is now flaring up.

'Eurocentric' culture has long been a matter of dispute and conflict, one which has even acquired dramatic overtones in the light of post-colonial claims. The Humanistic model of mankind has sometimes been compromised by Eurocentrism (Romano 2014, Borutti 2014), hence the very concept of 'human' became suspect.

Human actions in any environment are also due to non-human factors. A person's relation to an instrument or technique is neither one of freely exercised control nor one of mere conditioning (Simondon 1958; McLuhan

[1964] 1991). Technological tools deeply modify what is understood by the term 'human'. Moreover, if one adopts a notion of culture as an explanation of how human uses change in response to the environment, the boundary between human and animal processing is not always clear. I am thinking here of what we learn from animals through breeding, domestication, and observation in the wild. If culture is a human right, are there any activities and uses that may be considered animal rights?

For these and other reasons, the concept of 'post-human' has been proposed.² In the present context I prefer not to use it. The inflated and often all too easy use of the prefix 'post' (starting from the use of 'post-modern', which has its good reasons, but often occurs inappropriately) can make one lose sight of the profound stratification and vast range of application and meaning of certain words. The term 'human' has such a remote, deep genealogy, it is so prominent in 'our' culture, philosophy, legislation, political thought and practice, that treating it as a thing of the past - as the expression 'post-human' suggests - has the effect of preventing critical discourse from engaging with the most common and influential contexts, including the aforementioned international declarations and conventions.

A similar reasoning can be made about the word 'culture': ambiguous, polysemic, but still an indispensable ground for discussion. Therefore, it is appropriate to speak of 'human' and 'culture' precisely in order to detect the limitations, prejudices, misunderstandings and conflicts in their use. The association of 'mutation' with 'culture' is intended to detect some of these conflicting aspects in modern and contemporary reality.

2 Mutation

I will introduce the notion of cultural mutation by means of a musical example. Let us imagine someone who in 1962 is listening to John Coltrane, live, as he plays a long solo from *My Favorite Things*. McCoy Tyner, Steve Davis and Elvin Jones play an E minor, while Coltrane produces a continuous stream of sound on his soprano sax. The musical ambience has a touch of the Orient. The music is hypnotic and the sense of time is almost lost.

Let us now picture someone who, in 2007, is listening to Morton Feldman's live performance of *For Samuel Beckett*. The piece begins with a steady flux of sounds which changes suddenly - but not too abruptly - at unpredictable intervals: no musical meter or modulation allows one to anticipate these changes, as might be the case with music conceived as part of a functional harmony. One effect is that the listening time becomes difficult to measure. The listener is enveloped by sound and

2 See Kairos 2007.

it is hard to remember the beginning or anticipate the next step or the conclusion.

Now imagine someone who is listening to the same music on vinyl or CD. The sound is different, as is the setting. The listener might be alone. There is no longer any spatial, acoustic or emotional relationship with the musicians and their audience. Time too is different. The phone rings and the listener decides to pick up the receiver. The doorbell rings and she/he decides to open the door and can then resume the music at the same point and continue the listening. Being able to interrupt and resume the listening at will has its advantages: one can choose to go back, to repeat, to analyse any part. This possibility offers new means to the analytical musical mind. But the time is different: the psychological time which this music produces is completely different from the time a person will experience through the uninterrupted listening of live music.

Now imagine someone who has never listened to Coltrane or a live performance by Feldman and does not have their records, but wishes to get an idea of their music and see whether she/he might like it. This person will go on YouTube and listen to a sample from one artist and a sample from the other. She/he will get an idea. But *what* idea? Certainly this person has heard something by Coltrane and Feldman. The time that the music conveys is also different from that of the vinyl or CD. It is a minimal amount of time, the time of a sound sample that is filed in a hurry. Flicking from one YouTube video to the next has its advantages over live music and even the use of CDs: one can obtain a huge amount of quick information – unimaginable only a few years ago – on all kinds of music from every part of the world. We can get an idea of things, make a selection and expand our music archive. Through it, we can learn so many things...

However, we should not hide the fact that the psychological time which listening to music on Youtube usually produces is the exact opposite of the kind of time produced by the experience of listening, with no interruptions, to a live performance of music by Coltrane or Feldman. The issue is a serious one, because time is not accessory to music, but an integral part of its nature: it organizes, through sound and rhythm, the space and time of a place and of the existence of those who are there, listening. Can a person flicking across Youtube videos be said to 'know' the music of Coltrane or Feldman? Certainly not.

Things are different for the person who, being a musician, uses information from Youtube, Deezer, Soundcloud, Spotify and the like, to choose what really interests her/him, and from there begin to listen carefully to the music. For example, this person will first of all try to download lots of music by Coltrane or Feldman. Then she/he will want to listen to live performances of compositions by Feldman, or performances by musicians who develop some of Coltrane's musical ideas. The person in question can use analogical or digital supports to analyse and process music downloaded

off the Internet, even with the help of scores or of transcriptions of improvised music. He/she may also draw upon this material to create new live music. Nowadays all musicians, at all levels of expertise, as well as many listeners and fans, use the Internet in this way. A first quick selection of music is used to choose, explore or possibly develop new musical material to be used in one's own practice: one can take inspiration from it, extract certain parts, or even rework it directly, as DJs do. From this point of view, the opportunities that the Internet offers today are truly remarkable: never before have there been so many possibilities and *stimuli*.

The music softwares now available lead many people with a practical interest in music to digitally manipulate a large range of sound material, in order to produce music even without using any scores, or traditional instruments and their timbres. The new music genres could hardly have become a major development without these resources.

One might say that all these ways of using the network for music are free: because they are filled with moments of reflection and practices which provide a basis for informed choices. Yet, they are only free to the extent these practices require some sacrifices: for a person must stop listening to everything and focus on one particular genre or piece of music, even trying to imitate it with instruments or her/his voice. This concentration and these tests require an amount of time that is taken away from other listening. A very different type of reception is that of the person who yields to her/his musical voracity. This person gets used to listening to a piece for just over a couple of minutes. Beyond that, impatience sets in. For this type of user it is important to change music fast, to accumulate it: this is an 'omnivore' consumer (Peterson 1992).

In general, in the use of music in our globalized Western societies, which is the predominant type of use? Answers may be found by addressing the following questions, which can be answered on the basis of one's personal experience and without having to resort to complex statistical data:

- I have just observed that we may be able to restrain our musical voracity through an interest in the practice of music which is always quite specific and focused, requires much practice and sets limits in terms of genre and time. Something similar can be said of any student or lover of a specific discipline who wishes to extend her/his approach to the subject to the listening of music. Practices and passionate interests require study, skill, perseverance and time.
- To what extent do these factors find a place in the life of the average person with an easy access to music?
- Why is the most widely broadcast genre of music in the current globalized Western world not symphonic, chamber or opera music but songs? Romantic music had 'Lieder' as well as symphonies and chamber music. Opera also includes songs ('arias') but within the context of a more complex and long-running piece of art. One could answer:

music is becoming popular, and people have always sung and loved songs. This is true. However, one wonders whether people in the past had more time or, rather, a different, less intermittent time. At any rate, people in the past deemed it legitimate to devote some time to music. This was especially true of the upper classes, but also applied to everyone else, as people would always make some time for music, for example during the religious or secular festivities.

- What was the playing time of a 45 RPM record disc?
- How is it that pop songs have achieved international success even though people around the world often do not understand their lyrics?
- Why is it that, especially since the era of 45 RPM records, of the jukebox and of long playing, musical pieces by rock, progressive and pop groups are identified more by their immediate sound and timbre (recognizable from the very first seconds), than by modulation and narrative structure (take the *Beatles'* sound, for example)? The 'form' of some songs does not consist mainly in the harmonic development of a theme, as in the 'sonata form' or even in some early twentieth-century songs: for their very 'development' consists in suspending and then recalling a distinctive sound.
- How long does it take just to recognize the sound of a pop or rock song *today*? (There is even a digital program, *Shazam* that can instantly recognize any piece).
- What is the average duration of a piece of music uploaded on Youtube?
- Why are pieces of music that resemble classical or contemporary classical music most commonly heard nowadays as part of the soundtrack of films or TV series?

If the scale tilts toward the side of quick consumption, there will be some 'weighty' reasons that account for this cultural mutation. Later on in this text I will try to identify some of these reasons. Meanwhile, I only wish to note that this mutation affects everyone: casual listeners and fans as well as musicians. Often, a producer selecting new pieces of music to be promoted on the market will choose compositions or projects that have an immediate sound impact. Of course, every musician knows this, so she/he may decide to adapt her/his own music to achieve this effect. The process of musical production, including that carried out in private and/or among friends on social networks, is changing music. In what direction? The question is this: is music being received and used in a compulsive way, under the control of the media and their directors and managers, or in a free way? By exploring this alternative, a possible answer may be found to the question: what do we mean when we claim to 'defend' and promote culture, a 'right' to culture?

3 Mass/popular art and shared enjoyment

Someone might object to my arguments that a cultural difference between the elite and the majority of the population is to be observed in most civilizations and that, therefore, I am not making any new point. One might also observe that I am making an elitist argument, by disregarding popular entertainment. But this is not at all what I wish to do.

Much criticism is being directed nowadays towards the more widespread use of music in the Western world. This is seen as a form of consumption aimed at enjoyment, yet without a conscious, discerning attitude. This consumption has often been an (explicit or implicit) polemical target for composers of contemporary music – as well as for Adorno. Indeed, in the twentieth century not just ‘pop’ music but also classical music became a phenomenon of consumption for a middle class more interested in the social prestige of participating in cultural rituals than in the music itself. Adorno noted as much in *Kultur Industrie* ([1947] 1998). This form of consumption works to the extent that it fulfils a (partly narcissistic) need to achieve pleasure by indulging one’s tastes – and being reflected by them. This kind of enjoyment is pursued through music, films, TV series, soap operas, entertainment programs, and the like. It marks a pause in the individual’s critical awareness. In this way, it allows people to regenerate the energies exhausted through the stress induced by competitive capitalist society. Adorno realized that this break can be functional to the reproduction of this oppressive way of life. However, he mistakenly identified the use that ‘cultural industry’ makes of this pleasure, with those forms of art that offer a more immediate, less intellectual kind of enjoyment than avant-garde music.

Art does not always need to raise awareness, in the way so-called ‘great’ art does – from classical tragedy to the art of the twentieth-century avant-garde. Good art always meets people’s needs – in a shared social or political context and in ordinary life – and influences their way of living by promoting certain habits, behaviours and ethical attitudes; by suggesting what use to make of objects; and by building environments and structures.

There is an ancient art of pottery, a Japanese art for food and beverage containers; an art for fashion and design. There used to be a Byzantine and Arab art of mosaics, as a way of creating an atmosphere. Architecture produces environments. Music, too, builds environments, by means of sound. By means of it, music can produce a background, or meeting places through the rhythm of dance, or performances where to stand still and listen in silence. There are no ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ arts: for the so-called ‘pure’ arts often borrow materials (and ideas) from the so-called applied arts. There are no ‘high’ and ‘low’ arts. Rather, there are different functions of the arts. So-called ‘high art’ takes on the task of engendering a strong awareness of one’s relationship with the surrounding world: it is in

such terms that we interpret some ancient Greek tragedies, and some art of the twentieth-century avant-garde. 'Great art' is required when a world or culture need to be (re)interpreted. The need for it is certainly felt today. But there is no reason why this art should exclude the enjoyment provided by art that is more immediate and closer to everyday life.

Adorno, like many intellectuals of his generation, conceived of only one kind of music (and culture), and thus reasoned on the basis of one-sided categorizations that resulted in true errors of judgment (Goldoni 2005). For example, the 'danceability' of a given kind of music was, in his eyes, a sure sign that such music had little value: after all, Adorno's criticism of jazz (the one he knew, and quite badly at that) entirely rested on the fact that it was played by orchestras as an accompaniment to dancing. What is most striking of Adorno, alongside his intelligence, is his lack of sympathy, his aristocratic contempt for every form of popular enjoyment.

But in fact, the human ability to find an opportunity to celebrate and revel in almost all conditions, even with very few resources or in adverse circumstances, may be seen as a wonderful and moving thing. The festive character of music is not to be mistaken for a 'popular' character in the commercial sense. Celebrating is a way of thanking life itself, without calculation or ulterior motives. It is a great resource for expressing or re-discovering the will to live, and also gives people the energy to resist what is oppressive or harmful in life. Many musical practices around the world, including the practice of improvisation, bear this positive hallmark. Their value is not to be measured by the yardstick of most twentieth-century avant-garde music, which was aimed to avoid structural repetitions and predictability. Their value is in producing a shared enjoyment, including the simple enjoyment of sharing something.

It is certainly true that, in our globalized Western societies, most music we enjoy is provided by the culture industry. The difference, however, does not lie in the music itself as much as in its reception and use. One can use commercial music to promote a fruitful enjoyment and social interaction, while avant-garde music can also be used to discriminate against people, or for purely self-referential satisfaction.

It is equally true that the 'medium' itself - the commercial and industrial context of the music - is not neutral, but induces consumerist attitudes and implies certain cultural patterns. The reality, however, especially at a local level, is more varied than what Adorno imagined. Local, global... the truth is also a matter of quantity, extension, and what one expects from life. If one expects simultaneous historical and universal liberation - but are there really any 'universals' or any univocal 'history'? - the cards have already been stacked. But if one expects liberation at local levels, which can be extended and drawn together through mutual attraction, this is no doubt a real possibility.

4 Aims, means, and unexpected consequences

I have chosen to provide some musical examples, but could just as easily have focused on other fields. Anyone attempting to write a text of some sort knows that reading it with the eye, ear and the mind of the writer is very different from reading it – even voraciously – without being in the habit of writing. A person who writes will often focus her/his own reading on specific literary genres and devote much time to the practice: writing imposes certain rhythms, according to the theme and style adopted, and these end up governing the whole process.

It is the same for any art. *Ars longa, vita brevis*: one lifetime is not enough for any art. Today, however, something has changed. People's writing has become rapid, fragmentary and interactive through emails. Information has taken the form of a set of ideas or suggestions from the Internet. Books are becoming shorter. The essayist's style is increasingly coming to resemble that of the journalist. The impersonal style of the essay is now being replaced by personal reflections – sometimes moody, subjective and arbitrary ones. Each person can now become a writer, composer, photographer, film-maker, director or actor – whether for a brief moment or a whole lifetime. The assumption seems to be that each person's feelings are interesting. In all of this, a significant role is played by the new media, which individualize and fragment people's experience – unlike older media, such as the book.

Should we infer that everything is getting worse? It is certainly a tempting conclusion. But while this might well be the case, the point is that as the media change, so do constraints and opportunities. What is at stake is the balance between the use of new media – by which we may be 'used' ourselves, as often seems evident – and that of old ones, which have always been more closely dependent on the human body, as well as of those media – be they old or new – that are more accessible and may blend in with one's everyday life, without overpowering it Illich ([1973] 2001). What is at stake is the balance between fast consumption and slow processes of imitation and emulation; between the all too narrow space of the computer screen – combined with the boundless space of the distances produced by the Web – and the space measured through the use of 'media' of proximity in everyday life (e.g. hands and legs, speech, houses, streets).

The examples I have made should help understand and integrate McLuhan's description of the predominance, in every medium, of message over content (McLuhan [1964] 1991). Later, I will be partially criticizing McLuhan's concept of 'medium'. For now, though, I would like to use it in order to draw light on the phenomenon I am investigating. McLuhan's thesis consciously conflicts with the notion that media are something neutral which a person can choose how to use by freely establishing her/his own goals: media engender very profound cultural transformations, which

shape life far beyond one's original intentions. These transformations are the 'messages' of the media.

A person's intentions and aims concern and determine the content – for instance, that of the speech through which I hope to reach a given result, such as expressing my feelings to someone so that she/he will understand them. By speaking in person I will expose myself in many ways from an emotional point of view. If in order to convey the same content I instead use a landline phone, from home, I will place myself in a situation which offers a certain amount of time for mutual clarification, but which also allows me to partly conceal my feelings or change the topic of conversation. This is an effect of the message of the telephone.

An intrinsically more evasive message is delivered by the mobile phone, since it is not tied to any specific location. If I write something and send a signed letter, the medium itself – particularly nowadays – will protect me from my immediate feelings and convey a certain degree of determination: for it takes time to write a letter, and possibly correct it; it will take some time to arrive; it will endure as an object and document forever recording my will; and it will remain in the hands of the receiver, who might show it to others – or even let them read it. If I instead wish to send a text message on my mobile phone, I am forced to be succinct. I am implicitly more exposed to the risk of being misunderstood. Text messages enable – or indeed promote – sudden, short exchanges. Even more so than a letter, which is addressed to a specific place and person, if a text message is not erased from the mobile phone – an object that can be left in accessible places – it will leave traces of the conversation, which may be read out of context or by the wrong person. Misunderstandings and abrupt changes are a general effect of the wide-scale use of mobile phones and especially text messages. This does not depend on individual intentions and purposes, nor on inventors and manufacturers' wish to make telephone communication easier – which it now certainly is; rather, it is a 'side effect' that depends on the very nature of the medium and its widespread use.

5 A manipulable cultural heritage

The musical example I made before shows how the wish to provide the means for a broader and easier fruition of music has had certain consequences – presumably unexpected ones which the early developers of certain devices were not intending to achieve – that have deeply altered the content of music, including tastes and trends, thereby influencing its subsequent production. A similar reasoning might be applied, for instance, to the various methods of writing – by hand, typewriter or computer – and the modes of reading connected to them; to paintings and their images on a screen; or films and their broadcasting on television. Indeed, the

argument extends to artistic, historical and ethnographic meanings in all cultural fields and in relation to the so-called 'intangible cultural heritage' of mankind (to quote the expression used by the CICH).

In our globalized Western world, what are the most common modes and means by which people become aware of their cultural heritage? I would suggest: school education, research, and the range of resources that go by the name of tourism (which includes things such as information, advertising, transport, accommodation, and guided tours). Cultural tourism has steadily grown in recent decades and the economy of many countries, including Italy, relies on its 'development'. What kinds of cultural heritage fruition does tourism offer? One element not to be overlooked is represented by the conditions in which tourist visits are made – factors such as how much time is available, including overall travel time, which is to say the presence or lack of moments devoted to the processing and assimilation of experiences. Here is one example: cruise-goers who visit Venice in large groups only have a limited time (one day, from morning to evening) to see the city.

Readers might argue that I have chosen an extreme example. It certainly is, yet within the logic of 'development' extreme cases constitute a model that encapsulates and illustrates in great detail what is destined to become the norm within a very short time. What I have just described is occurring for a number of different reasons, such as the lack of money and time for most people who have the opportunity to do a little travelling. This lack of money and time, however, does not simply boil down to the bad luck of certain individuals, but is an effect of the globalized economy which is at the same time functional to it and to its promotion of this way of conceiving life and experiencing the world. So how will tourists experience what they see? It will be a little like flicking from one YouTube video to another for them: it will depend on their education, on their familiarity with art, and possibly on the studies they have privately made and the time they have on their hands. In this case too, the answer is to be found by addressing a few simple questions:

- How frequent and regular are the relations (in country or area X) between exhibition venues and educational institutions?
- What is the rough percentage of tourists who visit an 'art city' such as Venice, Florence, Rome and Paris and are well-educated enough to have an adequate understanding of what they see?
- On average, how much time have they got at their disposal and how do they spend it?
- What effects does this way of experiencing art have on most tourists?
- Will this mode of fruition ultimately condition the 'art world' and the management and conservation of the intangible cultural heritage as well?

While some data is available to find partial answers to these questions, ultimately each person already knows the answer, based on her/his personal experience.

The poor awareness displayed by most EU documents also extends to the FC. The latter is aware of the danger that «the creation of digital contents related to the heritage» may be used to «prejudice the conservation of the existing heritage» (Art. 14 d). Still, the document largely seems to ignore the fact that, at least in certain instances – the musical examples I have made may be extended to other analogous cases – digitalization itself could deeply change the reception of content.

One underlying problem concerns a certain aspect of the established historical-critical approach to the arts. Scholars write the history of techniques, genres, styles and authors. Information are sought on uses, iconography, ordering parties and historical contexts. Sometimes, however, the subject cannot be grasped through the modern historical-critical interpretation of life and hence risks escaping us. Let me clarify this point. If the context is a civil, social or political one, then plenty of explanations will be found: contemporary political-historical culture can – if only in a very partial way – establish a connection with the world of Antiquity, since the Enlightenment has preserved a legacy and trace of Humanism and hence – however weakly – of the ancient world. But if the context is a devotional one, modern explanations may take a rather strange form. For how can a critical-historical explanation be provided for a devotional experience, if one lacks the faith on which it rests? Hegel once asked himself: how can I understand Greek religious sculpture, the Homeric hymns, or even the *Iliad* if I am not familiar with – i.e. if I do not believe in or do not practice – those religions? (Hegel 1807, vol. 3 pp. 547-48) A person may admire and marvel at the grandeur and painstaking attention to detail of certain artistic images, but without sharing the religion they embody, it is impossible for she/he to truly understand them. This was Hegel's conclusion. How can anyone claim to understand an icon if she/he does not 'believe' in what she/he is seeing? Gazing at Titian's *Assumption* in the church of the Frari in Venice while believing in the Assumption and doing so without holding such belief are two different ways of looking at the 'same' work – as different as listening to a Bach cantata that speaks of salvation while believing in the composer's claims is from listening to it without believing in the idea of salvation (but possibly developing a formal analysis of the piece as a musicologist).

While art historians and musicologists may find the above observation annoying, it is plainly true. Why do Catholic churches have two separate visiting times, one for tourists and art lovers or experts and the other for people wishing to join in the worship? The answer that tourists might disturb the worship is self-evident, but only constitutes part of the answer. Tourists are not a disturbance only because they are loud or move around,

but also because their gaze is focused on things such as the artists' skill, style, poetics and historical relevance. Tourists are not at all interested in the function which the work was originally intended to exercise and – to some extent – continues to have in the context of the service. Hence, tourists' way of moving about, looking or simply being proves distracting and disturbing for people participating in the worship.

What I am asserting here is not the superiority of religion over art-historical criticism, but rather the superiority of context over decontextualisation. Concepts such as

«art history» and «music history» in themselves seem to presuppose the existence of 'substances' like art or music. Arts and music are historically determined practices. Artworks functional to forms of worship do not have a history of their own, removed from such acts of worship and their meaning. Art in general, as it is often understood or implicitly envisaged even in art history, is an abstraction that finds its origin and justification in modernity (Belting 1983).

The latter has progressively freed arts from worship, to the point that making art has become a pursuit in its own right (Benjamin [1935] 2012). The replacement of military prowess and political power with culture and 'taste' at the hands of the weakened European aristocracy first and then of the bourgeoisie, combined with modern aesthetics – particularly from Kant's time on – carved out and legitimized an independent role for the arts. In turn, the arts started developing according to alleged laws of their own. From that moment onwards, artistic contexts ceased being religious, political, or focused on the representation of everyday life, becoming cultural. Still, it would be a mistake to apply this perspective to the past or other civilizations.

Tourism and the art and culture market also condition the reception of the (preserved and protected) heritage of non-Western cultures (see CICH, Art. 2, 2), chiefly with an emphasis on folklore: tourists may purchase products of 'traditional craftsmanship' (CICH Art. 2, 2, (e)) or experience 'performing arts' or 'rituals and festive events' (CICH Art. 2, 2 (b) and (c)) in their holiday destinations, but in most cases who has the time to really take an interest in «knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe»? (CICH Art. 2, 2 (d), Goldoni 2012a, p. 331 ff.).

As noted above, I am not making any elitist argument here. There is an imbalance between the limited access to the kind of relations ensured by culture on the one hand, and mass consumption on the other. The problem is how to turn the latter into a genuine mode of access, rather than a surrogate for access.

In 'our' Western civilization, the principle of absolute individual freedom and dignity and the universalistic ideals of the Enlightenment have

ultimately inspired the principle of equal cultural rights (UDHR, DF). This liberating equality is a wonderful opportunity. All too often, however, it is applied in simplistic or even twisted terms. What we are witnessing is an approach to our cultural heritage as a source of wealth, even in the context of political speeches. For instance, once politicians in Italy would often speak of 'cultural deposits'; nowadays, they enthusiastically speak of Italy's 'petroleum'. The country's cultural heritage is indeed coming to resemble petroleum: something to be burned to make the engine of profit run smoothly. This heritage is becoming more and more similar to its copies: Venice, to the Venice built in Las Vegas; Paris, to the little Paris with a slightly downsized Tour Eiffel that has been developed in the Chinese city of Hangzhou. I doubt that there is any 'popular' enjoyment associated with all of this: on the contrary, the dominant global mechanism is merely triggering a compulsive reaction to that 'experience' on the part of the masses.

6 Cities and cultural and creative industries

The present-day economy plays a key role in the process that has just been described. Let us consider the suggestions made by the European Commission, within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, with regard to the development of cultural and creative industries. Its perspective draws upon the idea of 'clusters' and that of 'creative cities' put forth by Florida (2011) and Landry (2006). It is worth noting that the expression 'cultural industries' includes what «embodies or conveys cultural expressions», whether through traditional art forms or by means such as films, videos, games and new media:

'Cultural industries' are those industries producing and distributing goods or services which at the time they are developed are considered to have a specific attribute, use or purpose which embodies or conveys cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have. Besides the traditional arts sectors (performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage - including the public sector), they include film, DVD and video, television and radio, video games, new media, music, books and press (GPCCI, 5-6).

I suppose that the stress on the independence of cultural industries with respect to commercial values constitutes a token of good will. However, bringing such a range of different phenomena under the same label no doubt betrays some confusion. The confusion is only slightly less evident in CCD Art. 4, clauses 4-6, because at least a distinction is drawn here between 'Cultural activities, goods and services' (clause 4) and 'industries' (clause 6), as well as between such elements and 'cultural policies

and measures'. The one thing that all these cultural industries have in common is an artistic or cultural content. Yet, while the content may seem the same, it actually changes if the medium changes. Live performances, CD recordings and Youtube videos do not all share the same function and hence content; and the same applies to ballets, theatre performances and art exhibitions on the one hand, and similar events viewed on television, video or the Internet on the other. Let me stress here that I am not criticizing these new media as such, but rather the way in which they are predominantly used together with other media that lie at the basis of the overall social and existential interactions at work in the globalized Western world: media such as money, the Internet, television, and the press. I will soon get back to this point, when discussing the intermediary? And trans-medial relations characterizing a particular way of life. For the time being, I only wish to observe that ultimately it is a matter of balance. If cultural fruition mostly occurs in the form of a rapid and abundant flow of 'information' from new media, then the modes of reception change and, with it, the nature of the art and culture in question, originally conceived for a world marked by slower-paced and more locally limited ways of acting, ones rooted in tradition and based on non-economic ethics. Benjamin had already noted the change brought about by the spread of photography and film (Benjamin ([1935] 2012). Things have now taken a far more drastic turn. It is hardly surprising that 'culture' has chiefly become the product of so-called 'creative industries':

'Creative industries' are those industries which use culture as an input and have a cultural dimension, although their outputs are mainly functional. They include architecture and design, which integrate creative elements into wider processes, as well as subsectors such as graphic design, fashion design or advertising (GPCCI 5-6).

'Creative industries' are what actually makes the message - which is implicit in the media employed by 'cultural activities' in order to 'produce' and 'distribute' cultural elements through 'wider processes' - effective and dominant according its own 'logic'. For instance, the logic of advertising will prevail on the choice of images, the medium of the Web will suggest certain uses of artistic content, and so on. Ultimately, 'cultural activities' (CCD) and 'creative industries' are not really complementary, as the former are subordinate the latter. This, then, is the crucial question: can creative industries promote free modes of living, ones not dominated by the pursuit of chiefly extrinsic goals (i.e. the accumulation of power in restricted decision-making lobbies) and by the efficacy such goals imply?

For all the above reasons, an attempt must be made to dispel the existing confusion. One example of this dangerous confusion is to found in an expression used in the 2012 Italian 'Manifesto per la cultura' ('Culture

Manifesto') of the newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*, which sums up some theses regarding the economy of 'creativity':

What is needed is a genuine Copernican revolution with respect to the relation between development and culture [...]. To make this clear, the issue must be approached in strictly economic terms [...] Culture and research spark innovation, and hence create jobs, foster progress and development.

Culture is said to «spark innovation» and lead to 'progress' and 'development', yet this does not apply to culture in all its aspects. Innovation, progress and development are modern cultural categories. These concepts were alien to Classical culture, which – at least to some extent – was foreign to notions such as that of 'innovation' (*novus* does not have just a positive meaning in Latin), 'progress' and 'development'. Rather, Classical culture pursued the ideal of enduring happiness (*eudaimonia*) within the community or society (*polis*). Most importantly: in a «strictly economic» context, and with no further qualification words such as 'progress' and 'development' mean what the implicit contemporary context dictates: a growth of the GDP, which is to say of the sum of capitalist profits (indeed, the Culture Manifesto seeks to distance its own discourse from such approach). Whether 'progress' is being achieved, and whether the investments made in the fields of art and culture are worthwhile, is something ultimately measured on the basis of this kind of development.

A defence of culture in such terms implicitly leads to the cutting of any funding, investments, policies and forms of culture that do not lead to any innovation, progress and development. All good intentions and positive statements aside, traditional cultural expressions – our own as well as those of other peoples – are destined to endure as a mere folk survival, since any form of culture which does not embrace the dogmas of innovation and development will be seen as something useless or even harmful.

Even the most recent and open convention, the FC, shows little awareness of this issue. It defends the 'integrity' of the cultural heritage and its «inherent values», but fails to take into account the thorny questions raised by the plan to «raise awareness and utilize the economic potential of the cultural heritage» (Art. 10).

7 The 'aestheticization' of the economy

Benjamin has written about the aestheticizing of politics in Fascist regimes, whereby concepts belonging to the field of aesthetics, such as creativity, uniqueness and inventiveness, came to be applied to mass political movements and their leaders (Benjamin ([1935] 2012). Today, the

idea of the «creativity» and «uniqueness» of what is new is being used in economics to promote a neoliberal model which has been conceived as an answer to industrial decline and which is steadily eroding the welfare measures introduced in the post-war period. Here is one marker of such propagandistic intentions: in the GPCC the root of the adjective 'creative' occurs 93 times in just 20 pages (without counting the times it appears as part of the expression 'Culture and Creative Industries').

Creativity is a key word in European policies (Reckwitz 2013; Goldoni 2013 b, 2015), which here follow the policies adopted in the UK with Blair (Giddens 1991, Leadbeater 1999). While there is much truth to the idea of knowledge-based economy, in the sense that culture and knowledge can indeed ensure a better economy, the short-circuit that has been engendered between creativeness and the economy leaves a grey area. This area becomes all the more obscure, the more the glamour of art is used to dazzle our eyes by assimilating each 'creative' to the figure of the artist (McRobbie 2001).

Let me clarify this last point. Observers interested in processes of production have found examples of discovery in inventive processes not governed by the kind of rigid planning typical of Fordism. Their focus has been on less hierarchical forms of cooperation (Nonaka 1991). The arts offer many examples of this sort of collaboration. For instance, studies have been made of the practice of improvisation across different fields: music, ballet, organization theory, and so on (Borman, Brandstetter, Matzke 2010). While these studies reveal some interesting facts, there is a fundamental difference between the aims and means of the arts they discuss and the aims and means of industrial production. The latter is usually driven by profit, whereas the former pursue a certain kind of experience: the joyous release of one's energy (Goldoni 2012b, 2013a). In these arts, aims and means coincide. A person working with her/his body and hands, or with sounds and colors, pursues an aim that coincides with the process of production itself (Aristotle's 'praxis'). The time and mode of the performance are regulated by the individual's awareness of the process, not by any other factor - except the commissioning party, which may interfere with the experience, although some sort of compromise is usually found.

I am not arguing that no external, non-artistic context is at work here. When the arts were still connected to forms of worship, the aims pursued were not just 'pure' artistic ones. Any mediation would be made by the people in charge of the worship, together with the artists. These mediations would take place in a so-called 'spiritual' rather than predominantly economic field. Even in the modern art world different aims and functions coexist. In the early modern period religious and political power first, and later the rising bourgeoisie, still provided some mediation. The psychological energies at work were not wholly under the control of the market at the time. Nowadays, the arts must face a very different world. People

who produce art for the contemporary market are encouraged to adopt the same form of control of energies that is at work in advertising, marketing and, ultimately, financial capitalism (Lewis 2013). This leads to evaluation procedures and criteria that are radically different from those which governed the arts in the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century. The conceptual framework within which they are evaluated and produced has also changed. The conceptual framework within which this change began and continues to this day is what is currently referred to as 'aesthetics'.

8 The 'economicization' of aesthetics

Despite its explicit ancient Greek root, the word 'aesthetics' is used in a modern philosophical sense to reassert the role of the senses, feelings and emotions against their exclusion in the name of 'clear and distinct' knowledge. Such usage of the term was already explicitly made by Baumgarten and became less direct with Kant, albeit equally laden with important implications. Later, for Fichte and Schiller, the subjective processing of experience through the imagination became the key criterion to determine what is meant by 'reality'.

In the age of mass production, the imagination – and therefore individuals' self-image – is industrially manufactured through media such as photography, films (Benjamin ([1935] 2012), the radio and television. The cultural industry 'schematizes' experience as a whole (Adorno [1947] 1998). Marketing produces imagery, management governs it. Debord, by developing the full implications of the Marxian notion of fetishism, came to realize that the commodity must make a show of itself, creating a special space and time (Debord [1967] 1992). Society thus turns into spectacle.

Nowadays, the fact that experience itself, as one big spectacle, has become an economic matter is an idea that is happily embraced in the field of economics. One text that has become quite famous bears the title *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theater & Every Business a Stage* (Pine Gilmore 1999). Experience has been assigned a new meaning, as a subjective field for the evaluation of feelings and emotions. The momentous conjunction between the birth of aesthetics as the theory of sense-perception (through Baumgarten even more so than Kant), the notion of 'art' as an object of perception, and finally the notion of 'experience' as what identifies (and governs) the sphere of human emotions as a whole, was first recorded by Heidegger as early as 1935:

Almost since the time when a proper meditation on art and artists incepted, everyone names this meditation 'aesthetics'. Aesthetics takes the artwork as an object (*Gegenstand*), and indeed as the object of the αἰσθησις, of the sensuous perception in a broad sense. Today this per-

ception is called experience (*Erleben*). The way in which man experiences (*erlebt*) art must (*soll*) give the revelation of its essence (Heidegger [1935] 1950, my translation).

As a sum of perceptions, experience is open to manipulation. This sort of experience thus becomes 'economic', even at the level of human emotions. So called 'emotional' and 'experiential' or even 'existential' marketing (Gnasso, Iabichino 2014) contributes to forming people's 'spirit', as is suggested by title of the book *Marketing 3.0: From Products to Customers to the Human Spirit* (Kotler, Kartayaja, Setiawan 2010). Devices such as the Internet and mobile phone applications are turning users into collaborators for 'creative' industries in the digital field. To describe this situation, the word 'prosumer' (= producer-consumer) was coined (Toffler [1980] 1990). The term apparently attests to a democratic process whereby consumers are responsible for production. But actually, leaving aside isolated phenomena such as that of crowd-funding, the opposite is almost invariably the case: production tends to guide and train consumers (by a process that reminds one of the domestication of animals) through the application of the idea of 'design' to different aspects of life (on the different meanings of the term design, see Calcagno 2013). The theme of individual satisfaction or dissatisfaction is now widespread in both psychology and economics (Kahneman, Diener, Schwarz, 1999). Feelings have become a recurrent focus of psychological, aesthetic and marketing investigations (we need only consider how often the word 'emotion' crops up in advertisements). Aesthetics has been 'economicized'.

The process of 'economicization' of aesthetics is not merely the effect of the external forces produced by the new media. A certain propensity towards 'economicization' and manipulability was already to be observed at the dawn of modern aesthetics and, more generally, modern philosophy.

Philosophical concepts do not spring from the philosophical tradition alone, but also from the range of media through which this expresses itself. For instance, the Socratic dialogue presupposes a certain kind of city and particular meeting places. I am not arguing that the core of Socrates' philosophy exclusively depends on the structure of Athens and its society. On the contrary, I believe that it lies in a condition of close relation between *psyche* (mind) and *soma* (body) that that is largely independent of most of the media - including (verbal) language - through which it is expressed. However, the mode in which a philosophy or thought is conveyed is never completely independent of the media employed.

All too often, modern thought has overlooked these media. The modern age is also the period in which the individual 'subject' sought to free himself from natural and environmental forms of conditioning or habits. The best metaphysical example is the Cartesian *cogito*. This yearning for absolute independence, however, was conceived in terms of an abstract

isolation – and ultimately, in the following centuries, turned into its opposite: the management of individualities. A medium such as the printed word is one of the historical conditions of this abstract isolation (McLuhan 1962). It is possible to trace its genealogy back to the encounter between modern philosophy and the medium of printing, which spawned the figure of the solitary writer-reader. The modern individual subject (the *cogito*) forgets his own condition in writing (Derrida [1967] 2009), while owing his apparent independence and isolation to it. Descartes identifies with the soul as his original individual substance, while forgetting that that awareness of thought which he calls *cogito* is partly ensured by the remembrance of words already read, by the repetition of words, by reading and writing.

Descartes also forgets many other things. Individuality is not something completely original. Each individuality, be it of a person, group or community, is also the outcome of complex processes in which a decisive role is played both by traditions and by the media underpinning the mutual relations between human beings, and between the latter and their environment (Simondon 1989). Descartes was living in an age in which religious conflicts had removed all trust in the idea of a shared interpretation of life. He was living in an age in which individual human relations were being established also through private property and the market. Such conditions elude the awareness of individualistic philosophical idealism, but not the sharp-eyed control exercised by the new power-wielding institutions. The modern state and economy have developed a plan to become acquainted with the lives of men, in order to manage them, at a collective, national, mass and individual level – these being but different aspects of the same mode of organizing life. The division of labor and notion of ‘professions’ provide suitable means to this end. ‘Bio-politics’ have clearly emphasized this point (Foucault 1978-1979; Agamben 1995). The utilitarian approach (of the sort we find in Bentham) and a certain kind of psychological approach have gone hand in hand with the specialization and division of labor, becoming an instrument of analysis and control in the emotional sphere. As a form of manipulation of perception and feelings, this process may be referred to as ‘bio-aesthetics’ (Montani 2007).

I do not wish to argue that this aestheticization of life is an unambiguous process, a solid one with no fissures or conflicts. On the contrary, I believe that while these are the dominant lines of force, they can live by feeding on even mutually conflicting energies; and their development implies contrasts and a range of different possibilities. I will be returning to this point in greater detail in a moment. First, it is necessary to carefully examine the very profound and temporally extended nature of such process.

In the 18th century, in its reaction against the spiritualism and intellectualism of Descartes’ individual subject, ‘aesthetic’ philosophy lay a stress on feelings and sense-perception. However, it never really questioned Descartes’ subjectivist assumption, according to which an alleged universality

and individualism coexist, insofar as they belong to the same metaphysical configuration as two opposite polarities. The aesthetical philosophical approach should provide universal judgements based on perceptions and feelings. However, these judgements end up oscillating between historically shared tastes and individual ones, against philosophers' intentions of formulating a universal judgement. For example, Kant invoked a *sensus communis* for the judgements of taste, which he even presented as a moment of inter-subjective, potentially political communication (Kant [1790] 1983 §§ 42, 48). The critical point here lies in the sort of pleasure which ought to provide a foundation for the commonality of taste. Kant distinguishes the feeling of pleasure (*das Gefühl der Lust oder Unlust*), as the foundation for a universal, necessary judgement, from delightful (*Wohlgefallen*) and the pleasant (*Angenehm*) (Kant [1790] 1983 §§1, 2, 3), which remain sources of individual judgements. The pleasure of taste should stem from the harmonious interplay between the faculties of the intellect (and reason) and the imagination. Kant believes that the possibility of this harmonious interplay is something 'transcendental', and hence common to all which can be universally conveyed and shared. But let us read this passage on the difference between the beautiful and the sublime:

for this (the beautiful) directly brings with it a feeling (*Gefühl*) of the furtherance (*Beförderung*) of life, and thus is compatible with charms and with the play of the imagination. But the other (the feeling of the sublime) is a pleasure (*Lust*) that arises only indirectly, viz. it is produced by the feeling of a momentary checking of the vital powers and a consequent stronger outflow (*Ergiessung*) of them, so that it seems to be regarded as emotion (*Rührung*) - not play, but earnest in the exercise of the imagination (Kant [1790] 1983 § 23).

The physiological, anthropological and empirical aspects of this pleasure (with regard to which Kant partly shares the same views as Burke ([1757] 2008, section four) emerge somewhat paradoxically - but the paradox is due to the transcendental pretension - as constitutive elements of the transcendental theory of the faculties. If the pleasure of a harmony, which is to say that stemming from the checking of the vital powers, is experienced as an 'emotion' (*Rührung*), how can universality be ensured? An emotion can only be experienced at a personal level. Indeed, this does not imply that an emotional climate cannot be shared and expressed. The idea that each person is a separate individual but that at the same time everyone thinks the same, and hence behaves in a similar fashion, as well as in conflicting ways, is perfectly in line with the metaphysics of modern subjectiveness. What is distinctly modern here is the emphasis on the human capability to manage emotions in order to enhance the feeling of the furtherance of life and to overcome every possible, even natural, limit: to be in 'progress'.

Nietzsche was to push this energetic physiological aesthetics to its very limits by assigning tragedy the power of furthering life (Nietzsche 1888, 14 (117, 119, 120)). In doing so, he accomplished the metaphysical fulfilment of the subjectivistic physiological hallmark of modern aesthetics³ – an unavowed secret of the modern ego. Emotions and feelings turn into individual energies that may be analysed as such and envisaged as objects of control, as Heidegger ([1935] 1950) noted with regard to the new relation between art and experience (*Erlebnis*). The economy of experience and emotions accomplishes the extra-philosophical (yet nonetheless metaphysical) fulfilment of this process by other means.

9 Art devoured by the economy?

When drawing a comparison between ancient tragedy and the modern aesthetic attitude, Hegel spoke some harsh yet truthful words against the subjectivist, emotive and sentimental interpretation of the themes of fear and compassion which Aristotle mentions as part of his interpretation of the tragic genre:

With this thought Aristotle did not mean the mere feeling (*Empfindung*) of the harmony or contrast with one's subjectivity, nor what pleases or does not please (*Angenehme oder Unangenehme*), attracts or repels – the most superficial of all definitions, which was only established as the principle for approval and disapproval in the modern age [...] True compassion, on the contrary, means sympathy not only for the one who suffers but also, at the same time, for his ethical legitimacy [...]. Therefore, we must not mistake interest towards a tragic outcome for simple satisfaction (*einfältige Befriedigung*) deriving from the fact that a sad event, a misfortune in itself, must require our participation (*unsere Teilnahme*) (Hegel [1820-29]1986, pp. 524-26).

Hegel is here criticizing subjectivism in its most common forms. Hegel would appear to be referring to Kant when he speaks of «the harmony or contrast with one's own subjectivity», whereas the latter philosopher is apparently untouched by the reference to «what pleases or does not please» (*Angenehme oder Unangenehme*): for according to Kant aesthetic judgements concern not the pleasant, but the pleasure (*Lust*) of shared taste. In point of fact, however, Hegel's argument *does* apply to Kant – to his aesthetics and many later interpretations of it. The reason for this is that while in art it is necessary to take account of the *sensus communis*

3 However, I do not mean to reduce Nietzsche's thought to this idea.

for the sake of inclusive communication, tragic texts strike a much deeper note. Its compassion touches an area that stands at the basis of all genuine sharing. Sophocles' *Oedipus* and *Antigone* do not work because they make people experience a satisfying emotion. Rather, they bring about an ethical 'conversion' by leading the public to acknowledge the suffering due to the inevitable partiality of human aspirations and actions – their limits. Suffering is not rejected, but accepted as an aspect of life. What is removed is the additional pain caused by the illusion that life can fulfill one's every desire. Through poetry, life manifests itself in all its wonder, but also all its limits and pain, beyond all judgement. Certainly, poetry creates a narrative interplay of images – and this is a pleasure in itself. However, this is not the aim of art, but rather a means to engender that difference through which – as Hölderlin has illustrated ([1799-1800] 1992): 867) – *mimesis* can portray life outside life.

I further wish to observe that in the art of music the aim lies not in pleasant sounds or the appreciation of compositional skills alone. Music has always had to do with the formation of habits and of an ethos, as Plato noted in his *Republic* and *Laws*, and Aristotle reiterated in his *Poetics* – and indeed as is expressed by all ancient (e.g. medieval) or non-European (e.g. Ottoman, Indian, Persian and so on) forms of music. Nowadays, however, this is no longer a common way of conceptualizing and practicing music.

The historically and culturally shared 'spirit' discussed by Hegel has become a narcissistic public mirror, the spectacular surface of society. In this respect, it has increasingly become a constitutive part of what is seen as the 'world of art'. Of course, there excellent exceptions are to be found, but they are destined to remain an unforgettable spark: a window open on the world and a breath of fresh air within a self-referential art scene.

Someone might argue that this has always been the case: good works have always been a minority. While this is certainly true, it seems to me as though we are now witnessing a new phenomenon – and one that is overstressed through the garish advertising accompanying it.

New 'artists' are born each day, promoted by magazines and social networks (by now not being on YouTube and Facebook is harder than being on them), while journalists and critics find legitimacy and in turn maintain the market by announcing such 'discoveries' (Miles 2010).

Sometimes one gets the impression of a (conscious or unconscious) parody of some of the gestures made by the avant-garde. Parody is increasingly present in various artistic fields: it is the sign of an impasse. Traces – in some cases mere scraps – of avant-garde art are combined with elements from the private life of the artist who has become a star, as in the case of *My Bed* by Tracey Emin. Another example of the kind of parodist message that is dominant nowadays is the disenchanting postmodernity of Gioni's Encyclopedic Palace, presented at the 2013 Venice Biennale. One hall features fine drawings by Steiner, introduced by Jung's 'Red Book'. In the

next room I find paintings of 'tantric' eggs adorning the walls on the one side and, on the other, a sort of 'mandala' executed by someone who was not a professional painter. On the floor is some dust which, according to its label, is all that remains of a demolished temple. The underlying thesis here is all too clear: it is a 'pop' version of the theme - dear to Schiller, Hölderlin and Heidegger - that «the gods have fled»; or, in other words, that «there is nothing sacred any more». I make my way back to Steiner and find three people reciting unlikely mantras on the floor (an installation by the acclaimed Tino Sehgal). I think to myself: one is free to follow Freud rather than Jung, or neither of the two; one is equally free to object to Steiner's more esoteric side; however, both Jung and Steiner were serious and very interesting scholars. Were the tantric paintings originally used for some ritual? No one is forced to take part in it, but what are we to make of these paintings when they are simply displayed in such fashion? Mantras are meditation techniques. What is the point of presenting them like this? Whether conceived as a parody or as a disenchanting vision of today's world, the installation is neither amusing nor thought-provoking; rather, it is depressing in its drabness. Fortunately, a liberating laughter comes with Peter Fischli & David Weiss!

Still, there is one thing we can learn from all of this: the Gioni's Palace truly reflects the way in which the 'encyclopedia' of contemporary art works today. Even political exposes - deservedly an object of interest - are undergoing a sort of reversal: the seriousness, urgency and tragic quality of their content is all too often used to justify the existence of works and gestures that are conceptually and artistically poor, instead of using art to shed light on reality.

One reason for these reversals is clear: the suggestions made by avant-garde Conceptual, Dadaist and Process art movements, which played a necessary role in their day, pale by comparison to what the contemporary economy, 'creative' industries included, has actually accomplished (see Boltanski Chiapello 2005; Reckwitz 2013) - not to mention what the frightful power of new weapons is doing to war, with the systematic spread of terror. Through the combination of market, advertising, Web connectivity and production, the finality of each gesture or thing is lost within an endless range of cross-references in which the speed for the processing of what is new and the notion of efficiency, as measured in terms of profit and power, are the key factors. In the face of this «capitalisme énergumène» (Lyotard 1973), any artistic gesture seeking to 'repeat' such reality poetically in order to draw attention to it, or seeking to slow thought down for a moment and suggest something different by slow artisanal means, proves pathetic - or at any rate is bound to be ignored. From time to time, when someone has sniffed money, the euphoria of fashion and the market will intervene to save this artistic gesture from extinction by fishing it out as it is sinking and placing it in the sparkling aquarium of the 'art world'.

Through their transformation into a subjective experience in the modern age, the arts were made available as a means of control and management, based on the control and management of feelings and emotions. The arts are at the service of the economy not merely because they bring revenue to those people operating on the market, but – most importantly – because of the legitimation they provide for the ‘economicization’ of life (Stiegler 2004-2005). The theme of the genius and of creativity is the legitimizing factor for the creative economy. The arts have become a means to identify and awake feelings and desires to be fulfilled on the market. The effect, within the safety zones of globalized Western consumerism, is a humanity that is constantly stimulated: to purchase (e.g. note the collective excitement that creates crowds of people lining up outside Apple stores at the launch of any new device), as well as to produce – and this production must be ‘creative’, meaning ‘innovative’ in a way that will ensure profit. Omnivorous individuals are thus engendered, who are excellent energy sources for fueling the great machine.

The passage from Heidegger quoted above continues as follows:

Experience is the authoritative source not only of the enjoyment of art, but even of the making of art. Everything is experience. So, perhaps, experience is the element in which art dies. This dying proceeds so slowly that it requires some centuries (Heidegger [1935] 1950, p. 67, my translation).

Rather, I would say that art is becoming something other than art, while preserving a trace of what has been called art. This new phenomenon can no longer be interpreted according to the categories of traditional art history or of modern aesthetics – their processing of perception and taste have been cannibalized by the new economy – but must rather be viewed as a symptom of the social, political, ethical and ‘metaphysical’ mutation currently underway.

The ‘energumen’ character of capitalism especially manifests itself through an incessant noise that proves deafening (not just because it is so loud, but because it replaces and prevents listening): mobile phones, domestic appliances, traffic, televisions, cafés, shops, supermarkets, advertising... This sound connects metropolitan lives in which, to quote Hölderlin:

there is nothing apart from the conditions of time or space

where

beginning and end [...] in no way allow themselves to be brought together (Hölderlin [1804] 1992, p. 316; my translation).

This sound is the trace of a conviviality that has been denied and postponed to an imaginary future.

On the other hand, this mutation of life and the arts might disclose new alternatives.

10 Intermediality and transmediality

The dominant lines of force in this process do not operate alone or without any conflict. In order to grasp both the forms of cooperation and the conflicts at work, it will be useful to focus on the media themselves as 'messages', only by extending the notion of 'medium' beyond the meaning assigned to it by McLuhan ([1962] 2011, [1964] 1991, Goldoni 2015). I question the division between means of communication and means of production. Each use of things or production of things is a *communication* and, conversely, each *communication* 'produces' something according to its medium (its 'message'), insofar as it has effects on the organization of time, space, perception, imagination, and desire. A medium is any form of mediation that creates an attitude and an environment - from the human body, its limbs and sense organs down to streets, houses and human settlements (Simondon 1958, Leroi-Gourhan 1964, 1965; Watsuji 2011, Berque 2009). A street represents a medium just like the bicycle or legs used to travel it: these are all relative proximity media. Distance media include railways, cars and airplanes, but also money (Marx [1867] 2008), the press, the radio, the television, and the Internet. Even firearms, missiles and drones may be regarded as distance media.

Stressing 'message' over 'content' means studying the effects which the use of a given medium has on the relation it establishes with the environment, the person using it, or other people.

It also means noting that the extended use of a medium engenders a 'habit'. The legs suggest 'run', the piano «play me», and money «use me» - i.e. 'buy'. A weapon suggests 'shoot'. Through its extended, reiterated and 'specialized' use, on a certain quantitative scale, a medium *tends* to acquire independence and produce certain rules, forms of specialization, habits and ethics. The broader the scale is - and the faster the obsolescence rate and the technological development, which requires much specialization and releases the tools from common modes of control - the more the media will seem like autonomous subjects.

However, media are not to be understood in a deterministic way. They do not strictly compel as much as suggest. This feature also depends on the fact that the 'message' is not produced by each single medium, but by its relation with other media and traditions. No one medium works alone. Each medium works together with others and with cultural genealogies. Its power depends on these connections. For example, the capitalistic

'message' of money - «Use money to make more money!» - would have never emerged without an increased production of wool, the use of land for grazing, modern industrial production, legislative instruments, the religious roots of the notion of *Beruf*, and so on - as illustrated by Karl Marx and Max Weber. The so-called 'message' is always the outcome of a complex process, and may contain ambiguities.

I am focusing on this point, because in the same 'world' conflicts may emerge between the messages of different media (e.g. media that suggest fast behaviours, others that suggest slow behaviours, and so on), as well as between the 'content' of a medium and its 'message': for instance, between the listening time suggested by the content of a music piece and the listening time suggested or required by the means of its reception. These ambivalences offer areas of relative freedom, in which choices can be made.

It might seem as though these observations ultimately undermine the heuristic potential of the concept of medium. One might recall, for instance, the criticism directed by the art historian Rosalind Krauss against a more 'specific' and deterministic notion of medium than the one found in McLuhan: Greenberg's notion of «specific objects». Krauss shows how the medium of an artwork (e.g. many works by Ed Ruscha) consists not merely in a material means (e.g. a canvas, a photo) but in a set of 'rules'. In Ruscha's case, the rules find their source in the car (Krauss 2004). What I would argue, instead, is that cars, car parks, petrol pumps, roadside industrial warehouses and the American myth of coast-to-coast journeys, together with the iconic heritage from billboards, magazines and movies, are something that can very well be told in a picture: it fits with the picture. I would speak of inter-mediality. All media are inter-medial, and influence each other by analogies, producing 'families' of similitudes. Inter-mediality thus becomes trans-medial when the message of a medium slips into that of another: for instance, the car becomes a movie or a picture; money becomes virtual... and so on. However, we cannot ignore the material factor in the conditioning by the media. Their 'spiritual' and material features cannot be separated. Furthermore, it seems that modernity has been deeply marked by the development of so-called distance media (e.g. money, the press, firearms) on a very large scale and that contemporary Western culture has radicalized this trend, until it has developed into a sort of automatization. This circumstance exacerbates certain conflicts.

Old slow close media (e.g. legs, boats, routes) and new speed distance media (e.g. money, the press, phone, radio, TV, Internet, trains, cars, planes) could coexist quite well with the ancient conviviality and flexibility in human relations, creating a certain balance, without producing narrow forms of specialization or exclusive vocations. The two things could set reciprocal limits. This is indeed the case with the non-modern cultural expressions that govern much of our lives: particularly with non-specialized

activities or ones that are not economically relevant in terms of capitalist profit. Usually, however, these activities are underestimated and only conceived in negative terms, in the light of what they are not: they are called 'holidays', 'hobbies', 'entertainment' and 'amateurism' - by contrast to 'professionalism'. The yardstick here is the division of labor and specialization. Its necessary condition has been the separation of tasks - of 'work' - from the convivial use of the environment, as noted by Marx. This separation has led to a distinction in the use of media, suggesting the accumulation of potentiality in view of better occasions to come. Athletes and musicians train for special occasions, becoming professionals. People handling money invest it in order to ensure an unlimited increase. In the professional division of labor, each medium is used in order to achieve specialization and accumulation. The telephone and the Internet suggest that we should always be 'connected': the tendency is to concentrate the telephone, the Internet and the production of images and sounds in a single device. Money is all the more powerful, the more it is virtual.

11 Conflicts...

These dominant lines, however, are not consistent. The old media contained within new ones may offer some resistance. This is the case, for instance, when we are asked to clarify a misunderstanding due to a text message or phone conversation (in other words, a misunderstanding due to the 'message', i.e. the functioning of the medium) through a face-to-face verbal exchange (the 'content' of the phone conversation). This is the case when political decisions taken by elites (as is usually the case in contemporary democracies) are challenged through street rallies. When a series of economic transactions are ultimately opposed via military intervention. When 'religions' intervene in processes that have sprung up and have been managed by other means. When segments of the population favour lifestyles that run counter to the standards endorsed by the economic policies in force.

One example of the conflict between old media and new is the current crisis of traditional democracy in Western countries. Money + the Internet engender a financial capital that no longer has any ties to territorial states and hence escapes traditional means of 'democratic' political control, based on the ancient model of parliamentary democracies and modern forms of representation: as political representatives have always been envisaged as those entrusted to speak on citizens' behalf, discussing things face-to-face in a meeting place (the parliaments).

More generally, so-called Western society brings together practices corresponding to different media, which carry with them given habits and ethics; these are partly transformed through the interaction with new media, but may also constitute a source of resistance.

European cities, with their medieval historic centers, pedestrian routes, parks, surrounding countryside, rivers, lakes and woods, still suggest relatively 'slow' lifestyles and modes of discourse. At any rate, they allow us to envisage a connection with the countryside and its pursuits – partly an imaginary connection, partly a reconstructed one. Many cities, however, are being replaced by metropolises in which the difference between center and periphery are being recreated through a different kind of 'wealth' and way of distributing it, and different opportunities for mutual relations. But also 'junk-spaces' are emerging (Koolhaas 2001), along with new forms of segregation. In the new metropolises, there is a social gap between the people with economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979) and access possibilities (Rifkin 2001), that is the so-called new 'creative' class, and underpaid casual workers struggling to get by (McRobbie 2001, Scott 2008): post-proletarians who have neither any means of production – apart from their own labor – nor any prospect of earning a salary. Yet, 'work' (cfr. Arendt 1958) and professions continue to stand as reference values, precisely by virtue of their absence. This absence is the driving force on which cynical and adventurist economic policies rely.

12 ...and rights

People who – for good or even compelling reasons – are struggling to promote alternative policies in the Western world often fail to realize that 'the others' perceive this world as being far more homogeneous than it actually is when viewed from the inside. What shows itself on the outside are the dominant lines of power, which for the time being are eclipsing more critical agendas and the internal conflicts the latter focus on. The dominant lines of power are so powerful as to envelop agendas and aims in the name of 'democracy', 'interculture', and human and cultural rights.

There are many different ways of being 'open' to cultural differences. The following, for instance, stand worlds apart:

- an opening fueled by genuine and free cultural curiosity or the kind of desire that leads to the creation of mixed families;
- an opening to be managed as a response to migrations caused by distressing events (e.g. economic globalization, war);
- the opening produced by the market, the spread of information, or even television or online propaganda.

For instance, in the CCD the loftiest cultural reasons are mingled and conflated with issues related to the defence of industrial economies (e.g. of European multimedia products against competition from the US), but these are very different things. The opening produced by the market or television propaganda is that which is most visible to 'the others'. And it is

also rather aggressive, even though it is not (always or directly) achieved through the use of firearms.

Be that as it may, none of the many different forms of opening offered by the West is neutral: for each invariably implies a lifestyle and ethos. The European idea of freedom of culture and belief springs from a bloody history of religious conflict: the need to ensure the coexistence of different faiths and cultures is what engendered the modern notion that religion and culture are a matter of individual choice, the right of each individual. Once a traditional culture – with its religious, social, political and economic expressions – is placed within the context of the market and of liberal-democratic institutions, it is bound to change. Regardless of the fact that a person – or community – may favor and uphold an open ethics, it is quite clear that the aversion to ‘democratic’ rules on the part of traditional cultures (even in the West)⁴ is fueled – at a broader level (which can easily be manipulated by religious and political leaders) – not by any clash of principles, but by a sense that ‘democratic’ modes of living are *de facto* aggressive towards more traditional, community or clan-centered lifestyles. Perhaps, it would not be too surprising after all if people endorsing a traditional, traditionalist or even ‘fundamentalist’ lifestyle were to invoke Art. 2 of the FC:

cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time;

a heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations.

A public action of this sort, however, might not be compatible with Art. 1 of the same convention, which upholds

the role of cultural heritage in the construction of a peaceful and democratic society, and in the processes of sustainable development and the promotion of cultural diversity.

This ought be clear to people wishing to promote ‘democracy’ and cultural ‘rights’: every proposal is but one policy, which implies an engagement

⁴ Lifestyles in which the idea of clan plays a central role exist even in Italy and are followed by criminal organizations such as the Mafia, not without some ‘religious’ complicity.

and possibly clash, which may be managed in persuasive and transparent ways, or in more indirect, fraudulent or even very violent ones.

Every action of this sort interferes and interacts with the different natures of the media that largely support their respective forms of power. Awareness of this does not seem to be very widespread among political actors in the West, at least judging from their public statements (the inevitable conclusion being that such awareness does exist, only at a non-public level, and with different 'unavowable' purposes). I might mention the 'Arab spring' in Egypt or Libya (although similar considerations might be made on the recent or ongoing wars in Europe - from the Balkans to Ukraine). How could an effect of the 'democratic' Western model popularized through the Web - useful as a means of expressing a contingent political opposition - be mistaken for an actual capacity to seize, maintain and manage political power in an area? After all, this is something which requires actual means of military deterrence to control the countryside as well as urban squares, streets and homes. It is hardly surprising to discover that, in societies where - albeit it in very different ways - military deterrence has continued to ensure a close power over people's words and bodies, this continues to represent the primary means to maintain and exercise political control, and hence the one factor which sets the rules of the conflict. Adventurist policies on an international or even European level are having unexpected consequences? Or is it strategic to divide the world into 'safe' zones - where conflicts are controlled by means of the economy, media, army and police - and unsafe zones that are constantly in a state of conflict (as is currently the case with Syria, Irak, Libya, Palestine and Ukraine)?

When we speak of human or cultural 'rights', what human subject and culture do we have in mind? Who is the active subject of these rights and what is the content of his freedom? Shedding light on this field, obscured by its constant manipulation, is no doubt a challenging philosophical task.

13 A hidden religion

I noted above how the division of labor and specialization have as their necessary condition a separation of tasks from the traditional, convivial use of the environment. This necessary condition, however, is not sufficient to explain how this division of labor developed into a range of professions. In themselves, wealth and class differences and the presence of 'property-less' human beings do not make Western capitalism. Other conditions are required. Max Weber has shown that the genealogy of modern professions is rooted in a secular version of the Christian religion of salvation: the idea of business success. The truth of Max Weber's thesis is now emerging more clearly than ever before. Professionalism, combined with creativity,

is what lends legitimacy to individuals (and the society identifying with such values) in a phase of the economy in which life itself only acquires legitimacy insofar as it constantly reproduces itself (apparently) starting from the immaterial. Nowadays individuals must develop on their own not just the idea of what is to be produced, but also the work tools to produce it. Life only acquires legitimacy insofar as it is ever-new.

The metaphysical implication here is the complete devaluation of natural, non-produced existence. The notion of original sin has come to be replaced by that of 'natural': what has been received with no intention or desire. Life only has any value if it is constantly recreated. Clearly, old ties cannot be blotted out in one go, but are gradually severed, one by one. Thus the time perceived to be at work is the future, which is meant to free us from all conditioning. The future lends legitimacy to the present.

It would seem as though, through the loss of traditional jobs and the intertwining of different disciplines and forms of innovation, professions too were destined to disappear. But things are not as simple as that. What are vanishing are relative jobs and forms of art. However, the real 'professionals' of today are to be identified not with those who know a trade, but with those who 'profess' their faith in the ongoing miracle of creation, those banking on the future. This includes all 'creatives', and especially those who believe that the present is always indebted to the future. The real professionals are future professionals (indeed, writers, film-makers and visual or plastic artists are somehow expected to portray the future). Does the word 'futures' ring a bell? The future lends legitimacy to the present even in monetary terms: debt represents the imaginary and contested future - in the case of the present crisis, the stakes placed on derivatives - devouring the present. The real professionals are debt professionals.

Let us move away for a moment and try to gaze at things from the outside: we will soon notice that the dominant lines in Western culture are underpinned by a capitalist economy which is a sort of hidden religion of indebtedness - harsher than Christianity, since it usually knows no forgiveness - which has become a transnational economy (Benjamin [1921] 1991, Agamben 2013). Actually, it is not entirely true that capitalism knows no forgiveness. Usually, success is seen as the heart of capitalist economy. But bankruptcy is equally crucial (Dunbar, Guillet de Monthoux 1979). Whereas in former times merchants or manufacturers were not allowed to simply declare bankruptcy and were expected to repay their debts in person,⁵ in more recent years people investing their capital no longer risk a great deal: they may go bankrupt without any serious personal consequences. This is known by the name of «debt restructuring» and it is intended to reha-

5 Shakespeare himself makes this point in *The Merchant of Venice*.

bilitate ‘investors’ and enable them to carry on their business. Capitalist economy has inherited from the Christian religion its power to bring about a transition from guilt (debt) to absolution (it is hardly a coincidence that the Latin verb *solveo* is used to describe both the remission of sins and that of debt – *solvere debitum*. The assimilation of a deficiency – a sin – to debt is also found in the Our Father: «forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors»). In present-day capitalism, religion is transmuted into a system which ensures the crucial (yet repeatable) administration of absolution to capital-holders, while forcing all others to be held to ransom by debt, as a means of keeping them under control, when the constraint to consume or be creative is not enough.

This administration has its own form of worship and ministers, who fill the ranks of boards of directors, law firms, government committees and parliaments – as managers, lawyers, jurists, and MPs. Unlike in the time of the ‘masses’ described by Benjamin, or indeed that of individuals standardized by the ‘culture industry’ ([1947] 1998), the aestheticized economy of today not only ‘schematizes’ consumers’ tastes, but produces individuality itself. The ‘creative’ type is the last achievement of the late-scholastic theology of the creation of individuals (Ockham): this type represents the self-creation of humans as individuals (cfr. Reckwitz 2013, p. 12). Each one is an individual worthy of living insofar as she/he differs from others. According to the formal pattern of ‘creativity’ and ‘innovation’, individuals must constantly evolve and differentiate themselves from their own past selves. Since everybody follows the same rule, people differentiate themselves from others according to the speed of their own self-differentiation. This is the formal core of current competition. Thus, life becomes faster and more performative. The current aesthetic *sensus communis* (Kant [1790] 1983, §§ 40 and 48) is no longer a certain taste, but creativity itself, which is formal and exists only when it is actually performed: puncturing the screen with viral information, which shows the uniqueness of one’s ‘professional’ profile.

14 The complicity between this religion and information...

The effectiveness of ‘information’ presupposes the belief in the need for and possibility of a universal point of reference: ‘public opinion’. This belief is currently sustained by the complicity between the economy and the media. Through the management of the immaterial time of creativity, the new economy fulfils the ‘spirit’ of the Trinitarian divine economy – hence, economic crisis can neither be understood nor even envisaged by this economics.

Connection-information is the new universal church; its managers and directors, the ministers of worship. One may note the gestural and so-

matic similarities between bishops, pastors, spiritual leaders, confessors and some well-known politicians, newspaper editors, Web 'gurus', policy advisors and lawyers. The top creative person is the one who proclaims her/his 'profession' (of faith) on a website or on TV (and there is only a thin line between this profession of faith in creativity and unscrupulous narcissistic performances of all kinds, including criminal ones).

And so the 'critique of political economy' is outstripped by the economy, which has become the agent of a critical, shared and widespread revolution. Critical 'discourse' is outdone in speed and efficacy by other media.

15 ... blackmail, guilt, terror

The new economy reproduces the theological factor by means not only of seduction, but of economic blackmailing - the threat of job loss - and of guilt. Job loss means the loss of dignity and social relations: ex-communication.

The new economy reproduces the theological factor also by mean of terror. Money, the Internet and the media require a trans-national armed police to govern the conflicts they produce. Unsurprisingly, artists are increasingly exploring crime and terror in their art, whether they are predicting the future or seeking to immunize themselves against what is already occurring or is looming on the horizon.

In turn, the control of conflicts through a trans-national police requires money and so-called information in order to gain legitimacy.

16 Alternatives

I would claim that life is good by nature and should not be judged nor justified. Particular pleasures and pains are a big part of life but do not qualify it, as noted by the tragic poets and philosophers of Antiquity. Life in itself is sweet, Aristotle suggests (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169 b 30-1170 a, 11). This is quite simple. Yet today it is the hardest thing to say or understand.

Certainly, many aspects of life could be improved. But how can life itself be improved, since it belongs to each individual - and exists for each individual - and hence escapes any overall or comparative judgment? Comparisons may be made concerning living conditions, not existence itself. Existence and nonexistence: there is no middle ground from which to evaluate the difference between the two. Anyone seeking to bestow existence by creating a new life trusts in the happiness of the newborn, but does not enter into relation with that existence the moment the decision is made. People who rejoice in life or complain about it may be addressed in persuasive or violent ways, but ultimately the verdict - even with regard

of any bonds of affection - is entirely their own. Individuals who choose to take their own lives make an assessment that ultimately, in principle as much as in practice, remains unjudgeable and indisputable. Historically, however, it has indeed been the case that life has been deemed worth living or not, depending on the circumstances. When such evaluations became an object of modern policies, politics and economics came to pass judgment on life itself. Nowadays, the economy has become a self-sustaining process that feeds off the energy of consumers and producers. However, the machine has its inner conflicts.

A useful analogy is that of a drawing: at a first (or second) glance what we catch is the main figure; however, the marks may then reveal other partially hidden unfinished figures. Likewise, in hilly area what I see lying on the horizon from a distance may suddenly change as I approach it. An obstacle may ultimately prove a fresh opportunity. The conditioning uses and features I described do not make an organic body, a homogeneous 'apparatus': their cooperation is contingent and laden with conflicts. Conflicts can favour and nourish the system, but can also push towards a change.

Every historical and/or technological change is ambiguous: there are main lines of force, but its direction, its sense, is not determined once for all. The fact that in economic thinking and practice the need is felt to resort to creativity indicates that the globalized Western economy is walking on thin air.⁶ The tendency of money and 'information' to exercise a total, intimate appropriation of life makes all experience an economic matter. Experience, however, is open and cannot endure limits forever. The concern with ensuring endless possibilities is becoming a jail. Sometimes, people feel they have had enough of all these connections - compulsive connections. Sometime we feel that we have had enough of being professional, of being creative. Sometimes, a person only wishes to be absorbed in the repetition or 'imitation' of what she/he loves, with no concern of being judged.

Life cannot express or know itself without media, but it is not reducible to media. Life reveals its freedom by distinguishing itself from the media in which it expresses itself.

However, there is no dialectic capable of providing a way out of this logic or of reversing it. There can be no dialectic leading from an assessment of life based on justifications to the acknowledgment of its 'non-assessability'. Recurring crises, counterbalanced by innovations neutralizing or mitigating the ensuing sense of disorientation, may well go on for a very long time - indeed, this is a likely prospect. The only way out is through an awakening that will suddenly make any justification superfluous, any theoretical processing of it uninteresting, any behavior triggered by it em-

6 I assign this expression a more critical meaning than Ledbeater 1999.

barrassing. This process of awakening may start in any place or in different places, and then spread to the point of changing the politics.

In the face of the bipolar swing between euphoria and depression that affects contemporary mass culture, it would be worth adopting a joyous seriousness: of the sort exemplified by Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Spinoza and many other poets, philosophers and human beings, both famous and unknown, examples in common life. Individual freedom is no longer to be understood as the freedom to do anything at all, but in terms of the unjudgeability of each life.

This suggests also a different rule of inhabiting the world (= *oiko-nomia*) and use of energy resources. The most important energy of all is that of a liberated existence. This is what Aristotle also suggests with its notion of *energeia*. The object, the matter of economy is energy. People lose energy when compelled to do something – instead they get energy by doing what they love. A new economy should care about this kind of energy.

In turn, this suggests a different mode of relating to tools or media. There are tools that can be used in a convivial way (see Illich 1973, esp. p. 84). The governance of commons represents an alternative to the dominant system (Ostrom 1990). For instance, compared to the CICH, the FC (Art. 12) leaves more room for bottom-up attempts to define what the common heritage consists in. This is a good opportunity – supported and reinforced by the FC and VC – to suggest ‘good practices’ that will safeguard or redefine the use of commons and re-evaluate slowness and proximity media, as in the case of the Faro Walks and of heritage walks.

It is possible to envisage a balance between different media, which will make their utility a genuinely public and common thing. A different culture might come into being which makes time for relationships, passion, and all art forms.

Ars longa...

Art practices that are not dependent on aestheticization and on the paradigm of creativity offer alternative models. We all begin to practice art by imitation. Ancient Greek and Latin cultures were aware of this and used the words *mimesis* and *imitatio*. The loving, poetic repetition of admired examples fosters a special intimacy with the practice of art. From this intimacy stems what we call invention. This is, simply put, a persuasive new example. Its convincing force comes from its being done after a long, extensive and honest comparison with the solutions already attempted or successfully implemented by others.

This intimacy does not necessarily need to be confirmed through a public but may remain within the sphere of convivial everyday life – something among friends. It does not need to be absolutely *new*: repetition can occur (cfr. Reckwitz 2013: 359 ff.). In fact, every *mimesis* is a repetition, at least to some extent. Differences emerge through the repetition of something. Consider the ‘minimalist’ music by Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Phil

Glass, John Adams, Tom Johnson for instance. Or consider musical ‘free’ improvisation: it takes knowledge, skill or ‘art’, but the game consists in catching the right moment to let each person’s music be ‘right’, to express oneself in the present. We do not necessarily need to give a performance for an audience. What we do is for the sake of life itself. Nor do we need to produce *new* music: what is new is the moment and its context (Goldoni 2012b, 2013a, 2015).⁷

I am thinking here of the capability of finding words and practices to detect alternative opportunities in that vacuum. Unlike the words ‘aesthetic’ and ‘creativity’, the meaning of which has been powerfully colonized and devoured by the dominant economy, the word ‘art’ – despite its relatively recent and ambiguous history and its mutation – still preserves traces of an ancient, deep-seated freedom. Therefore, this word keeps open a transitory space and time for alternatives: a transitory time and space in which to take up a position and fight. Then art would become «fight specific».⁸

I envisage this capability as a necessary social invention, as an art to grasp the *kairos* (the opportune time) of a different, future possibility: a ‘kairological art’. This is something I would claim for art as much as for philosophy – a philosophical art or a poetic philosophy. That is what I mean, to quote Benjamin ([1935] 2012), by the ‘politicization’ of art: a «politic for friendship».

Abbreviations

CCD = *Convention on Cultural Diversity* (2005)

CICH = *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003)

DF = *Freiburg Charter* (2007)

FC = *Faro Convention* (2005)

GPPCI = *Green Paper Unlocking Cultural and Creative Industries*

UDHR = *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948)

VC = *Charter of Venice on the Value of the cultural heritage for the venetian Community – Forte Marghera, Venice, 07/05/2013*

7 This is what we do, since 2010, in a permanent workshop for «all-round improvisation» (jazz, free improvisation and contemporary music) organized by the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. See: http://www.unive.it/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=158433: MusiCafoscari.

8 See *Fight-Specific Isola* (2013) and the photo exhibition «Support Your Locals» held by Lorenzo Tricoli in the Isola district in Milan within the context of the 2015 EXPO (Antongiovanni 2014). See also the collective photographic work by Fuorivista (<http://www.fuorivista.org>); and, about the situation at L’Aquila in the aftermath of the earthquake and today, Confotografia (<http://www.confotografia.net>).

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