

The Spanish Contribution to the Study of Cultural Industries. The First Steps

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Abstract

Between the introduction of the term “culture industry” in the late 1940s by German thinkers as Adorno and Horkheimer, and the promotion of the concept “creative industries” at the end of the past century, a group of French scholars developed complementing critical approaches in the 1970s that offered a platform for a robust, specific theoretical approach that Spanish authors would further develop. The article offers a review of the most relevant contributions of these authors, focussing on the Spanish ones. To do this, an exhaustive bibliographical review was carried out and two principal Spanish representatives were interviewed.

Keywords Cultural Industries, Communication, Culture, Political Economy of Communication and Culture, Spain

Professor Enrique Bustamante (2009: 5) states that the “cultural industries” concept “*has spawned and continues to create abuses as well as deformations or excesses. [...] But that probably occurs with all ambitious concepts of the social sciences, which not only evolve like living beings, but rather also are twisted, diverted and, at times, manipulated*”. Effectively, the term as well as the theoretical approach known as Political Economy of Communication (and of Culture) or any other, evolve, mutate and adapt themselves to each context according to the historical moment. Within this historical context, one of the elements that is frequently forgotten is the idiomatic one, that is, in which way the same approach can evolve with distinct nuances according to the language used to publish and extend knowledge.

1. From a cultural industry to cultural industries

Even though the term “cultural industry” has become widely accepted, any study of this industry should be considered in the general context of economic approaches to culture. Attempts have been made for almost 50 years to find out about, classify, understand and provide a robust (albeit not unified) theoretical discourse for these types of industry. The term “cultural industry”, even though still being the most widely used term, is not the only one that serves to refer to the same thing (Jones, 1989). In the United States, in 1962, the economist Fritz Machlup spoke of the knowledge industry, a term which served for him to refer to the specific weight of this industrial sector within the Gross National Product, more than to propose discussions on the commercialization of culture. The German Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1969) spoke of the industry of the manipulation of the conscience. Even more ambitious was the conceptualisation of information society of Marc Uri Porat, who tried to define a new type of society, marked by the advent of telematics, in the 1970s (Porat, 1978). The Spanish teacher and researcher, Daniel E. Jones, specialist in media system, clarified that:

[T]he concept of just cultural industries can make one think of an excessive preference for only some of the phases of the productive process, focused on fabrication. At the same time, if reference is only made to ‘culture’ and not to ‘communication’, the impression is given of a certain forgetting of the sub-system of the means of mass communication, a key piece of any contemporary social system (Jones, 1989: 137).

The very first analyses of cultural industries spring from the reflections of exiled German thinkers like Adorno and Horkheimer, who coined the term “culture industry” in 1947. In the book *The culture industry* (1967) Adorno said that they had chosen this term to ensure that no-one could mistake it for mass culture.

Culture created by the masses was one thing, and culture that “creates” masses was another. As representatives of European high culture, these German thinkers’ critical approach is widely known, as is the intellectual astonishment that some of them felt on discovering mass communication research in their host country (the United States). Confronted with partial or sectorial studies in the field of mass communications research, conceived as isolated units of society, critics decided to analyse and interpret culture in its full societal context; for this reason, critical theory is presented as a theory of society taken as a whole (Wolf, 1987). According to Ramón Zallo (1992), the really new aspect was not the commercialisation of culture, which already existed in the visual and performing arts, or the application of industrial procedures to cultural production, which can be found in the music, film or radio industries, but rather the application of Taylorist principles of labour organisation to cultural production.

In the United States in the 1950s, Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller developed a critical approach to the political economy of communications, representing the next stage in the critical approach to administrative research. According to Mattelart and Mattelart (1997), the political economy of communications has two focal points: it starts off as a reflection on the imbalance in information flows between developed and developing countries (Schiller, Ewen, Tunstall, Palmer, Nordensstreng and Varis, among others) and then goes on to analyse – from a second, essentially European focal point in the second half of 1970s – a greater link between culture and capital in the form of cultural industries. This European focal point was represented by theoretical contributions of scholars from three countries: the United Kingdom, France and Spain. According to Mattelart and Mattelart (1997: 84), 1978 was an important year: it was then that the study of the Grenoble group, led by Bernard Miège, was first published, producing a relevant change: “*The notion of ‘cultural industries’, adopted by the European Culture ministers meeting in Athens, makes its entrance in the administrative announcements of a European Community organism: the Council of Europe*”. Finally, according to the authors, in the 1980s cultural industries were converted into a topic of interest in distinct academic communities, among others in Québec and Spain; in the latter a few sociologists employed the critical approach during the final years of the Franco dictatorship.

In an exhaustive table, Juan Luis Millán Pereira (1993) sums up the various schools of thought forming part of the information economy. Out of a total of 14, here we would like to underscore the political economy of cultural industries, represented by Patrice Flichy, Ramón Zallo, Enrique Bustamante, Nicholas Garnham, Bernard Miège, Graham Murdock, Peter Golding and Giuseppe Richeri. According to Millán Pereira, their main contributions are the concept of cultural industries, the approach to cultural production, distribution and consumption, and the political economy – or critical – perspective.

Graham Murdock and Peter Golding (2005) opt for a critical approach “*which necessarily engages with empirical research*” (p. 61). The authors define critical political economy (to distinguish it from mainstream economics) thus: it is holistic; it is historical; it is concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention (this detail is of particular interest in Europe, where traditional public broadcasting monopolies are the norm) and it goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and public good. For his part, Nicholas Garnham (2005) recalls that the political economy of communications approach was especially important in the United Kingdom during market liberalisation and deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s, focusing on the analysis on the dynamics of the cultural sector, based on the symbolic and intangible nature of its products, which was often used as an excuse to justify its regulation. Effectively, the peak of the critical approach coincides with a decade characterized by the increase of ownership concentration in media, the liberalization of telecommunications and the audiovisual de-regulation.

A similar effort to construct a classification was made by David Hesmondhalgh (2002) on the basis of the work produced by Vincent Mosco (1995), one of the leading successors of Smythe. Hesmondhalgh reviewed the theoretical perspectives of the approach to culture (cultural economics, liberal-pluralist communication studies, sociology of culture or cultural studies) and devoted a section to political economy approaches (in the plural), proposing a division between the Schiller-McChesney tradition, exemplified by Schiller, Chomsky, Herman and McChesney, and the cultural industries approach, into which the French and British would fall.

We firmly believe that it is fair to add to this list the Spaniards Zallo and Bustamante as well as the Québécois contribution by Gaëtan Tremblay and Jean-Guy Lacroix (1997) to the logics of cultural industries. To complete the table, we would need to add the contributions made in the late 1990s by the Latin American school of thought by César Bolaño and Guillermo Mastrini, among others, which is closer to the American tradition than the European one. This current arises as a reaction to the theories of development and modernisation; hence their links to the United States. As Mastrini relates (2013: 35), the critical school had great influence in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, but “*some simplifications and excesses brought about a reaction, in the 1980s, that almost completely eliminated economic analysis, considered to be economistic and deterministic*”. This critical perspective, nevertheless, rapidly reappeared, just when the concentration and control processes by part of the large communication groups were being consolidated in the area.

2. Main contributions in Spain and the French connection

According to the main actors in the Spanish school, Enrique Bustamante (2016) and Ramón Zallo (2016), the beginnings of the political economy of communication and culture in Spain and the studies on the Spanish cultural industries cannot be understood without the French connection. Bustamante remembers that the idea to set up a European communication research group arose already in the early 1980s when he came into contact with academicians from France, Great Britain and Italy. In 1982, they decided to focus the research work of the group on the changes that culture and communication were undergoing with the new technologies (at that time: cable television, videotexts, teletexts). The research was originally based in France because Miège and Musso had obtained some funding. Philip Schlesinger and Nicholas Garnham joined the group, at a time in which British scholars had already formalized the rupture between the classic school of cultural studies and that of political economy and had created the journal *Media, Culture and Society*. Some Italians, most notably Giuseppe Richeri, and Germans entered the group, but the hardcore nucleus was in France and Great Britain. Without any other help than the money in France to pay for transportation, they began to investigate public television, new technologies and social communication. For that, it is appropriate to briefly remember the principal contributions of the French scholars, basically Patrice Flichy and those of the so-called Grenoble school.

In terms of cultural industry products segmentation, Patrice Flichy (1980) divided them into cultural goods and *culture du flot* (“flow culture”), which Fernández-Quijada refers to as the “Flichian binomial” (2007). On the one hand, cultural goods are products sold in a market, each of them having a specific value in use connected with the personality of the worker or workers that conceive it. This is the case for records, films, videos and books. On the other, “flow culture” refers to products characterised by continuity and extent of dissemination. Today’s products render yesterday’s products obsolete. They are products that move between culture and information (press, radio, television, etc.).

For their part, Miège, Pajon and Salaün (1986) classify them according to five logics: in keeping with Flichy, the first two are the logic of edition and the logic of flow production, apart, that is, from the press, which forms the third, independent logic; the fourth logic is computer software production and the fifth is the delayed broadcast of live shows.

Research in communication was evolving in Spain. Grenoble and Great Britain had already worked in culture and communication and also in a vision of the political economy of communication, alternative to the predominant currents that existed at that time, above all the functionalist ones (which separated communication from culture). This was what they adopted in Spain (coinciding with the

moment in which Bustamante met Ramón Zallo around the middle of the 1980s and directed his doctoral dissertation). According to Bustamante (2016), the great contributions of the Spanish researchers of that time (who were dedicated to this) were, above all, the study of media concentration and its effects on communication and culture production and consumption, as well as the lack of pluralism as its main direct consequence. Their approach coincided very well with the Grenoble school and the already mentioned British one, offering “*a more complex vision, Marxist or neo-Marxist, but more complex of reality, and we contributed many things in the empirical study on Spain and Europe but, also, to a great extent, we provided a theoretical approach on how contemporary culture behaved in its relations with the communication media*”.

For his part, Ramón Zallo (2016) began his trajectory in the world of communication with the study of the economics of communication and culture, moving from Marxist postulates that believed that all stemmed from the processes of work and valorisation. That let him tackle a definition of the distinct cultural industries by branches. That was the basis of his doctoral dissertation (later converted into a book). His relationship with Bustamante at the end of that decade yielded, as a result, not only his doctoral dissertation but also a work considered fundamental and that both of them coordinated, *Las industrias culturales en España (Cultural industries in Spain)*.

Zallo defines cultural industries (1988: 26) as a “[...] *set of branches, segments and auxiliary industrial activities producing and distributing symbolic goods conceived by creative labour, organized by the valorising logic of capital and ultimately destined for consumer markets, and which also plays a role in ideological and social reproduction*” (English version from Lacroix and Tremblay, 1997: 44). The most characteristic feature is that its products are symbolic and ideological content. The same author does not consider industries that supply physical media, technical equipment or communication networks to be cultural industries, despite the fact they are closely related and they represent one of the greatest sources of profit in the audiovisual industry. Moreover, unlike other classifications, Zallo includes advertising, even though he points out that it is the only cultural industry that does not have its own distribution channels and therefore needs other industries (especially media industries) to distribute its products. Zallo (1988) establishes his proposal for a segmentation of cultural industries on three basic premises: labour processes, capital valorisation processes and product characteristics. Furthermore, he takes as the basis the “branch” segment (Zallo, 1992): a dominant technology within a specific production process, expressed in a creative product (or series of creative products), a funding method and social practice.

Other authors like Juan Carlos Miguel (1993), whose PhD dissertation was directed by Zallo, propose a segmentation of cultural and media industries that acts

as a complement rather than a replacement. It is segmentation by “lines”. A line is a form of vertical integration (total or partial) encompassing the whole process that a product goes through, from the time it is conceived (or even earlier) to the time it reaches the consumer. As an example, we can study a company or group that controls the whole production process, from paper manufacturing to newspaper distribution. If it only controls the part upstream from the product (conception and production), this is what French scholars call *amont*. If it controls the part downstream from the product (broadcasting and distribution), they call it *aval*. Miguel argues that analysis by lines is complementary and helps us arrive at a better definition of the dynamic space in which media groups operate (Bonet, 1995 and 2007).

Regarding the classification proposal put forward by Zallo (1988 and 1992), and following that French connection above mentioned, within industrialised culture (craft culture, independent culture and other industrial segments also exist) we find five separate cases: *discontinuous edition industries* (Flichy’s cultural goods), two representations of “flow culture”, which are *continuous edition* (press) and *continuous broadcasting* (radio and television), as well as *advertising* and *video production*. Zallo did not consider these two latter as cultural industries strictly speaking, but two industry segments closely related to them.

3. Discussion: why Spain matters

The Spanish contribution here outlined should be put into context, as always, because it depends on a specific political, social and cultural situation at a very determined historical moment. Those years, the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, were those of inaugurating democracy in Spain, opening itself as a vast field still to be investigated. For example, the doctoral dissertation of Bustamante, which will later become a seminal and fundamental work, *Los amos de la información en España* (*The lords of information in Spain*), brought not just a few problems to the author and it was one of the detonators by which he became dedicated to university teaching and research. Spain was still a young democracy with very thin skin. Both his personal and professional trajectory as well as that of Zallo is an accurate reflection of how the democratic Spanish University was being constructed, though still with too many Francoist hindrances.

Both scholars have insisted on the fact that it is an error to separate communication and culture. For this reason, sometimes, the critical perspective continues moving within the limits of the logic of the name. “*The logic of the dominant thought and its hegemony have been precisely in that fissure, such that communication continues being basically political, but culture is a commercial terrain. In this way, cultural policies are only cultural, but never communicative, and*

communicative policies are those of the market and there is now nothing to do" (Bustamante, 2016). According to Zallo (2016): "*Political Economy of Communication is an expression I have never liked. I prefer Political Economy of Communication and Culture, the word 'Culture' was missing [...] Communication is part of culture [...] And Cultural Industries is one part, because the performing arts, creative arts, traditional arts and crafts are not in them... all of which has to do with social relationship*". In fact, we could consider that this is one of their great contributions.

It is obvious that the first contacts between these academicians and the French, British, Italian and even Quebec scholars laid a basis for a good and fruitful relationship for the further development of critical Spanish political economy of communication and culture by Bustamante and Zallo. Nevertheless, upon being asked why they are so little cited and recognized outside of the Latin American and French circles (especially in the 1990s and 2000s, when their careers are more consolidated), Bustamante (2016) uses the concept of "marginalization" in the context and in the historical moment. There was a double marginalization, according to him: at the beginning of the 1980s, France "sheltered" them when both the topic and their critical perspective were very marginal; additionally, French was the dominant language of culture (he notes that even Schlesinger and Garnham spoke in French during the meetings).

In the second place, their works, often originally published in French, were rarely translated, and as the academic world has become more and more dominated by English, they are little known within the English speaking academic community. Their work has had much more influence in the Latin American world. Zallo (2016) agrees that such an idiomatic bias exists and admits, with the perspective that time gives, that it could be said that each country specialized a bit, though not in a strict manner. For example, he notes that the British were always very preoccupied in analysing the influences and structures of power; the French mainly dealt with the "insides" of the cultural industry, the way it is produced, and the Latin Americans greatly focus on the social preoccupation of some topics such as media concentration, etc. For its part, as Bustamante notes, this idiomatic bias might be because English researchers do not usually know any other language but their own. Moreover, he adds, they do not cite only due to idiomatic questions but also because some authors and topics were very marginalized.

Finally, it should be added that the studies of political economy of communication and culture in Spain were in those years basically "masculine" and, although not in an exclusive manner, very centred on the audiovisual line.

The insistence that the critical analysis of culture and communication should not be separated, the classification and the exhaustive study of each and every one of the cultural industries, the division between industrialized and non-indus-

trialized culture, as well as the defence of public service and critical perspective could be the principal contributions of the Spanish researchers in the early years of democracy – and still today.

Currently, there are more people conducting research from this critical perspective. Although it continues to be comparatively a minority approach, it is experiencing an important moment in many countries of Latin America.

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Biography

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