

## New sources, codes and channels of communication in Identity Studies

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### Introduction:

The globalization trend, already going on for a decade, has proven itself strong, and most of its characteristics seem to be shaping the development of the western world, slowly but steadily spreading through the periphery. For the social scientist, it is important to study the role of the new forms of communication: as important channels for social and political activity, as meeting points and forums where freedom of speech is exerted and encouraged, as a new marketplace where products and services are sold, and where national barriers no longer exist, as a global cultural scene where diverse cultural and artistic expressions -no matter how small or marginal- can be enjoyed by anybody, anywhere, and as a powerful and multi-dimensional source of information. And it looks that its importance and pluralism can only increase, as long as the new media remain relatively free of censorship and state control.

It is undeniable that the hardware technology that makes all these features possible is getting cheaper every day, and the required software -if open source software<sup>1</sup> finally becomes a standard- could soon be free and away from costly patents, royalties and licensing fees. For the first time in history, almost everybody can get competitive professional new media technology -not only to receive the information, but to create their own cyber-presence- at really low costs. This means that we could set up our own Internet-based radio station, our own Internet TV-stream, our own newspaper and, for example, our own shop, with an initial investment of less than 600 dollars plus the monthly fee of our local Internet Service Provider<sup>2</sup>. If we don't have the technical expertise to do it, we can also download easy self-explanatory tutorials. We can expect to be in the next few years almost reaching universal access to the global communication networks (mobile telephones, high speed Internet, digital television, etc.).

Although several sectors of the world's society will remain -so as to say- in the dark, most people will be "connected" one way or another, and able to interact to an extent that we are only beginning to experience in the western world. Although i have a great interest in that, it is not my task on this

- 1 New, efficient GNU Linux-based operating systems -that can be used to create stable, top-quality Internet servers- are free, downloadable from the network, or can be mail-ordered for the price of the blank CD-ROM's, complete office suits as OpenOffice.Org, equal in power to the omnipresent, controversial and expensive Microsoft Office, web browsers (and web-site design tools) such as Mozilla or professional photo-design tools such as The Gimp, can also be downloaded and used -without the need of a licence- for free and have an "open" architecture, free from patents of any kind. This means they can be used to develop new software, so new versions appear constantly due to a collective effort by the user community. The rapid development of Open Source software cannot be understood without an ethical point of view, its the work of thousands of individuals -from translators to programmers, computer experts or students- convinced that the software operating systems and work tools should be free-. However, from an economic perspective, switching to open source software can save a business -or a national administration- literally thousands of dollars, still achieving the same professional results. As a result of this, in 2002 the government of Extremadura -historically, the poorest region of Spain- started a program to implement Linux and Open Source software in its administration (The "LinEX" program) in order to reduce costs derived from licensing commercial software. The European Union is also committed to the development of Open Source software, and encourages its member-states to gradually substitute their windows-based IT resources with free Linux technology.
- 2 For example, in Poland the rate is about 50 zloty per month, barely 10 Euro. In Spain the rates are about 30 Euro per month. These are the prices of high-speed satellite broadband access.

paper to focus on the underdeveloped -marginalized- sectors of society, but on the rapidly-developing “globalized”<sup>3</sup> sectors, who are giving birth to new identities and social and political movements. Of course, other problems accompany the process of globalization: national or cultural resistances establish lines of fracture with the rapidly developing western world, also limiting the expansion of the new networks of communication and creating islands of isolation, sometimes violently<sup>4</sup>. To a great extent, the rising of the Islamic movements and the modern *War on Terrorism* are caused by cultural resistances to progress, or to a certain kind of progress. However, the globalization process seems certainly unstoppable, and even the movements that oppose it are globalized -and global- themselves<sup>5</sup>.

There are new social and political identities being formed through to the new ways of information and communication, and -as new, young sectors of society begin to exert social and political action- new ways of social and political action are born and spread through completely new channels. New identities that traditional political parties are unable to integrate, new forms of protest that governments cannot predict or prevent, new political ideologies and artistic currents that the traditional media is being unable to detect, information out of control, technology that the new social movements -born under the sign of globalization- can use to its advantage, but that governments -stuck on their traditional tasks and channels- cannot.

I would like to outline on this paper some of the new ways, codes and channels of communication, as well as how they are serving to generate new identities and social and political action. New philosophical, cultural, artistic currents, new relationships and trends are shaping the modern world and, to a certain extent, pretty much under the shadow of *Blade Runner*<sup>6</sup> or Orwell's *1984*, as a post-modern, post-industrial dystopia. This shaping not only derives from an aesthetic, futuristic point of view, but also -and more worryingly- from high politics and economy. Nobody can deny that there is the growing preoccupation that most important political decisions are being taken in remote instances, far away from the people -that is why there is a growing number of “eurosceptics” and groups who oppose the European Union, and why there is such a great abstention on the European elections- Few can maintain that, to a great extent, governments are not subjected to the pressure of giant corporations that operate beyond any control, and that those pressures force them to take certain decisions -such as not signing the Kyoto protocol- against the will of the majority of their citizenship.

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3 Also well-off, middle or high-class citizens from western countries, together with the highest classes of developing countries, who share the same or very similar “globalized” experiences, read the same newspapers, watch the same TV programs, read the same books, and download the same files (music, videos, video games.). This is the kind of people that can feel at home in a youth hostel in Delhi, in a Pub at the docks of Candem Town, checking the mail in a netcafe in Zagreb or downloading “The Diary of Bridget Jones” in a friend's house in Beirut: Young, with a good network of international friends, highly technical (they all have email, sometimes their own web page, and participate in several Internet forums in different languages), well informed (they read a good selection of international press regularly) and not subjected to borders any more. The first truly global citizens. As the Canadian writer Douglas Coupland wrote in *Generation X* “the kind of people who have incredibly high telephone bills and speak most of the time talking about up-to-date air ticket fares”. The works of Coupland have been recently been reviewed in the French newspaper *Liberation* related to the gap between the Hippies of the 60's and the Yuppies of the 80's, and as a fine example of the generation who doesn't believe any more in utopian dreams but doesn't want to embrace the apparent wonders of neoliberalism. (Review of *All families are psychotic*, *Liberation* 11/06/04)

4 This is the scenario defined by Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*.

5 As it is originated and impulsed by the richest and more developed societies of the world, their transnational companies, their enormous media networks and corporations and their economic power. Its hegemony cannot be questioned.

6 Ridley Scott's famous film from 1982. Based on the cult novel by Philip K. Dick *Do androids dream with electric sheep?* It is not casual that the new super-production “The day after tomorrow” starts rendering a clear tribute to that classic, showing a city of small Chinese-food shops under the great sky-scrappers of the giant multinational corporations, under a heavy rain, with the sound of the news in the background talking about climate change and environmental degradation. The main purpose of the film was to warn about the consequences of not signing the Kyoto Protocol and to criticize George W. Bush's administration for its low concern about environmental issues.

## The resistance, or something<sup>7</sup>.

One of the social movements more clearly visible -for it took the shape of violent riots, clashes with the police, student deaths and massive protests- is the anti-globalization movement. Or should be said in plural, anti-globalization *movements*, for it is a phenomenon with several facets, composed by a myriad of small groups that share some common points, but surprisingly, not so many. We can find there, fighting side-by-side, ethical minority groups who demand their share of power, or anarchist middle-class students who claim destruction of the state and the capitalist economy. In the Spanish case, some of its most active participants are members (or former members) of the communist party. Indeed a strange combination, but we must look at the details to understand it. And this means looking at the factors who compose the complex identities present in the anti-globalization movements.

Following the process of globalization, new individual and collective (cyber)identities have been born, specially among the youth, who have now to go through the process of creating their own identities in a highly interactive and technical world, subjected to many more -and more diversified- stimulus than the previous generations were. This also means that marginal, radical or anti-democratic discourses can reach them more effectively now, and find a wider support between them. New identities are extremely complex -as the globalization process is composed by an increasing interaction of an increasing number of actors-, and can be formed by, for example<sup>8</sup>, a generally tolerant attitude towards sex or other races, teamed with a disbelief in social-democracy -deception and disenchantment-, nostalgia for charismatic leadership -use and abuse of symbols from other -more charismatic and generally, not so democratic- political systems (communist, populist, authoritarian regimes, etc.), a sympathy for anarchist and punk movements, and at the same time a firm ecologist militancy, a vegetarian food habit, and the readiness to accept that a theocracy -as such pretended by Islamic fundamentalists- is a not such a bad thing, compared to modern liberal democracy. Such a character could be found participating in the same meetings with an agent from the Syrian Intelligence Service, an experienced member of the Communist Party, a member of the ETA environment or any other radical national-socialist, or eventually some skinheads (belonging to fascist or anti-fascist groups). Each group is looking for its share of the eventual profits of the common fight against globalization. Since their interests differ, and their niches of power small and fragmented, they can agree on a joint action.

As we have been witnessing in Spain during the last years, extremist groups and radical thinking find its way to reach to a wider public than before, thanks to their rapid adaptation and use of the new forms of communication. This explosive mix ignites regularly, but specially whenever there is a real possibility of gaining extensive coverage by the media: international summits or economic forums. We remember well the dramatic moments in Geneva, Italy, when security forces killed a student who was trying to break through the back window of a police vehicle with a fire extinguisher. What can make a well-fed, middle class, university student so violent? Indeed we

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7 The use of the words "or something" is not casual. Beavis and Butthead, popular cartoon characters from the 90's, constantly used this expression in their speech. "We should go somewhere...or something", or "I think somebody stole our TV... or something". They were a very critic -and controversial- cartoon that expressed the general situation of the average American youngsters from the 90's: two white middle-class, bored friends, living in the suburbs, working in a badly paid temporary and senseless work, with little interest in culture or politics, and living in a time-bubble -some kind of ironic version of the American dream- isolated from the rest of the world, under the hypocritical morals of a puritan society, just looking for anything to do that would take them out of the general boring stream of their lives. This "or something" was a kind of phrase that expressed their apathy and boredom, and that they could as well do one thing or something else, since anything they could do would really make no difference. Hence, they constantly recurred to drugs or vandalism.

8 This example is taken from the average of the increasing minority of Spanish students who participate actively in squats, anti-globalization movements or extreme left-wing groups, and my personal experience of participation in several meetings, student assemblies and political actions from 1995 to 2004.

cannot find such strong material reasons. It must be something else.

Violence is on the air, an exalted, sometimes nationalist, sometimes revolutionary, romantic violence. A violence that has its roots on the crisis of cultural and human values, on extreme relativism or materialism of our societies, on the lack of ethics and the “society of the success” that took shape during the 80's and 90's, where anything was acceptable if it could make you successful. Today our societies try to ritualize unacceptable violence into films or video games. It is always a shock to western spectators the amount of sex and violence present in Japanese cartoons, but Japan has a long tradition of “eliminating” dangerous social tensions through these kind of artistic expressions. But the tensions that arise in a highly competitive society, where failure is not admitted, and where people is living in 25 square meters due to the housing costs, and have special personnel that pushes people into the commuter trains, are far from being eliminated. In fact the violent cartoons have necessarily to be the expression of an extreme, local version of the capitalist society.

Last year, there seemed to be a great degree of indignation or surprise about the release in several western countries of *Special Force*, an action video game designed by Lebanese armed group Hezbollah, where the player took the role of a radical Islamic fighter and was encouraged to raid the Israeli army positions. In fact, there are multiple games on the market made by the western programmers that encourage the player to kill Islamic activists or terrorists, such as the best-seller CounterStrike, so it seems that others are catching up with the technology that allows them to generate its propaganda through modern media. In fact, games such as the popular Postal or Postal 2, where the player is heavily encouraged to use vast amounts of racial and sexual gratuitous violence while trying to run the daily errands such as buying milk, show that our societies also are accepting high levels of violence, and also of political violence. There seems to be an identity problem in the background. Somewhere are great tensions looking for its own ritual of “safe” normalization.

As Fukuyama stated, we are witnessing the end of ideologies, the end of history. There seem to be no alternatives for our social and economic system, the prediction of the One-Dimensional men made by Herbert Marcuse has become reality, or so it might seem. We live on a reduced world, under a reduced universe of political -and more clearly, economic- discourses, and under a kind of education that makes not easy “lateral” or alternative thinking. In our countries, traditional identities, that once shaped society -the worker's identity, the bourgeoisie's identity, the middle class- are undergoing a heavy crisis. In fact some say -and I could agree with them to some extent- that traditional classes don't exist any more, due to the change in the production systems, the computerization of labour, the tertiarization of the economy. In our western societies Fukuyama's dream seem close to reality. In such a world there is little room for romanticism or irrationality. It seems to me that the increasing levels of violence are due to a resistance of the human character against excessive technology and efficiency, teamed with a strong criticism and growing awareness of the unfair conditions of the world economy, that benefits us but generates a social gap that we cannot tolerate any more. But when this resistance could be theoretical, political or artistic, lack of education, lack of “words”, codes and channels of expression make way for a violent expression of nonconformity.

As an example, in Spain too many times ETA has found support for its cause among *romantic-revolutionary* students who play Che Guevara, accepting a degree of violence unacceptable and unjustified in a democratic society. There is a general belief that the Spanish education system has been steadily deteriorating, that every generation seems to know less and have greater gaps in their knowledge -specially of history, ethics and philosophy- with every educational reform -designed to prepare students for the new dynamism of the capitalist market-. There also seems to be a relation with the increasing violent behaviour of young kids. It cannot be casual that the activists of ETA are also getting younger. From an average of 30 years old during the 70's, the average militant of the

Basque radical nationalist movements is now less than 20 years old. Its education is poorer, and its violence stronger. New, very complex and radicalised identities are appearing, and derive from one common cause: the loss of appeal of democracy, the loss of hope, the belief that the whole system is under some kind of obscure control that renders political and economic change impossible or futile. The feeling of loss of control over their future forces them to choose radical, totalitarian political options<sup>9</sup>.

Demographics play a relevant role on the situation. There has been a major decrease in the birthrate of the western, more “developed” countries. In Spain we are aware that, at the present rate (less than 2 children per family<sup>10</sup>), our society is getting old. Therefore, it is understandable that young people is feeling less and less important, and further away from political power than, for example, the generation born in the 50's, the actors of the change from dictatorship to democracy. For the new generations, options are: political apathy (“there is nothing to fight for any more, and anyway, i am not interested in politics<sup>11</sup>”) or political radicalism. Disenchantment and little belief in the traditional political parties and political uses is growing, since there is little chance for doing anything “exciting<sup>12</sup>” in one of the traditional political parties who compete on the elections.

Following the trend of what we could call the bored “society of risk”, hooliganism, drug abuse and other radical attitudes might seem not so relevant politically as the anti-globalist demonstrations or the pro-ETA militancy, but are also taking their toll -and a heavy one- on the western youth. The red light is flashing and it's basically about disenchantment, disbelief in democracy, lack of interest or lack of the democratic institutions to generate interest and to seem credible and capable of reflecting people's interests and creating a fair, more equal world. It is the task of all the educators, politicians and intellectuals to generate the necessary enthusiasm around the values of citizenship, representative democracy, social concern -expressed on the welfare state- and liberal, capitalist economy. Not doing so will render us unable to resist the rising of irrationality and anti-democratic trends that seems to be one of the globalization side-effects.

Arnold Hauser described the rising of Fascism and Communism during the thirties as:

“The attraction of Fascism lays within its illusion of absolute, unquestionably solid values, and its hope for getting away from the responsibility that comes with every rationalism and individualism. And with Communism, the intellectuals promise to themselves direct contact with the masses, and the redemption from their own isolation from society”.<sup>13</sup>

The statement is still valuable today, to analyse what are the causes of the rising of anti-democratic, fundamentalist thought.

### **Through the new channels: We could call it Cyberpunk.**

A new, futuristic identity. Social revolutionaries, ex-communists, anarchists, radicals or left-wing nationalists from the past were and are easily attracted by post-industrial and dark futuristic images of the cyberpunk movement. It was born in the 80's out of the dark corners of the western dream, the magical appeal of the early hackers, films such as Blade Runner and science fiction books and comics, role-playing games such as Shadowrun<sup>14</sup> mixed the punk tradition with the new emerging

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9 These kind of thought can be found in the main newspaper of the Basque radical nationalist movement, Diario Gara. <http://www.gara.net>

10 Source CIS (Sociological Information Centre of Spain).

11 Franquist education focused on “demobilization” and political apathy.

12 The popularity of the culture of the risk, of extreme sports, reality shows or sensationalist press seem to arise from its contrast with the boredom, routine and greyness of our daily lives and work experiences.

13 Hauser, A.: *The Social History of Art*, 1951, Vol. 3, *Under the sign of Cinema - The decadence of the culture*. Page 266.

14 Shadowrun, FASA Games. Today it belongs to WizKids. There exists a myriad of websites somehow related to

trend in the 80's: networked computers<sup>15</sup>. Films such as *Wargames*<sup>16</sup> showed the new power that this new way of communication could reach, and brought new concerns about national security. In fact, that was the beginning of what it's now called "cyberterrorism"<sup>17</sup>. But it reached a clear visual definition during the early 90's with Japanese artists such as Katsuhiro Otomo and Masamune Shirow, the first cyberpunk Japanese writers to really influence the west. Otomo's monumental work *Akira*<sup>18</sup>, translated to every major language, is composed by 10 volumes of the highest-quality Japanese manga art, plus a controversial and cult film, set around a highly industrial world crumbling apart, totalitarian governments controlled by industrial corporations or crime syndicates, gangs, drugs, degraded urban environments, ecological disaster, young people with mutant powers<sup>19</sup> and little hope in the future. In Otomo's own words:

"Students from a special education centre, social outcasts with a black future, Kaneda and his friends take a desolate road, changing the city that oppresses them for a deserted landscape, formerly full of life."<sup>20</sup>

Such was the combination that made its way to the receptive youth of the 90's, the sons and daughters of the generation of May 68. In the Spanish case, the children of the socialist era, born right after the Franquist dictatorship, who very soon learnt how the good intentions of the 60's turned into economic crisis, corruption, and environmental degradation<sup>21</sup>. The borders of morality have, hence, weakened, and the line between the good and the bad is only a matter of where from we are looking at it. The deception and the belief that democracy is a big lie, and that all the governments, political parties and politicians are corrupted has a great number of followers, specially the youngest ones. Today cyberpunk finds a never-ending source of new images coming from the ex-communist countries, where its easy to find this images of a crumbling industrial world, in permanent crisis<sup>22</sup>.

As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote about actual Russia,

"The system that governs us is a combination of the old nomenclatura, the sharks of finance, false democrats, and the KGB. I cannot call this democracy -it is a repugnant, historically unprecedented hybrid, and we do not know in which direction it will develop... [but] if this alliance will prevail, they will be exploiting us not for seventy, but for one-hundred and seventy years<sup>23</sup>".

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Shadowrun, its history, its background, mythology, aesthetics, etc. Its aim was to create a credible world composed by a "real" world -an alternative near future seen from a pessimistic optic- and a cyberworld, where one could "enter" and interact, in fact living an alternative electronic life, without a real body.

15 Bulletin Boards (BBS), the network of the 80's, they were sites created by computers linked to an analogue modem, that could be accessed from anywhere in the world through the telephone line. Mainly text-based, with few and rudimentary images and colors, where advanced computer users could share information, spend time, post messages... they were the beginning of the "cyberworld" and the immediate precursor of Internet, and although they rapidly have become part of the past, nevertheless have become mythological for all hackers and "computer geeks" around the world.

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17 Articles about "Cyberterrorism" are common in the computer press around the world, always linked to virus alerts or national security threats, industrial espionage, etc.

18 *Akira*, Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988. Katsuhiro Otomo is a cult Japanese "mangaka" born in 1954.

19 After all, something -although metaphoric or symbolic- has to replace that feeling of loss of political power, social relevancy, etc.

20 *Akira*, Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988, Vol I, pages 11-12.

21 Specially in the Mediterranean coast of Spain, the environmental degradation due to mass-tourism has been dramatic from the 1970's until the mid-90's. In the north, sudden massive unemployment and abandon of the traditional forms of labor due to the industrial "reconversion" and liberal "efficiency" policies made way for an increasing left-wing radical nationalism that used for its propaganda the same images of the "cyberpunk" culture: post-industrial crisis images, nihilism, etc.

22 As one song by the Polish rock band Myslovitz say: "And we prefer to walk at night, because everything is black and you can imagine the world is more beautiful than it really is, because during the day is all so grey and dull". Myslovitz, Choroba Milky Bar, 2003. This band is extremely popular among university students in Poland.

23 Quoted by Polish journalist and writer Ryszard Kapuscinski in *Imperium*, 1995.

Although we cannot establish definite comparisons between the Russian situation with the rest of Europe, in the Spanish case we can hear -and read- similar comments about the relations between the People's Party, certain economic lobby's and the Franquist administration. And to a great extent, there are comparable situations in some of the ex-communist countries who recently became part of the European Union. In some cases, voices have been heard comparing Soviet Union with European Union, and although we can consider this comparison nonsense, there is a certain degree of truth since the decision-making process in the Union is not truly transparent, and the Parliament has merely a consultative role, therefore making possible such statements, which are being made by extreme right wing parties or pressure groups that fear the process of integration<sup>24</sup>.

But it is probably in video games, the really modern, interactive expressions of art, where new identities are taking shape, and new social meanings can be read. We have to begin taking them seriously, since development companies are investing on them the same amounts of money than in Hollywood productions. Commercial profits are also reaching equivalent levels. As an example, we can examine the *Syberia* series, created by French artist Benoit Sokal. These games let us take part on adventures placed in a post-communist world, full of symbolic monuments in decadence, taking the role of a girl in her twenties, Kate Walker. We will witness throughout the game how she leaves her dull job, her broken family, her untrue friends and lover, for a random quest that will take her from the United States to "Syberia", a kind of Arcadia, magically preserved from progress, where mammoths are still alive, and where she will find a true, real life, away from the selfishness, individualism and routine of our societies. The same could be said about the highly successful *The Longest Journey*, created originally in Norway and translated into dozens of languages. In this game we take the role of April Ryan, an art student that escaped from home. She survives as a waiter in the artist's quarter of a big city while she takes her art courses in the university. She will begin to have problems with her perception, her strange dreams coming into reality gradually, and will soon be involved in a magical adventure where she will become the one chosen to restore the balance between the world of magic and the world of science, and prevent chaos from taking over. Both games show a certain degree of disenchantment, a deep crisis of identity, nostalgia for magical, romantic adventures, and seem propose escapism as a possible solution for a life that is getting too boring, routinised, full of false friends, superficial relations and family problems. *The Longest Journey* has been so successful commercially that the development of it's second part *Dreamfall* is being sponsored by the Norwegian government, therefore becoming as important as other artistic expressions such as cinema -traditionally sponsored by governments in Europe-, and receiving an equal financial support. In this "return to magic", or more precisely, this return to romanticism, it is not surprising that neo-transcendentalist philosophy such as in Paulo Coelho's *O Alquimista* is becoming increasingly popular. In his book Coelho explains that our destiny is, essentially, written, and we must only read the signs. It is understood as an book for initiation into transcendentalism, as a some kind of guide for life. Although a beautiful, inspiring book, it is yet another attempt to bring some kind of values, some transcendence, into our materialist, superficial world.

Maybe one of the most interesting new groups, with its own definite identity, and clearly associated with a new technology of communication are the computer hackers. They are computer experts, young and talented, who spend most of their time connected to the Internet exploring, breaking into whatever is closed, decoding security codes, acting like modern Robin Hoods or, simply, like pirates. They normally have some kind of political ideology -related to anti-globalization movements, or radical left- and a complete disregard of private property. They believe they are living in an unfair world and they try to take advantage of their privileged knowledge or talent. New crimes are being defined and new laws tailored to them, in order to prevent their actions, that sometimes pose a real threat to governments or companies. In Spain, some of them are associated with anarchist movements and work to protect the websites and channels of communication of their

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<sup>24</sup> A good description of such kind of comparisons and statements -in the Polish case- can be found in the article by Katarzyna Zapasek referred in the bibliography.

organizations<sup>25</sup>. Some of them are also working for the security forces of the state, for Internet service providers or security companies. As portrayed by Douglas Rushkoff in his book of interviews *Cyberia, life in the trenches of cyberspace*, they also do industrial espionage and work as mercenaries for anyone willing to pay their fees. And they also leave a “back door” open in case they have to return later for payback. “Hacker culture” has also influenced “Geek culture”, a kind of trend among computer experts and advanced users, who enjoy almost unlimited access to many different sources of information, and who compose the “hard-core” of the Internet users. They set up websites and keep the information flow going: webmasters, providers of contents, whole new social groups with their own magazines, On-line forums, political attitudes, books and artistic expressions, fashion and trends. They share a passion for cryptic messages, use highly secure networks such as Freenet<sup>26</sup> and alternative software. Some of their websites express really critic views of modern society or the way common people use the new communication networks<sup>27</sup>. They move through new channels of information naturally, and they perceive them as real as conventional reality. Ultimately, they could aspire to a fusion between body, information and technology: to become a cyborg. We can see it through their artistic expressions:

“Motoko is a hyper-advanced cyborg, her body consists of all of her active drives, her memory of all of her active sources. These are all variable, but on a periodic basis her components crave energy and sleep and remind her of her basic identity-layer. To her, the physical world and the world of information are both reality. All existence is life, destined to continue for the unforeseeable future”.<sup>28</sup>

Not only anti-globalists, hackers, geeks or cyberpunks are using the new channels of communication, although they were somehow the first and faster to adapt to this environment, since they are very much network-based or technology-based. Ecologist groups such as Greenpeace have developed a new kind of affiliate, the cyber-ecologist, and a new kind of activities: cyber-actions. Such kind of activist is the kind of person who may be not willing to -or simply cannot- participate personally in a Greenpeace conventional action, but would donate gladly some minutes of its time in front of the computer for the sake of ecology or a nuclear-free world. Cyber-actions include sending letters to political parties or members of the national or European parliaments, sign petitions, spread news or donate some money. They are effectively using the tools that the new technology provides, and some of their actions have been as successful as the traditional ones. Amnesty International and practically all the major NGO's are encouraging this kind of activism,

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25 For example, in Nod050 -the major anarchist network of Spain- there is a group called “Los Vigilantes” (The Watchmen), who claim to be computer experts able to detect and prevent the intrusions of the state security forces into the pages of the anarchist and “libertarian communist” movements.

26 Freenet was created as a way to escape the restrictions of Internet, to minimize the chances of being caught for possessing, sharing or uploading illegal or dubious contents, and also to serve as a way to establish secure contact with political dissidents who live in totalitarian or authoritarian countries where Internet traffic is monitored or restricted (such as Cuba or China). Freenet can be described as a kind of file-sharing mechanism where the original server -the one who posted a specific information in the network- cannot be traced, hence making able to operate in complete anonymity, something that Internet makes more difficult due to the registration and logging of the IP addresses and server traffic. In fact it is extremely difficult to operate really anonymously in Internet, though it seems like that to the average user. However, connecting with your home computer to Internet leaves traces that almost anybody with minimum abilities could follow.

27 For example the title of a well-known ironic and critic website is “Something Awful, the Internet makes you stupid” <http://www.somethingawful.com>. Also a reliable source of “geek” information is the website Slashdot. <http://www.slashdot.com>

28 Masamune Shirow, *Ghost in the shell 2*, Vol. I, page 4. Canadian edition, Dark Horse Comics, 2003. The whole series is a deep reflection about body, technology, knowledge and information, and about the future possible integration of those components into technologically enhanced human beings, or perfect androids. The same ideas influence the *Animatrix* series, a series of short films who participate of the Cyberpunk identity, inspired on the *Matrix* films that have been so successful in the cinemas recently. The *Matrix* original success was mostly due to its reflection about the idea that what we understand as reality could be a computer simulation, while the real world would be a dark, terrible place where we would only be a “battery”, another piece of the machinery, part of the system, and only “existing” in our dreams. In fact it could be well understood as a metaphor of the dark side of our wealthy western societies -where technology will make possible higher levels of social peace and control through entertainment and media-.

and they find a great support for their campaigns partly because of the privacy that Internet gives to the activists. They feel more free to participate from their workplaces, or their homes, without the need of establishing a greater compromise with the organizations. There is a new kind of political action: cyber-petitions. There is no need to gather signatures on the street, asking personally to people and trying to convince them about something. Sites like Petition On-line manage the hard work, you just have to send an email to all the activists, and they will spread the word. The results are very effective. Some months ago, the Spanish famous singer and Latin Music composer Alejandro Sanz was underestimating the power of new communication and information networks when he said that -referring to a petition against Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez- if so many people signed a petition to ask him to stop singing, he would stop singing. A petition was created in Internet -initially as a kind of joke- but it reached the required number (around half a million signatures) in a couple of days. Of course he has not stopped singing, but he will certainly think twice about making such kind of statements again.

### **Conclusion: New Identities, Globalization and a Happy End?**

We can see new identities, complex and adapted to the new technologies of information and communication growing and spreading throughout the new -and the old- networks. They will gradually become more representative and relevant as the whole of society gradually inserts itself in the global network. They coexist and interact with the existing, traditional identities, who are entering a serious crisis<sup>29</sup>, and refusing to give way, but they will eventually replace them in the future. Taking a recent example, one cannot understand the political change that took place in Spain during the recent general elections without studying carefully the role played by the new technologies of information and cyber-identities, a role that was to be crucial in the organization of a great social mobilization as the one that took place during the tense weekend between the terrorist attack of March 11<sup>th</sup> and the elections of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Text messages, Internet forums or web logs, became a more reputable source of information than press agencies or the traditional media -most of them controlled by an strict censorship and a smoke curtain imposed by the government-, and were used as powerful tools who served for coordinating an extensive social network of protest that ultimately brought the Aznar government down.

For no longer can our politicians expect us to believe only our local media, because it's too easy to be informed, and to find good arguments against their decisions. Therefore these are times to cultivate consensus, dialogue, tolerance of complexity, and peace, but certainly not for unilateral action, simple-mindedness or one-sided cultural point of views. If our democratic governments fail to generate enthusiasm around democracy, the belief in our system can rapidly deteriorate, as radical opposition is more likely to be heard nowadays than it was twenty years ago. Those seeking power in modern societies must have the ability to generate consensus, and maintain a good relationship with new media. They must also be able to use effectively the new channels and codes of communication, in order to make their discourses heard among the multiplicity of voices and informations.

The social scientists must reflect upon the negative consequences of abuse of power, control of the media and censorship, but also about the consequences of underestimating the role that public opinion can achieve in modern societies through the use of the new media. Internet and other high-speed communication networks are making possible the coordination of large sectors of the citizenship, and serving for many purposes. Those are networks that are not easily controlled by anyone, in fact there are little barriers for them. Fast, global communication beyond borders, beyond

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29 A good example of the crisis of the traditional identities are the very recent electoral results of June 2004 for the European Parliament, with a major abstention that made way for a victory of nationalist, ultra-conservative movements throughout Europe. In Poland, the rise of ultra-conservatives such as Liga Polskich Rodzin and Samoobrona, shows how entering the European Union has generated great fear and opposition among the Polish peasantry and the low and middle classes. Source: Gazeta Wyborcza, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2004.

barriers, beyond easy political and state control, is here to stay and it can only increase with time. Political parties and administrations have to get ready to deal with these new media and never underestimate its power. Alternative, reliable sources of information can easily emerge in such a context, making very difficult the construction of leviathans, authoritarian or totalitarian systems. In the other hand, radical discourses and nihilism can easily spread in times of crisis or disbelief in democracy, and claims for more charismatic “hard” leadership can easily find support.

The same way that the fall of communism saw the old party officers become nationalist and fight for the power in the myriad of fragments that composed the old USSR leviathan, the globalization process -that is also lessening the power of the nation-states- is subjected to the centrifugal forces of social, national or regional fragmentation as traditional identities enter a crisis -because they are based on a world that no longer exists-. But we must keep in mind that the nation states inspired on the principles of the French Revolution and the welfare state have not been such a bad environment for democracy, in many cases, those principles have kept authoritarianism at bay. If globalization is to carry on, it must have a strong, democratic principle built inside. Otherwise we can be -as it's the purpose of most anti-globalist activists- in a world without states, under the double oppression of a global, non-democratic government subjected to private economic interests, and a local, antidemocratic, fragmented, romantic and radicalised political chaos. The feudalism of the era of globalization. The problem of the global village is that it shouldn't remain a village. Villages are nice places, but too oppressive for the individual. They lack the needed privacy that democracy requires, and the wider, broader view of the city. The aim of globalization should be to make the earth not a global village, but a global polis.

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