

All Industries and Forms of Consumption are Cultural. A Critique of the ideas of “Cultural Industries” and “Cultural Consumption” (1)

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The terms “Cultural Industries” and “Cultural Consumption” have been significant categories in a number of research projects and publications in several languages. Although, I find many of these projects and publications valuable, I nevertheless consider that the usage of these two terms is highly inconvenient for two main reasons. The first reason is that highlighting the cultural significance of a few industries and consumption conceal the cultural relevance of all others. This concealing operation has specific effects in two realms of social experience, one the one hand it contributes to preventing public awareness of the cultural significance of those other industries and consumptions; on the other, it becomes an epistemological obstacle to studying those other industries and consumptions from a cultural perspective. The second reason is that the operation of bounding together a certain group of industries, or consumptions, on the basis of highlighting certain common characteristics may diminish the relevance of certain specific characteristics of some of them, or groups of them (either “industries” or “consumptions”). I want to be clear since the beginning, this article is not about how it is proper to name these or other industries. There is not a “correct” way of naming any industry, or thing. The issue regarding analytical and policy making categories (as these two concepts are) is not whether or not they are “correctly” named. The issue is that if not all, at least certain ways of naming carry on specific consequences, and this is the case with these two categories, and it is the case for at least the two reasons formerly mentioned.

In the first section of this paper, I briefly discuss the origin and transformation of these two terms. Through the second section I argue about the cultural condition of all industries and consumptions. To support this argument I highlight some salient cultural aspects of a number of industries and consumption usually left apart from most studies on “Cultural Industries,” and “Cultural Consumption,” a few of them a little more in detail. Finally, in the third section, I discuss some meaningful consequences of revising the use of the two expressions, and studying less regarded industries and forms of consumption from a cultural perspective. (2)

As I will argue in these pages, the main problem with these two ideas is that both their origin and their most current applications are too associated to the idea of "arts," even when in many cases in unconscious ways, those that imperceptible come with these expressions themselves, with their history. It may however be argued that the idea of “cultural consumption” it is also associated to the idea of science, since visiting museums of science, not only of arts, is also included in this term.

Although there may be exceptional cases in which these two ideas are applied in more inclusive ways, in both the academic literature and policy making they are mostly applied to certain specific industries, and the consumption of their products. This universe usually includes the following industries and associated consumption: print and electronic publishing (including newspapers, books, magazines, posters, comics, etc), radio, cinema, video (including games), photography, music (including performance, recording and print), television, advertising, and internet (web pages, portals). Some authors and government agencies also include the arts, even in their more classical formats, as part of the universe of “cultural industries;” for most, if not all, of them, there are no doubts that the arts are “culture,” but the issue is viewing them as “industries.” In some cases, the idea of “cultural industry” is used to include in a broad way the mass media and some industries of entertainment and spectacle (not to all, since most authors who use the term habitually do not include the sport spectacle industry). Some of the more comprehensive visions of the idea of “cultural industries” include tourism as a cultural industry. But not other industries or human activities susceptible of being regarded as industries (as in the case of the arts) are usually included within the analytical and policy making categories of “cultural industries” (see for example: Hesmondhalg 2002, Thorsby 2001, UNESCO 1982). Meaningful exclusions in this regard include not only those industries about which I will briefly argue in this paper, as for example the toy, automobile, garment, and fast food industries, but also several others, as for example the development and international cooperation (which are as susceptible to be called “industry” if not more than the arts) (see for example: Escobar 1996, Mato 1998, 2001), among others), pharmaceutical, food (not just “fast food”), beverages, and others.

On the other hand, the idea of “cultural consumption,” apart from being applied to the consumption of the products of the “cultural industries,” as formerly mentioned, it is also regularly applied to visiting museums and art galleries; attending concerts and theater plays; visiting archeological, historical, and similarly valued sites. In other words, the idea of “cultural consumption” is usually applied to the consumption of the products of the “cultural industries,” plus the products, exhibition, and performance of the arts

(including so called “popular arts,” and “handicrafts”), and science and humanities (museums, archeological and historical sites, etc) systems. In addition, in this category are also included some forms of consumption of the services, products, and performances originated in the education system, particularly those that may perhaps be described as non-formal, or extra-mural.

1. On the origin of the ideas of “Cultural Industries,” and “Cultural Consumption”

If we pay attention to the origin of these two ideas, it would not have to surprise us their biased application to those formerly mentioned kinds of human activities. Both were coined, although in singular: “cultural industry” and “culture consumption” by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, in 1944, in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1979 [1944]). These authors were concerned about the formation of which in their text they denominated “mass culture,” as well as about the role they attributed to this latter to atrophying the imagination, and being an instrument of domination. Remarkably they were also worried by the impoverishment that “mass culture” represented vis a vis “art.” In my view, their critique got relatively trapped within the contrasting idea of art. On the other side, the creation of this category must be valued because of its power to highlight the relevance of integrating economic, sociologic, and cultural analysis.

Twenty years after that book, in 1967, Adorno published his essay “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” which was first published in English in the journal *Cinéaste* (vol. 1, nr.1, Winter 1971-72), and republished in the journal *New German Critique* in 1975. In this new *solo* essay Adorno says that in the draft of that earlier book they spoke of the “mass culture,” but –he states- they replaced that expression with “cultural industry” (1975: 12) (2). He adds they did so “in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art. From the latter the culture industry must be distinguished in the extreme” (1975: 12). In opposition to this: “In all its branches [the branches of the cultural industry], products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan.” (1975: 12). And he adds: “The seriousness of high art is destroyed in speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civilizational constraints imposed on the rebellious resistance inherent within it as long as social control was not yet total.” (1975: 12). In this new essay, as in the former one co-authored with Horkheimer, the idea of “art” is the reference in the creation of this new concept.

I think that this mark of origin largely explains the limitations of this concept. Since then, the concept has been appropriated and adapted to the appearance of new industries by a good number of authors. Perhaps, the most significant differences between the original concept and newer ones are the use of the plural (“cultural industries”), as well as the development of new visions on the subject which, in contrast with that of Adorno and Horkheimer, recognize and/or stress the importance of the work of

consumers in interpreting and/or constructing meaning with regard to the products of the “cultural industries.”

Nevertheless, to stress the importance of consumer’s interpretations, or to put the name in plural does not delete its mark of origin: the idea of “art.” This is why, the most away from the idea of art that the application of the idea of “cultural industries” has up to now traveled has been to include fashion (which, on the other hand, and perhaps due to the importance of the market has already been accepted in art museums), and television entertainment genders (which may be interpreted as an extension of the centrality of cinema in the elaboration of Adorno and Horkheimer).

Significantly, I have not found yet a study of “cultural industries” discussing the cases of industries like toy, automobile, make up, development and/or international cooperation industry, although it would probably there must be a few (but, in the best of the cases, surely just a few). What I have found, and constitute valuable references for my argument, have been studies about these industries and their “impact” in social life, which does not take into account the idea of “cultural industry.” These meaningful studies have come to provide me further data to criticize the exclusionary use of the adjective “cultural” to call only a few industries, and for the same reason conceal the cultural significance of many others. On the other hand there are also numerous studies showing the cultural character of the consumption of most goods in quotidian life, although without calling these consumption “cultural.” These studies on the one side provide a basis to criticize the exclusionary use of the adjective “cultural” to speak of only certain forms of consumption, meanwhile on the other reinforce the argument regarding the fact that all industries are cultural.

The established ways to speak of "cultural industries," and “cultural consumption” are narrow, and limiting. Because all the industries are cultural, this is to say they produce socio-symbolically significant products, which are bought and used by consumers not only to satisfy a need (nutrition, shelter, mobility, entertainment), but also to produce meaning according to their specific values, and interpretations of their world. I may recognize that some industries may be seen as socio-symbolically significant in more obvious ways than others, but this does not mean that the others are less significant in this regard. But, only that they are it in less obvious ways.

It may be argued, for instance, that audio-visual and music industries are obviously “cultural,” for them clearly to produce representations, meaning. It may be naively assumed that they only produce meaning and nothing else, nothing functional. Nevertheless, this does not hold true. Because they produce at the very least entertainment, which although in some cases may be regarded as intangible, it is nevertheless functional, it has a function: to provide entertaining. It does not matter if the final format come to the hands of the consumer has a material support (a CD, a film), or a digital format. Those arguing the former may perhaps assume that the automobile industry does not produce meaning, but only a product oriented to satisfy a need. Nevertheless, this is not true either. Because, as I will further argue in the next pages, cars are not chosen by consumers only with regard to their functional properties, but and

strongly according to their symbolic features. “Each car is different,” and a meaningful object to feed the work of the owner personal imagination, s/he personal desires, including her/his needs in terms of personal identity and social group belonging. But, in addition, in the case of this industry, the interplays between the industry and modern society development have remarkably influenced the organizing of social life, use of the space, urbanization, etc. This is this industry has had impressive implications in social life and people imaginations.

Before going further in the discussion of the “cultural” condition of all industries, I must say a few words regarding the use of the word “industry.” In his mentioned essay Adorno states that ‘the expression “industry” is not be taken literally. It refers to the standardization of the thing itself –such as the Western, familiar to every movie-goer – and to the rationalization of distribution techniques, but not strictly to the production process.’ (1975:14). It is industrial, he says, “more in a sociological sense, in the incorporation of industrial forms of organization even where nothing is manufactured –as in the rationalization of office work—rather than in the sense of anything and actually produced by technological rationality” (1975: 14). Since the time Adorno wrote his essay, 1967, the uses of the term “industry” have notably expanded, and further departed from the idea of manufacture, is even less restrictively associated to the idea of manufacture. Today the term is applied not only to every manufacture branch, but also to business such as restaurant and hotels, insurance, music, entertainment, tourism, etc. My use of the word “industry” echoes these changes to include any and every branch of human activity oriented to produce goods o services, whose existence may in certain ways be described and differentiated from others. Although, as we already know demarcation between them is necessarily relative, or blurred, as for example it would be any attempt to detach the music industry from entertainment industry, or any of them from television. It similarly would happen with any attempt to separate too strictly the industries of hotels and restaurants, from those of tourism, or this latter from that of travel and airlines, etc. In all these cases, relations of property, as well as interdependence of business prevent from reifying the result of the analytical operation of naming separated branches. It is within this latitude that I use the word “industry” here. Of course such new developments do not make me forget that there exist certain more “classic” industries, like automobile, toy, etc.. On the other hand, they constitute an invitation to recognize the existence of other branch of economic activity, which it seems appropriate to name “industry.” As, it is the case, for example of the “development and international cooperation industry,” which so strikingly has developed since the creation of the United Nations system of agencies, as well as of the multilateral banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, etc). The reason to highlight the existence of this latter industry here is that although its products, “ideas of development,” etc. are socio-symbolically so significant, it is rarely named as a “cultural industry.”

2. All Industries and Forms of Consumption are “Cultural”

In order to sustain my argument that both all industries and all consumption are cultural, in the following pages I will more specifically discuss the cultural condition of a

few industries and some associated forms of consumption of their products. I will do this for a few cases related to toy, fashion and garment, automobile, and fast food industries.

2.1. About toys:

The significance of toys in the formation of representations of gender, ethnic, and other collective identities, and representations, has been stressed in numerous studies, of diverse disciplinary traditions, psychology, sociology, anthropology (e.g.,: Giannini Belotti 1980; Ducille 1994, Rossie 1999). But it is not just the toys, the ways of consumption of these products in specific social contexts are also relevant. It is not only the toys, but also the way of playing with them, or the game; or sometimes the possession.

Nevertheless, in one way or another the toy itself is at least a referent in the production of meaning. Moreover, for many toys in modern societies the ways of playing with them are suggested, induced, by open or concealed advertising, or sometimes the very guidelines that accompany the toy. It has also been taken into account that the industry does not only advertise its toys, but also research about interests, ways of playing, etc. It is difficult to establish what is first, if “the chicken or the egg,” but in any case there are meaningful relations between one and other element, consumer preferences and industry proposals.

Let us begin by briefly discussing the very introduction of industrially manufactured toys in societies in which they did not exist before, when children have been mainly playing with toys made by themselves, and occasionally by artisans. This is currently the case of numerous societies or specific social groups in the world, as for example, as I have had the opportunity to observe among those Guayuu Indians living in some remote villages in the Peninsula de La Guajira, Venezuela, or as Jan-Pierre Rossie has documented in north Africa and The Sahara. This author has observed that “the commercialization of toys, making the more expensive industrially manufactured toys affordable only for middle class and high class families, creates a new distinction between Saharan and North African children, a distinction that did not exist when toys were self-made.” (Rossie , 1999, chapter: “Conclusion” Internet version, no page information).

Let us consider a different example. In an article posted in Internet by the The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Carol Moog (n/d) tells us about the cases of two Black dolls. One of these dolls is Huggy Bean, “a mass-produced, mass-marketed Black character doll,” who was introduced in 1985 by Yvonne Rubie, founder of Golden Ribbon Playthings.

[Huggy Bean has been designed as a] proud, feisty image for Black children to identify with. [...] When the child grows up playing only with Caucasian dolls, the daunting effects of his immersion in the white-oriented United States culture are compounded. [...] In the United States, ethnic children have to battle their ways not only past concrete negative

images of themselves in the media, but also past the impression that the pervasiveness of Caucasian imagery means they are not part of the "real" American society. Golden Ribbon Playthings, a Black-owned company, produces Huggy Bean with African-American features, and it deliberately gives the doll a positive personality in order to educate Black children about Black issues and heritage. Huggy Bean goes on adventures to places such as Ethiopia and even South America and comes with a detailed fantasy storybook in order to help the Black child discover who he or she is. Golden Ribbon constantly gets letters from parents recounting how proud their children are of their Huggy Bean, and so, of themselves. Recently, the company has expanded its products to include Hispanic dolls, which are marketed to and purchased by Black consumers, as a way of enlarging their "families". (Moog n/d)

The former reference seems particularly useful, because apart from telling us about the product, also give us at least a hint of the way in which is consumed, if not by the children themselves, at least by their parents. Let us now consider the case Naomi, in contrast with the case of the Black version of the best known and sold doll around the world, Barbie. Naomi is produced by Olmec Toy Company. This company has been founded by Yla Eason, who created the first Black superhero toy "Sun-Man, after hearing her son announce he could never be like Mattel's He-Man because He-Man was white. Eason produces Sun-Man, as well as a line of Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian superheroes." (Moog n/d). Naomi, is precisely one of these dolls, which Moog portrays as a "Barbie-like fashion doll, has Black facial features; she is not just a white painted brown. There is a market for ethnic accuracy. And immediately ads:

By contrast, Mattel's priority in producing ethnic diversity in its advertising and its products is not to enhance the self-image of its young consumers. Barbies are manufactured to be profitable, and Mattel has found that, more than ever, it is lucrative to sell to the ethnic market. When Barbie was first introduced to America, the doll business was predominantly white and reflected, according to Candace Irving, Mattel's Manager of Marketing and Public Relations, what the mass market wanted in dolls. By the late 1960s, in response to a rapidly changing society and out of a need to be "responsible," Mattel introduced a Black doll named "Christie," a friend in Barbie's world. Nevertheless, Christie and Mattel's other ethnic dolls are "not designed to be educational," but rather to build a social group for Barbie--and a purchasable collection for her owners. Barbie's current friends "Miko" (Asian), "Teresa" (Hispanic) and a Black Barbie all possess ethnic features sculpted by designers who have distilled recognizable images from pictures of the dolls' purported ethnic groups. The aim is not accuracy for the sake of psychological educational development, but recognizability for the sake of sales. As Mattel's Irving explains, "Toy markets reflect what's happening in society; everything tells us that the Black and Hispanic markets are growing, and you will see Mattel targeting more and more products toward those

segments. (Moog n/d)

It is interesting to highlight the remarks made by Mattel's Manager of Marketing and Public Relations, which tell us of at least one interpretation of how the market plays. According to her statement is not the company who takes the lead, but it responds to society developments. This is of course a complex issue, about which I do not seek to produce any sort of definitive answer. In any case, my current interpretation is that in this regard there are complex interplays to be studied on a case by case basis. Nevertheless, the problematic issue is how we could frame and delimit "a case". Could we study the Barbie doll as a case? Would it be a case to learn about what?

In order for us to learn about any of Barbie doll most famous "sins," like promoting racial or gender stereotyping, or even about promoting anorexia, it would not suffice to center in the doll, not even in the plays with her. Because her contribution to those two forms of stereotyping, as well as to that health disorder can only be properly understood when placed in the context of other concurrent factors. This means we would have to look at prevailing social values, as well as the work of the fashion, television and film industries, among other factors. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Barbie is any kind of "neutral" element. Even if we assume that the toy is not the determinant factor, but how it is used, how children (mainly girls) play with it, anyway precisely because those other mentioned factors are at work, they constitute significant elements of the context of the play with her, Barbie contributes to produce certain meaning more than other. This does not mean she does not favor also other process, as for example that playing with dolls that represent young adults instead of babies may have certain positive effects in children plays, or gentle behavior instead of violent, language development, and other, as argued by some authors (e.g., Rogers 1999). In addition, in evaluating what kinds of representations are associated to Barbie doll, we also have to look at what the corporation that produces the doll (Mattel, Inc.) contributes to shape those meaning through advertising, the production of Barbie paraphernalia and associated products (books, shows, etc), as well as at its policies regarding how to shape "ethnic" Barbies (Black, Hispanic, Asian, etc) which in fact are just "colored" classic Barbies and do not reflect any body shape differences, as well as how to dress them, and associated meanings to each of them. In one way or another, the issue is that it is not only the single doll, as an object, the material from which children playing with Barbie make meaning (Ducille 1994, Ebersole and Peabody 1993, Rogers 1999).

In addition, in the particular case of Barbie, we also have to take into account that Barbie is not only a doll to play with. Studies on the doll show that Barbie is also consumed by some children and adults because of her ample and fashionable wardrobe. Barbie is for some consumers a vicarious way of enjoying fashion, in ways that due to these consumers' budget and actual social life they could not enjoy on themselves (Dickey 1991, Rogers 1999). Moreover, Barbie is also an object of consumption for collectors, for them Barbie have particular meanings, different from those children endorse through playing. But similar or different, as a toy to play with, or an object of collection, Barbie catalyzes meanings.

To finish this section, I want to stress that, it does not matter if we speak of Barbie doll, or of any other toy, we need to study not only the toy itself, its properties, and not only to place our analysis within the proper social context, but also, and particularly, to incorporate into our analysis the ways in which is advertised, and more in general marketed. Marketing and advertising build meaning around the toy itself, and in certain ways come to constitute handbooks of how to play with and make meaning of the toy in question. We have to consider toys and advertising together, since they jointly constitute “the key instruments of children’s culture” (Kline 1993: 20).

2.2. About “fashion” and clothing:

We often associate the idea of “fashion” to costume, but in fact it also is applicable to other domains of life, although it may in each have different nuances. We even speak of intellectual, and literary fashions. Moreover, and before discussing fashion in dressing and the garment industry, it would be convenient to highlight that the idea of fashion also applies to the case of the industry we have discussed just above: toy, as well as to many others. There are also toy fashions, which in one way or another condition, or at the very least inform, the buying of toys and the ways they are used. Similarly, there are automobile fashions for different specific segments of the market. These and other fashions respond to individuals’ desire of belonging to specific social groups and differentiation within those groups, as well as differentiation from other social groups, desire of distinction. Every arena of human experience, and kind of consumption, is fertile terrain for these kinds of processes, they take place whether consciously or unconsciously. In this sense, the goods and services we consume, and the ways in which we consume them are meaningful, and construct meaning for ourselves and for others (Barnard 1996, Bourdieu 1984, Baudrillard 1974, Eco 1986, Isherwood and Douglas 1996).

Now, getting directly into the subject of this section, it seems necessary to begin by addressing some issues of vocabulary. What we wear are cloths, the industry that produces them is the garment industry, and what we wear and what that industry produces is in diverse forms associated, informed, condition, even when through alternative or “resistant” ways to fashion. But there is not just one fashion at any given time, there are several fashions. They vary according to countries or regions in the world, age, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, occupation/profession, and other referents of social identification. In fact, clothing is used to present a certain image of ourselves, to communicate our belonging to a certain social group, or at least our desire of belonging. Clothing is simultaneously used to mark both adjustment to the group and individual differentiation within it. Clothing is key element in the production of representations of both our collective and individual identity. Although none of us (or at least no myself, and most probably none of the readers of this paper) dress Haute Couture clothing, the idea of fashion is most commonly associated to such specific segment of the market, which for specialized media constitutes “the Fashion”, meanwhile of the ready-to-wear clothing we use it is more often said to be, or not, in fashion, or to be “a

fashion.”. However, most Haute Couture designers have collections for both markets. Moreover they have also incorporated into their collections the “jean,’ a cloth that in its beginning was for farmers, and that in a certain moment of its history was a symbol of anti-fashion. In any case the designers, jointly with fashion media are significant players in defining, or conditioning what most people wear. Here, like in the case of toy industry, we also have to take into consideration the production of meaning associated to the goods advertising and marketing practices. Although related, these two activities are not exactly the same, therefore we should also ponder the work of advertising agencies, as well as, for example, the department store system, and other relevant involved agents. Nevertheless, the garment market, is even more complex, because there are many other factors at stake, and it cannot be simplistically assumed that they are determined by what those mayor players “dictate.” Among these other factors, we have to consider the role played by cinema and television in promoting certain fashions, the spectacle sport system, but particularly “the street” (within which we must include the working and leisure places) what different groups of people adopt and adapt from those mayor players proposals, how they “dialogue” with those proposals. Some segmentations of the market are particularly significant, and therefore there are specific national or regional markets each with its own orientation (some Arabic countries, India and some other Asian countries, etc), as well as specific “ethnic” markets, as it is remarkably the case of Afro-Americans in the U.S., and of several immigrant populations in both the U.S. and a few Western European countries. The existence and relevance of these latter segments of the market, as well as those other already mentioned that are associated to age, socio-economic group, gender, sexual orientation, profession, diverse “alternate” (to mainstream) identities, constitute the best and most notorious argument of the “cultural” character of the garment industry and fashion system (Ash and Wilson 1993, Barnard 1996, Croci and Vitale 2000, Davis 1992, Gordon 1991, Klein 1999, Leopold 1993, Thompson. and Haytko 1997)

Nevertheless, as former considerations suggest the cultural condition of industries cannot be properly discussed within the narrow frame of any given industry. Currently, industries are interrelated in several ways. Some are interrelated in more obvious forms than others. In this sense, I cannot avoid pointing out a relationship between this industry and what we have already discussed with regard to Barbie doll as a promoter of certain (unreal) body shape model, which makes part of larger system of messages within which other major players are fashion designers and media, the garment industry, fashion model and cinema & TV star system, fitness and weight management industry, make up industry, and beauty contests. All these players concur in the production of certain hegemonic images of how our bodies should look.

Even although recognizing that individuals are not just passive receptors of all these players’ messages, their influence on the preferences and efforts to look properly of at least certain groups of population (which obviously live and behave according to certain values) cannot be stressed enough. For example, the process that led to the recent crowning of a Nigerian very thin woman as Miss World has sparked in her country an unprecedented interest among Nigerian valorization of thin women. The fact is remarkable in a country in which women have historically been valorized for being fat. Several ethnic

groups in the country hold festivals to celebrate big women, even. Moreover, among the Calabri, the very group to which Ms. Agbani Arego, the recently crowned Miss World, belongs “fat has traditionally held a cherished place. Before their weddings, brides are sent to fattening farms [...]. Now this is changing, the issue was not just motivated by incident, but by a decision made by Guy Murray-Bruce, the executive director of Silverbird Productions, which runs the Most Beautiful Girl contest. With no success his company has been sending contestants to the Miss World pageant for years. Until ‘ in 2000 he carried out a drastic change of strategy in picking the Most Beautiful Girl and Nigeria’s next representative. “The judges [he said] had always looked for a local queen, someone they considered a beautiful African woman [...] So I told the judges not to look for a local queen, but someone to represent us internationally’ (Onishi 2002). The adoption of “Western beauty ideals” has been the key factor because Miss World competition is dominated by them. In Venezuela, “Miss Venezuela” director, Mr. Osmel Sousa has adopted these criteria long ago, as a result there have already been several Venezuelan girls crowned as Miss Universe and others as Miss World. They, like most of those who manage to being accepted in the national contest although do not win, make their lives as professional models, they provide the bodies that constitute the model image of women perfection for many. Some of them become television stars. The contest is a trade mark of Venevision, a company owned by Cisneros Group, which is also co-owner (jointly with Televisa of Mexico) of Miami based Univision, the major producer and provider of Hispanic Television in the U.S.. The panorama is not different in other countries. The industries of fashion, make up, and television are linked. The sizes of not a few garment producers do not fit into most regular people, particularly women. Not a few women make incredible efforts to adjust themselves to those shapes. Television is not the only “cultural” of these industries, it is a system, this challenges the prevailing vision of what industries are regarded (and studied) as “cultural.”

Finally, I cannot finish this section without at least briefly introducing another aspect of the problem. The “cultural” condition of any industry is not limited to the meaning it in diverse ways (design, advertising, marketing, etc) embeds to its products, nor to the production of meaning of the related costumers in appropriating and using its products. It has to do also with the ways in which it organizes production, and how this impacts social life inside and beyond the production spaces and related social contexts. Every industry has these kinds of “effects,” but historically it has happened that in certain moments of history some industries have had greater social impact than others in the ways they have organized, or reorganized production systems, as well as distribution, and social life around. This has notably been the case, for example, of the textile industry in the XVIII century Industrial Revolution. It rapidly changed the organizing of labour within the factories, and at the same time had a notably impact (jointly with other factors) in the organizing of urban and rural life in England, on the English foreign policy, and through this latter on other regions of the world social and political life. Different, but also significant has been the social and cultural impact of the automobile industry (as we will see it in following pages), and particularly of Mr. Henry Ford moving assembling line revolution. Charles Chaplin has insightfully portrayed the cultural dimension of this revolution in his extraordinary film *Modern Times*. Through time there have been several relevant examples of these sorts of cultural impact of specific industries, which have

always been part of larger concurrent factors. At a different level, and again as part of larger factors, the garment industry has recently have had notorious impact in the organizing of the labour market at worldwide level. It has not been the only one, since the late 1960s several industries have begun deployed transnationally their production systems, and particularly to set up “maquila” facilities, but it has been one of the most significant players in this practice, and given the labour intensive character of its productive system, it has for this reason had notorious impact in the incorporation large contingents of people into the waged labour system, and other modalities of capitalist production, as for example domiciliary work for factories.

“Maquiladoras” are assembly plants established by transnational corporations of diverse branches (textile, automotive, electronic, etc.) in countries where low wages are paid, to make the final assembly of originating parts of the outside and thus to produce final goods that are re-exported almost without paying taxes or customs rights. The corporations not only take advantage from low wages and waves in taxes and custom rights, but also from de-regulated labour markets, in which usually unions are forbidden. The “maquila” style assembly plants began to settle down in the north of Mexico in the decade of 1970. At the moment there exist more than 3,000 plants assembly plants in Mexico, where they hire more than 900,000 workers, and although 81% of them still are concentrated in the border zone with the United States, their presence no longer limited to this area. In addition, currently “maquila” plants have about 200,000 workers in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua (Network of Solidarity of Maquila 1995). Also there are them in Dominican Republic, as well as in several Southeast Asian countries.

Numerous studies the “maquiladoras” focus on the economic aspects of the subject, as well as problems related to the payment of very low wages, the environmental contamination, the negative impacts on workers’ health, that I cannot avoid to at least mention here. Nevertheless, in this opportunity it interests to me to put of relief some associated aspects of a more clearly “cultural” character. In the first place, it must be considered that very often for numerous workers of these plants its relation with them implies its incorporation - by first time to the market of work within the framework of a strictly wage relation (and impersonal respect to the previous experience of some of them to work in small familiar companies, or at least property of visible residents of the same locality). This is because numerous assembly plants hire as workers people who until then have been dedicated to agricultural tasks (only sometimes within the framework of wage relations), or to weave and other activities, but in artisan ways, or in family owned and other small companies.

In this way these companies induce very important changes in the organization of the work and the habits of work and life of people. These changes not only have to do with the types of tasks that the people make, but also in many occasions they involve passing from individual work, in solitaire, or in small factories or on the land, to the industrial work where many people work under a same ceiling, in coordinated and interdependent ways, fulfilling routine tasks, within rigid schedules although often on a rotating basis, in conditions that often affect their health, in addition to its habits of life. But not only that, many of these companies usually have the policy of specially hiring

young women (in Mexico 70 % of the workers of the assembly plants are women, most of between 16 and 24 years of age; in Guatemala 90% are women) who until then did not have had remunerated jobs, but worked at home or in family companies without receiving any, or even smaller remuneration. This alter relations of power within the families, as well as the organization of family life and (these changes are significant, independently if one it considers positive for the inter gender or inter generational relations). Also they change the patterns of consumption of these workers, the time available to feed itself, the foods that can be prepared or to take themselves in that time, the availability of cash to make purchases, the type of clothes which they need or they wish to use, the products of the industries of the entertainment in which they are interested, etc. (Green 1995, Rock 1997, Network of Solidarity of Maquila 1995). In other words, all this involves significant cultural change, and therefore come to make part of the cultural condition of garment, and other significant industries.

2.3. About automobiles:

As I said above, fashion is not just an issue of clothing. ‘ Americans treat automobiles as fashion accessories and image enhancers [...] “The car industry is really a fashion business, more than ever before,” said Christopher Cederrgren, an industry analyst with NextTrend, of Thousand Oaks, Calif. He said that Americans “wear” their cars, and “costumers are fickle, and they are going to go with the latest craze”.‘ (Cobb 2002).

But, not only industry analyst stress that cultural dimensions of the automobile, also Clay McShane, a university professor in the US and the author of a research book in the subject (1994), as well as French social critic Henri Lefebvre, have made concurrent remarks:

The automobile, a metaphor as well as a machine, meant more to Americans than just another transportation mode, a tool to reach the suburbs. Very early in its history it became what French social critic Henri Lefebvre has called “the epitome of possessions.” The automobile symbolized wealth and psychic liberation for an enormous number of groups within American society. It also played a role in changing American patterns of gender identity (1994: 125)

But, providing a material resource, and associated advertising, for the costumers making of representations of their individual, unique but belonging to a certain group, selves is not the only, and perhaps not even the most significant, reason why the automobile industry must be regarded as a “cultural industry.”

The introduction of the personal automobile has been a significant factor in the organizing of human life in several respects. The car has been influential in the pattern of geographical distribution of population beyond cities. It has been the car, jointly with the train and the subway, which has allowed the development of large cities to which diverse socio-economic layers of workers may concur to do their work. More recently it has been

the car, and particularly the car, which has allowed the reorganizing of territorial occupation patterns to the development of suburban areas, particularly in the U.S., and with it, the emergence of what some have called “suburban culture.” This does not mean that because of the automobile the sub-urbanization has taken place. There have been several concurrent social factors to make this happen, but without the automobile this could not have happened, or at least not in the same way we know it today.

[...] mass motorization had reorganized American urban and rural space into what the President’s Research Committee on Social Trends in 1933 called “metropolitanism.” “By reducing the scale of local distance,” the committee pointed out, “the motor vehicle extended the horizon of community and introduced a territorial division of labor among local institutions and neighboring cities which is unique in the history of settlement. The large [urban] center has been able to extend the radius of its influence [sic]. Moreover, former independent towns and villages and also rural territory have become part of the enlarged city complex.” (Flink 1988: 150)

Before going ahead, I want to highlight the idea of “reducing the scale of local distance” attributed in the formerly quoted Presidential Report, to suggest that in spite of certain light appreciations of what is happen in current times, Internet is not the first technology to make “time and space compression” possible. This might be an additional argument to make in favor of my statement regarding the cultural condition of car industry, at least for those who would easily accept the cultural dimension of internet, but not of the car. But, let us resume into our main subject here, the car industry.

Would it be necessary to argue here about the extraordinary impact that this phenomenon has had in every respect of the lives of people, including forms of work, entertainment, and of practicing friendship, courtship, dating and mating; inter-generational and inter-gender relations; architectural design; the development of shopping centers with its own consequences, the symbolic appropriation of landscape (including iconic national landmarks); health and causes of mortality; etc. Moreover, the development of the car industry has also carried out other kind of cultural consequence. For that I mean its historical role in the development of the moving assembly line by Ford Motor Company in 1908, and both its consequences in workers lives (again, remember Charles Chaplin’s *Modern Times*), and the associated possibilities of mass production at levels not seen before in history (e.g, Flink 1988, McShane 1994). Of course, to say it once again, this was not just because of the car, there were several concurrent factors, among others people uses, and then there are feedback effects on the industry itself. Similarly, when scholars and policy makers claim that television programming, cinema or music, culturally impact our lives, they do not (or at least cannot) claim that this is just because of the respective industries or their products.

2.4. About “Fast Food”:

Similarly to the case of the car industry, the fast food industry has also been the site of striking changes in both the way of organizing the production process, and the associated organizational culture. In this case the main player has been the McDonald's. And as it has happened with the car industry, the fast food industry has also impressively impacted daily life. The development of this industry has not only affected the ways in which people eat, but also what people eat, family routines and uses of leisure time, and at least aspects of inter-generational relations. In addition, McDonald's has become an American icon, particularly abroad. Its stores have become either the place in which some people feel as participants of the “American way of life,” or the target that represents the U.S. government when it comes to the political performance of feelings of “anti-imperialism,” “anti-globalization,” “anti-free trade,” and the like.

In addition, at a worldwide level, particularly when regarded from outside the US and Western Europe, perhaps the most significant impact of McDonald's is not on the food people eat, and the way they do it, but with regard to both the model of organization of the work, and the associated principles of productivity and identification with the corporation. In a certain way, the values that McDonald's promotes constitute its most important cultural good. Significantly, it particularly does this between the numerous young people who in many cities of the world begin their insertion in the labor market in a McDonald's. Moreover, the McDonald case has been taken as a paradigm in not few university business schools around the world (4). Through studying the case of McDonald's, the students, futures managers of companies, get acquainted with particular managerial systems, and the associated values and representations. Nevertheless, the complexity of the McDonald's case goes further. Because, in the last years, along with the hamburger, the Coke, and the organization of the work, in his promotions of the "happy small boxes" the company includes plastic toys related to the most recent film productions. That is to say, the burger now comes with the products of the entertainment industries.

Nevertheless, it seems that the impact of McDonald's in terms of its pattern of company organization, franchising, customer service, food consumption style, and food itself, has been even more remarkable in the U.S. Research journalist, National Magazine Award winner, Eric Schlosser, author of the book *Fast Food Nation* (2001), and formerly of a several articles (e.g, 1998), says: “After four decades, our obsession with fast, cheap food has transformed our towns and flooded the labor market with low-paying, dead-end jobs” (1998: 1). According to this author McDonald's Corp. annually trains more workers than the U.S. Army, and that “indeed, the company earns the majority of its profits not from selling food but from collecting rent.” This is because what McDonald's sells is franchising. As Schlosser tells us: “The key to a successful franchise, according to many texts on the subject, can be expressed in a single word: uniformity. Franchises and chain stores must reliably offer the same product or service at numerous locations. Customers are drawn to familiar brands by an instinct to avoid the unknown.” (1998: 4). Equally as it occurs abroad, also in the U.S. teenagers constitute the largest part of McDonald's work force, it is similar for other fast food chains. They constitute for many workers a

train intensive camp, in which to learn labor routines and values; remarkably, according to Schlosser fast-food workers are the only Americans who earn lower wages than migrant farm workers” (1998:5). In less than half a century the fast-food sector has also dramatically affected the significance of small locally owned business and its associated entrepreneurial culture. This and all the formerly mentioned (the way of eating, what people actually eat, etc) are cultural issues. This is why I state that the if anyone wants to speak in terms of “cultural industries” would have to include also the fast food sector under such a label, and therefore to think of it when designing research about “cultural industries,” or making policy for such a sector.

2.5. About the terms “Cultural Industries” and Cultural Consumption”, once again:

For all the above I believe that the term "cultural industries" is problematic. Because, as said, all industries are “cultural” and therefore it should be applied to all of them, which would make it redundant. It seems more fruitful to name and study specific branches of industry, like for example entertainment industry, food industry, toy industry, make up industry, etc; and at the same time being aware of overlaps and integrations between the different industries. In this way we may get deeper into the knowledge of each one.

Similarly, I believe the idea of "cultural consumption" is redundant. All modality of consumption is cultural, that is to say, symbolically meaningful and contextually relative. It responds to a certain “common sense”, or to a system of representations shared among members of certain social group or human populations. At the same time, in a convergent way, all consumption reproduces or constructs that common sense, or contributes to question it and to produce alternative ones. The “cultural” character of consumption practices does not depend as much on what is consumed, but on “how.” What may make the attribution of the adjective "cultural" to certain practices of consumption, more obviously than to others, does not depend as much on the objects consumed, but on the attribution of meaning that those who consume made to the objects consumed, and/or to the involved consumption practices. A similar object or system of objects, as those exhibited in a commercial display cabinet or in museum showcase, may be consumed in different ways by diverse social actors, from diverse “interpretative communities.” There are some who watch commercial display cabinets as if they were showcases of museums, and also those others who do the opposite thing. More even, these ways of seeing can be consciously or unconsciously associated to specific representations of identities and differences. This potential interpretative capacity may be applied to products of any industry. It applies equally to products of industries as cinema, television, book, communications, museums, as much as to those of those of dress, makeup, food, toy, automobile, etc.

3. Studying Specific Industries and Forms of Consumption from a Cultural Perspective

In this final section I will discuss a few consequences of the formerly argued, for both research and policy making. In my view something strikingly important that may be learnt from those studies about specific industries, as well as from those about specific forms of consumption, that constitutes the source of the argument developed in former pages, is that the most promising research orientation would be to develop studies that integrate both production and consumption. But, sorry, I have not had time to finish this section.

Notes:

- (1) A first version of this text was included as a section of the article “Des-fetichizar la globalizacion: basta de reduccionismos, apologias y demonizaciones, mostrar la complejidad y las practicas de los actores,” in *Estudios Latinoamericanos sobre Cultura y Transformaciones Sociales en Tiempos de Globalizacion*, edited by Daniel Mato, Caracas: UNESCO –CLACSO, 2001, pp.: 147-178. I have prepared the current expanded version during my residence as a Visiting Professor at the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) of New York University. I like to acknowledge the valuable assistance kindly provided by CLACS staff and graduate assistants Maritza Colón, Patricia Oscategui, Andrew Whitworth-Smith, and Melisa Lujan, as well as comments and bibliography generously provided by my colleagues and friends Toby Miller and George Yúdice, who obviously are not responsible for the views I express in this text.
- (2) In this article, I have consciously decided to avoid the academic rite of reviewing other authors’ perspective. This is because, as I have said above, I believe those studies have been valuable, even when in my opinion limited and limiting, and my interest here is not to engage in a debate about those other studies, but to stimulate research about the cultural dimensions of all industries and consumption, and particularly with regard to those usually not studied. In addition, I think necessary to stress a difference between this piece and most of my articles. This is not a research article, but one oriented to promote an ambitiously ample range conceptual debate. I have not done research on each of the industries which cultural dimensions I stress in this article, therefore I have had to support my argument on other authors’ research. In practice this is the only possible way to refer my argument about the cultural condition of so diverse industries. In any case, my former research on soap opera industry in Latin America (e.g, Mato 1999, 2002), as well as that other on the cultural dimension of a less typical industry, that of “international cooperation” (e.g, Mato 1998, 2001) have in a good part been what put me in the way to make the conceptual argument I present in these pages.
- (3) In the Spanish edition that I have of Horkheimer and Adorno’s text (1979) the expression “mass culture” (“cultura de masas”) is used. I should still check in the

English edition, but in any case for the discussion in this text it does not make any difference whether they have used or not that particular expression. The argument here is that the term “cultural industry” was made in opposition to the idea of “art,” and that as a consequence it brings in itself the mark of the idea of “art,” even when as what may in the Adorno and Horkheimer system be regarded its negation.

- (4) I am thankful to Prof. Magdalena Valdivieso, Director of the School of Administration of the Central University of Venezuela, to tell me about the importance of the case Mc Donald’s in the formation offered by administration schools throughout Latin America, as well as the reference to a significant sample, as it is the book *Administracion*, by James Stoner and Edward Freeman (1998, 6th. edition, Mexico: Prentice Hall).

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