The global village: globalization, rethinking McLuhan in the 21st century

La aldea global: la globalización, repensar McLuhan en el siglo XXI

Marshall McLuhan was the first theorist who in 1964 spoke of the idea of the Global Village in his essay «Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man». Born in Canada in 1911, he studied English literature at the University of Manitoba and later at Cambridge University. He taught at the University of Wisconsin and Saint Louis University; he converted to Catholicism. Because of his interests and studies, he was soon recognized as an authority in the field of media and technologies. He taught at Assumption College, St Michael's College (46-79), University of Toronto, and Fordham University, where the famous Fordham experiment on the effects of television occurred. He died in Toronto in 1980.

The idea of global village was born in McLuhan after the observation of how the media had been able to overcome any physical distance, bringing the inhabitants of the earth closer, making them close, neighbors, turning the earth into a great global village. In this new global village, villagers can know what they do, how they live, what other villagers say; a villager in New York can see what a villager in Hong Kong is doing and even observe him in real time.

This transformation of the world into one big village has, according to McLuhan, also changed our behaviors into those typical of a villager.

Interestingly, McLuhan’s visionary idea predates the popularization of the Internet and social networks. Rumorology in networks, the proliferation of reality shows, the desire to see what others are doing, are some of the aspects and consequences of these new behaviors. Radios, televisions and then computers, tablets and cell phones, become the new windows from our homes to the street; that’s where we see what is happening and as Jean Luc Godard also advocated, there will come a time when on television we will see how a neighbor waters her plants and even more on the other side of the world. This world has already arrived, online dating, online classes, online
concerts... everything brings us closer and relates us to what is far away. We share the same series and movies in the big shared cinemas, the new video libraries/platforms Netflix, HBO or Prime; we buy in the same stores, in the big supermarkets Amazon, Alibaba or Ebay; we have the same big «text library» Google and a long etc. We can read the news in real time from any newspaper in the world and know what is happening live in a war not so far away.

Marshal McLuhan anticipated globalization, not only of markets, but also of customs, lifestyles and communication.

Media communication has brought the world closer together and transport communications have made it real; popularization of affordable air travel to any part of the world, Erasmus, exchanges, multinationals, work travel... have made our contacts more and more international; families and friends of different nationalities are becoming more and more common.

The Global Village appears in the RAE as the planet earth, as an interconnected and globalized world. In itself the Global Village contains an opposition of terms: on the one hand a village, a small place, according to the RAE a town of few neighborhoods; on the other hand the term global, in the RAE as referring to the planet, the globe.

Calling it village instead of town or city, is part of McLuhan’s great visionary capacity; his idea surpasses that of world citizen, someone we liken more to a great traveler, a businessman or someone who by his personal circumstances has been able to know different parts of the world, an educated man, open, knowledgeable of different cultures and societies, respectful of others, a cosmopolitan, which according to the RAE is a person who has moved or moves around many countries and is open to their cultures and customs... A world villager has customs, behaviors and feelings very different from those we can imagine in a citizen of the world, a world villager does not necessarily resemble someone open, or educated, in fact in its pejorative meaning the RAE qualifies the villager as someone rude, coarse.

McLuhan in 1964 announced a vision of a hyper-connected world, long before the advent of «smart-communication» that would allow us to be connected to the whole world 24/7, 365 days a year from our pockets.

Now, in this recent era in which we have painfully experienced the first cross-border pandemic live, through the media, we have also seen the other side of the coin of how the world is truly that Global Village. We have exchanged the benefits of globalization for a suffering that has become a global village. We have exchanged the benefits of globalization for a suffering that has gone viral not only in all the networks, but in the material integrity of the human being with the worst of its consequences, his own death; thus leading man back to that fragile and ineffable place of human existence, remembering that the global village itself is part of a universe in which the entire globe is an infinitesimal part of a much larger whole, in which only outside oneself, one can find a meaning and a destiny.

To wonder in the 21st century about the idea of globalization and more concretely and more accurately, about the idea of the Global Village, is also to wonder about borders, transhumanities, migrations, human rights, the common good, the ideas of macrocosm and microcosm as John Paul II indicated in Centesimus Annus (1991); it is also to wonder about the importance of preserving the balance of the earth and the balance of the moral conditions of authentic human ecology.

In this issue of the magazine we intend to bring together researchers from sociology, philosophy, pedagogy, medicine, architecture, urban planning, engineering, art, advertising,
journalism, social responsibility, business and any other area interrelated with communication, who are researching globalization and the idea of the Global Village, the idea of man as a villager and his destiny in the 21st century. As always, space has also been given to those researchers who, from other disciplines, have dealt with topics of interest related to communication and the humanities this year.