

The historical method(s) in communication research

O(s) método(s) histórico(s) nas pesquisas em comunicação

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ABSTRACT

The article aims, from bibliographical research, to discuss how the schools of thought deal with history, its research methods and its importance in the construction of communication knowledge. The initial discussion provides details so we can discuss how the communication field in Brazil appropriates history and its methods to support its research. Along the way, the bibliographical research, articulated to the discussion of the historical methods in the context of theoretical paradigms, allows us to comment the foreign and Brazilian authors that deal with historical research in communication.

Keywords: Communication, history, historical methods

RESUMO

O artigo objetiva, a partir de pesquisa bibliográfica, discutir como as correntes de pensamento tratam da história, de seus métodos de pesquisa e de sua importância na construção do conhecimento comunicacional. A discussão inicial fornece elementos para que possamos debater como a área da comunicação no Brasil se apropria da história e de seus métodos para embasar suas pesquisas. Nesse percurso, a pesquisa bibliográfica, articulada à discussão sobre os métodos históricos no âmbito dos paradigmas teóricos, permite comentar autores estrangeiros e brasileiros que tratam da pesquisa histórica na área da comunicação.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação, história, método histórico

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DEALING WITH A research method almost always results in operational simplifications. How can one do it? How to search for information? How to choose one's sources? However, what good are those questions when one does know the basic element: that which one wants to study? The core question of the research indicates the possibilities that are opened up for its answers. Each and every answer is built from that initial question that guides a researcher's theoretical-methodological tools. Choosing a research topic is taking a stand, it is recognizing that something needs to be sought, understood, revealed. The investigation question, when asked, reveals the theoretical concepts required for a study and also whether history is relevant to the intended investigation or not. Moreover, when one places the historical aspect as relevant, what history are they talking about? Is the one that is marked by the narration of actions performed by leaders and characters who are important at a certain time? About the history that is seen as the driver of social changes, whose investigation joins specific to general aspects, connecting relations of production and classes? About long or short-term history, that is told based on mentalities, cultural objects, and daily lives? Those are all possibilities for dealing with history. Depending the question a researcher asks, they may be mobilized and reveal the paradigm from which that researcher chose to guide themselves. In order to attempt to answer all questions above, we propose to discuss the concept of history and its relevance to studies in communication.

THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT HISTORY

Talking about history is talking about past events, their relationships with certain objectives and points of view, through narratives that are recorded in a type of language. Herodotus (484-425 BC), in the classic western tradition, is the historian who develops a particular narrative on time, detaching it from the literature. Above all, his nine books describe wars. Thucydides (460-395 BC), also one of the first historians, is the founder of what we say that is history told from objective information, without the intervention of mythical narratives. His concern with the facts may be observed in an excerpt from one of his works, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, in which the author discusses the trade of a historian:

Considering the evidence so far, however, nobody would make a mistake if they kept their point of view that facts in ancient times were really similar to how I described them, not giving too much credit, on one hand, to the versions poets sang, embellishing and amplifying their topics, and on the other, considering that logographers [a derisive description for historians who preceded Thucydi-

des], while doing their work, were more concerned with pleasing people's ears than with telling the truth, once their stories could not be confirmed, and with time most of them chose to tell fables, thus losing their credibility. Facts must be looked at as established with enough accuracy, based on the clearest information, albeit considering they took place in more remote times. (Thucydides, 2001:13)

Thucydides is concerned with objectively reporting history and, above all, whether topics described regard to facts, to true events, in contrast with imagined stories and fables. He highlights the need to "look at facts as established with enough accuracy, based on the clearest information..." (loc. cit.). By calling attention to that aspect, the classic thinker establishes a paradigm for the rise of a science. By doing so, Thucydides also gives rise to a question for philosophical thought, which regards to the opposition between the subject and object of knowledge.

Such contrast between objectivity and subjectivity has remained a controversial aspect in philosophical thought from ancient times to today. In that tradition, Plato (428/427-348/347 BC) is the one who, according to Oliveira, presents us with the concern with knowledge about the world of things and the world of ideas: "there is no possible knowledge in the visible world, simply because there is no object of experience", as all *things* are transforming. Philosopher Bernard Williams, whilst commenting the Republic dialog, argues that, for Plato, the world of forms is what it *really is*; for the philosopher, the everyday perception of the world lies between *being* and *not being*, as a dream or appearance; the only object of knowledge is *being*, the world that will come into being is a mere conjecture or opinion (Williams, 2000: 51). Thus, only *ideas* are in the realm of knowledge, as they are permanent *in essence*. That is, the core arguments of Plato's philosophical thought oppose subject and object, and propose a metaphysical base for scientific production. To Koch (2012: 7), "Plato conceives the logic space as the cosmos of ideas and the physical space as an anteroom of logical space, which is immersed into the darkness of logical chaos".

The subject/object contraposition thus revolves around the dichotomy between the man who knows and the real world to be known. The exteriority of the object and its materiality of forms in time and space are disconnected from the being who knows, as if that Man who asks questions were not part of the concrete world to be known. A rational being takes a stand, one who produces concepts from outside or above the facts/objects to be known. That type of idealist rationalism crosses the production of historical knowledge. The Encyclopédie, by Diderot and D'Alembert, in its *Detailed system of human knowledge*, is a good example of such influence.

The physical beings act on the senses. The impressions from those Beings excite their perceptions in the Understanding. The Understanding is occupied with their perceptions through three ways only, according to its three main faculties, Memory, Reason, and Imagination. Either Understanding simply enumerates its perceptions through Memory, or it examines, compares, and assimilates them through Reason, or it can be satisfied with imitating and mocking them through Imagination. That is where a general division of human Knowledge results from, and it seems to be very well supported by History, which reports to Memory; by Philosophy, which emanates from Reason; and by Poetry, which is born from Imagination. (Diderot, D'Alembert, 2012: [unpaged])

As read in the *Encyclopédie*, History belongs to the universe of memory and is separated from reason, being in the realm of Philosophy and Science. Although many centuries separate Thucydides and the Enlightenment thinkers, it is possible to realize the dilemma between a fact to be known and the subject of knowledge had not been overcome in regards to the production of historical knowledge.

In Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the subject/object contraposition is presented as the impossibility to know the *thing in itself*. Knowledge is only possible through reason, the concept. History to Kant, as a knowledge of the past, “is born from the requirement of truth which is the very freedom of thought, as it releases spirits from religious representations and from the traditional view of life of men and their societies”¹ (Kant, 1988: 124). Thus is the search for the freedom of human spirit which is perfectly developed by its rational activity. In different words, knowing the thing in itself regardless of time, space, and cause-related determinations, and, thus, knowledge lies beyond our senses and understanding (Oliveira, 2011). To Kant, history is the condition and possibility of knowledge and reason, it is a process through which men achieves freedom, and that freedom is related to the *categorical imperative*; that is, action commanded by reason, conscious knowledge.

If the subject/object contraposition is a secondary philosophical question, which outlines the different scientific paradigms, it also guides knowledge in regards to History and to its importance for the production of knowledge.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) is the one who places the discussion about that contraposition on another level. The philosopher faces history as a process that is capable of knowledge. Regarding the classic dichotomy between subject and object, Hegel supports that subjectivity and objectivity are necessarily related without being contraposed. That thesis is based on the understanding Hegel proposes on such dialectics.

1. Free translation of: “L’histoire (...) elle naît d’une exigence de vérité qui est la liberté même de la pensée, parce qu’elle délivre les esprits des représentations simplement religieuses et traditionnelles de la vie des hommes et des leurs sociétés”.

Against the Aristotelian thought in which “truth is identified with the absence of contradiction” (Sader, 2007: 9), which is called formal logic, Hegel states that contradiction enables to apprehend the real movement of each phenomenon.

Sader (2007: 11) explains Hegel’s contribution to the understanding of reality in the following manner:

The world which appears to us under the dichotomy between subject and object, between subjectivity and objectivity, needs to be unveiled in its roots, so that we can understand the reason of such breach, whereas the mentioned illusions opt for one of the two sides and make them absolute. The apprehension of the real truth consists exactly of explaining the way through which reality is unfolded in subject and object.

Thus, reality loses its absolute character. By recognizing that man is part of the total world and history, it is impossible to separate in man what is reason and what is nature. That principle is the founder of Hegel’s dialectic conception. “Hegel attributes to the whole, complete Spirit ” (Assunção, 2010: 1). Thus, a conception is created, and it allows talking about knowledge based on reality. For Hegel, reality is rational and rationality is real, and history is a logical process of the development of the spirit. With that, we may say that, albeit from a different perspective, Thucydides’ concerns are placed on another level.

The contributions from Karl Marx (1818-1883) change the Hegelian conception of dialectics. To Marx, the meaning of history lies in understanding it as a dialectic movement of relations of production rather than a product from a higher being. In that approach, history becomes a science that is predominant for understanding society. History searches for material elements to be studied in the development bases of productive forces from each period. That observation must consider the contradictory movement of productive forces, in disputes and conflicts of interest, which generates the class struggle.

History, in the context of Enlightenment memory and rationalism, is elevated, by Marx, to a science whose potential is to, through the dialectic method, allow establishing understanding nexuses between yesterday and today for the transformation of becoming. That task is dealt from the relevance of the concrete development of relations of the production from a certain society, as well as the conflicts which are undertaken by social classes. Power relationships are present in the data and in the facts that compose the situation that needs to be analyzed. History starts being understood by the force relationships, whose protagonists are men who are engaged in social emancipation.

In the words of Marx (2011: 25-26), in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, we have:

Men make their own history; however, they do not make it of their own free will, as they are not the ones who choose the circumstances under which it is made, but they were transmitted to those men as they are. The tradition from all past generations is like a nightmare that squeezes living people's brains. And exactly when they seem to be engaged in transforming themselves and the things, in creating something never before seen, exactly at those times of revolutionary crisis, they fearfully conjure help from spirits of the past, borrow their names, their mottos, their clothing, in order to represent, with that respectable and traditional coating and that language that is borrowed, the new scenes of world history.

Marx comments about how strong the past is and how it is part of the present as the heritage of each society. That totality is the one that allows knowing specific aspects and understand, from it, the relationships of productive forces and the culture of a time.

To Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012), Marx's historical dialectic method does not distinguish social relationships of production from ideas and concepts, "partly because it is, in itself, a retrospective historical distinction, partly because the social relationships of production are structured by culture and concepts which cannot be reduced to the very relations of production"² (Hobsbawm, 2008: 69). The development and the proposal of Marx's work is not to make history, but he resorts to the historical method, as scientific; that is, to the historical dialectic materialism, to produce it.

Regarding Hobsbawm, his work has an unquestionable methodological strictness, inspired in the historical materialism. On that aspect, he challenges his critics, who see a teleological model of historical understanding in his publications. He replies to such criticism, stating the need for methodological strictness, so historians "can expose the general mechanism through which society structures simultaneously tend to lose and reestablish their balance" and can look for the dimensions and causalities of "intellectual and cultural changes" (Hobsbawm, 2010: 94).

The method of historical dialectic materialism, which is incorporated by Hobsbawm, is restricted, however, to small circles of intellectuals, as the transforming perspective is not the hegemonic one both in the field of history and in the use of the historical method by some other areas of knowledge. With that, one can state that the writing of history and the historical method that gathered followers is the one that takes time in its linear diachrony, transferring that same linearity to social facts.

2. In the original: "(...) en partie parce que c'est en soi une distinction historique rétrospective, en partie parce que les relations sociales de production sont structurées par la culture et des concepts qui ne peuvent pas être réduits à cela".

In the perspective of the rationalist objectivity, André Cellard (2008) comments on the important role of book *Introduction aux études historiques* (1898), by Langlois and C, Seignobos. Such work influenced generations of historians from a methodological standpoint. They have a research approach that privileges written documents that are stored in official files; the accounts of facts and the actions from politicians and social majorities. That is, they give historical status to official documents that report, above all, the facts regarding hegemonic policies.

Thus, in the development of a historical research method there are, therefore, well defined schools of thought, whose positions recognize history as (i) a discipline that is capable of rationally organizing facts from the past, in order to build an account of the development of societies; (ii) a science that, through the analysis of the development of productive forces of different societies, builds knowledge for social transformation. Albeit controversial and originated from different thought paradigms, those schools cooperate to develop the history discipline and its own objects and questions.

By reaffirming aspects from such controversy, thinkers such as Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) introduced themselves in such struggle in a creative way. Benjamin, who was tied to the Institute for Social Research of the University of Frankfurt (later known as Frankfurt School), deals with the concept of history with a particular concern. He disputes the teleological, linear view of history, which is interpreted by Marxist followers - called social democrats (1920s) - which produces rich thinking for specifically appropriating the concept of history, which is also influenced by the Judaistic messianism. In his theses on history we can see the debate Benjamin faces when he reveals his purposes for a materialism that considers big and small facts; the disputes for economic power and moral and spiritual values.

In his third and fourth theses on history, we may observe examples of issues that are controversial to Benjamin (1994: 222-232) and his concern with the method:

Third Thesis

A chronicler who narrates events, without distinguishing between small and big ones, takes into account the truth in which nothing that has happened on a day can be considered as lost for history. Without a doubt, only a redeemed mankind will be able to fully appropriate its past. That means that only for a redeemed mankind past can be quoted in each of its moments. Each moment experienced transforms into a citation à *l'ordre du jour* - and that day is exactly judgment day.

D

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Fourth Thesis

“Fight first for food and clothing, and then God’s kingdom will come by itself”.

Hegel, 1807

Class struggle, which a historian that was educated by Marx never loses sight of, is a struggle for raw, material things, without which the refined and spiritual ones would not exist. However, in the class struggle, those spiritual things cannot be represented as war loot that is attributed to the winner. They manifest in that struggle by means of trust, courage, humor, wit, fortitude, and act from afar, from the bottom of times. They will always question every victory from the dominators. Just as the flowers who rise towards the sun, the past, thanks to a mysterious heliotropism, attempts to head to the sun which rises in the sky of history. Historical materialism must be aware of that whole transformation, the most unnoticeable of all.

Benjamin gives room to the debate about the cultural forms in which the class struggle is manifested, and it also states its objections to the idea that the culture of the conquered people has not value. The one who left an intriguing and eclectic work was among the thinkers from Frankfurt School. Despite having died at early age, his work was open to multiple interpretations, without making compromises to the conservative spirit and not even to the empiricist mechanical philosophy that existed in the early 19th century.

Other fields of knowledge will be supported by history in order to produce their arsenal of concepts and methods. An example is anthropology, especially with the contribution from Franz Boas (1858-1942). Anthropologists take a stand as opposers to the conception of cultural evolutionism and, in order to contrapose themselves to that ideology, develop a historical method that is also called *historical particularism*. Boas disputes evolutionist anthropology, as it is supported by the comparative method between cultures, and aim to demonstrate that dissemination and evolution explain the paths of peoples. Franz Boas, conversely, defends that the historical method is more adequate to deepen and exhaust the study of culture of a people, seeking to understand its particularities in order to perform a historical reconstruction of the life of such people. Boas’ major contribution is to dispute theories that want to outline proximity relationships between ethnicity and personality, which were very fashionable in the early 20th century.

The influence from anthropology as a knowledge field was remarkable throughout the decades of 1930/1940 and its research methods also have consequences in the appearance of the so-called History of the Annales. That historiography ideology, which was founded by French historians who were con-

trary to restricting the historical research to the official events and documents, defends the long-term history, and, in that sense, any them can be the object for historical study; it has an understanding of social history that greatly increases the notion of document.

The main representatives of that school of thought were Marc Bloc and Lucien Febvre, the founders of *Annales d'Histoire Économique et Sociale* (1929), who were concerned with a history of mentalities. Another important member from that group is Fernand Braudel, the author of *The Mediterranean* (1923/1949/1966) (Braudel, 1990). He is going to bring in to the historian's context of doing the possibility of multiple objects and methods, getting closer to other disciplines. Braudel, in *On History* (1969), discusses the relevance of his theoretical and methodological proposition, arguing with concepts that go from Linguistics to Anthropology, from Sociology to Archaeology. The topic of short and long term periods is mentioned as an account on the event and in writing about the mentalities, about the long and profound times of permanences.

The generations of historians following Braudel will call his productions cultural history (New History, Micro History). It is a narrative of history that privileges the way of thinking and feeling of individuals. Thus, there is an array of new objects and multidisciplinary of theoretical approaches, such as the work *The Cheese and the Worms*, by Carlo Ginzburg (1993).

In the chain of debates on history, Michel Foucault gives his contribution. He is the controversial scholar who, from what he will call a historical genealogy of topics, such as values, moral, asceticism, runs its course of theoretical interests to be investigated. The author places the critique to the historicist positivism, who heritage he attributes to Hegel, in the center of his concerns. In *Microphysics of power*, Foucault states:

Genealogists need history in order to conjure the chimera of origin, a bit like in the way a good philosopher needs a doctor to conjure the shadow of the soul. One needs to know how to recognize the events of history, its commotions, its surprises, its faltering victories, its badly accepted losses, which explain the activism and hereditaries; the same way one needs to know how to diagnose the diseases of the body, the weakness and energy states, its cracks and strong points in order to evaluate what a philosophical discourse is. History, with its intensities, its collapses, its secret passions, its great feverish agitations as well as its syncope, is the very body of the becoming. (Foucault, 2004: 20)

Foucault's severe critique to the historical method, which is based on the linearity of social facts, arises from his option to discuss aspects of life such as

sexuality and craze in a way to “adopt Nietzschean genealogy as a historical research method” (Lamas e Silva, 2010: 111) and the multiplicity of interpretations enabled by the method. Thus, what Foucault does is “a history which diverges from positivist canons and from factual history, and absorbs Nietzsche’s contributions to a historical method” (Ibid).

In that multifaceted course of theoretical perspectives on history and the historical method in the scientific procedure of researchers from different fields of knowledge, we may synthesize the discussion by stating that: (i) there is not only one historical method, (ii) the same controversies on the paradigms of scientific thought are repeated in historical research and in the field of history; that is, idealism, rationalist idealism (positivistic), and the empiricist materialism, the historical dialectic materialism; (iii) although the contributions from different authors and fields of knowledge have brought considerable advancements to history, we remain in the crossroads of either the particularism or the intersections of disciplines and approaches.

Those previously discussed aspects are repeated in the way through which the field of communication appropriates history method(s). Following that, we resume this discussion by contextualizing the work of authors about the history of communication media, the history of communication sciences, and those authors who use historical methods for communication research.

THE CONTROVERSIES REGARDING HISTORICAL METHODS IN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Schudson (1993: 211), in the chapter “Enfoques históricos a los estudios de la comunicación” of *Metodologías cualitativas de investigación en comunicación de masas*, introduces the topic by stating: “The writing of communication history is sadly underdeveloped” [loose translation]³. That is so because, for him, historians are concerned with causes and effects [of past events] and understand then communication media as transmitters only. In that sense, the communication media would not take central space in historical events. As a general rule, protagonism would be exercised by institutions such as the church, the state, and the party.

The history of the book, the reading, and the public reading is, for Schudson, an exception in the field, with a rich bibliographical survey and systematic research in files. The author also points out that communication studies demand the analysis of production, the message, and its reception by the public, and, undoubtedly, the reception is the one this has received the least attention from historians. In that context of development of the communication history,

3. In the original: “La escritura de la historia de la comunicación está tristemente subdesarrollado”

Schudson also proposes to identify three classes: macro-history, history per se, and the history of institutions.

Macro-history of communication is the most famous among among all three, and it relates the development of the communication media with human evolution. For him, such approach greatly influences the communication thought, and its main icons are Harold Innis (1951, 1977) and Marshall McLuhan (1971). Conversely, the one he classifies as *history of communication per se* is the least developed one in the field. He calls attention to that aspect, as it is the most relevant on to the field of communication as it focuses on the problems from the relationships between the communication media, social change, and culture. As an example of that classification, he quotes Habermas (1984) and his study on the realm of English bourgeoisie. The *history of institutions*, the third class of studies, is interested in studying the communication media as social institutions. He mentions the infinity of investigations on the history of a certain newspaper, magazine, advertising company, etc. A landmark study is the one by Asa Briggs (1995), on BBC; in Brazil we may mention, as reference, the works by Nelson Werneck Sodré (1977), Aníbal Bragança (2008), Sérgio Mattos (2000a, 2000b), among others. Schudson also comments that, from a methodological standpoint, the history of institutions resorts to documents and files from the organizations, which not always ensures materials that reveal the impacts from the communication media on society.

By analyzing case studies and study methods of the history of communication per se, he gives two exemplos. The study by Michel McGerr (1986), which takes electoral campaigns as a communication medium. McGerr wants to understand the change in the political practice of the American population, especially the one driven by the new political elites, even before the arrival of television. Another example of related research is the study by Lawrence Levine (1988), who treats theater as a communication medium. The researcher tried to understand how Shakespeare's theater, in the United States, shifted its audience from popular culture theatergoers to high culture ones. That is, the questions from the studies privilege communication as a social and cultural relationship throughout history, not being restricted to the traditional technological media. To Schudson (1993: 214), what defines and sets the research of the history of communication per se apart from the remaining classifications is exactly the problems in its investigation; that is, who does cultural, political, and social history influence the changes in communication? And how are the communication media influenced by social change?

Schudson assumes a theoretical standpoint that understands the history of communication as changes in social and cultural relationships rather than

4. In the original: “Los medios de comunicación se han de comprender como prácticas sociales y formas culturales, no como tecnologías distintas”.

the history of technological advancements. In that sense, the author pints out the observations from Raymond Williams (1974) and reiterates: “The means of communication must be understood as social practices and forms of culture, not as separate technologies”⁴ (Schudson, 1993: 224, loose translation). Regarding the theoretical approach Schudson supported, researchers are observed to be somehow close to the Walter Benjamin’s conception of history, which also allows him to somehow dialog with Braudel’s cultural history.

Being a critic of Schudson’s approach on the history of communication, Luis Claudio Martino (2008) refers to it as too broad, straying from the field of communication as a particular field, and ironizing the fact that Schudson understands political parties as communication media (Ibid.: 41). Which does not actually take places as the study is Michal McGerr’s, and its about *political campaigns* as communication media. Still on that subject, Martino disagrees with the three categories created by the American researcher, due to the limited analysis it allows. It points out that the central issue for the (epistemological) history of communication is studying the communication media as central in the social and cultural practice. In the words of Martino (2008:39):

to communication professionals, it touches the core of the issue of a possibility of a Communication Science, insofar as it exactly corresponds to the possibility of a reading from social aspects from the communication media; that is, taking them [...] as central elements in the interpretation of social, cultural processes, etc.

That is undoubtedly one of the issues. However, one cannot limit communication and its history to technological media and instruments.

Aiming to outline the epistemological grounds of the trade of historians from the one of communicators, Martino defends the need for developing a particular and specialized point of view of communication processes; that is, to make history in the manner of communication professionals: to transpose communication studies, which are centered in industrial and contemporary society for other periods, in a diachronic perspective. The author sees that the biggest challenge in the field is to think the scientific specificity as a link to understand society and culture in a historical perspective.

In that path of discussions on the history of communication, neither Schudson nor Martino (2008), enunciate their knowledge of history outside the dominating paradigm. Maybe, the closest approach to a method that understands history as a science that knows reality from the development of the productive forces of each society and its contradictory and circular movements

has an expression in Schudson's quote of Raymond Williams on communication media as cultural and social forms. In that sense, to Williams (1992: 33), it is worth pointing out that:

the communication systems were never an optional aggregate in social organization or historical evolution. As we study its true history, we see they occupy a position that is close to other important ways for social organization, the same way they occupy a place in the history of material invention and economic ordination.

That is the characteristic of communication: it is a process of principle that is part of the human practice, and, as such, has, according to Williams, a "history in itself and in its relationships" (Ibid.: 40). That means to state it is not possible to write a history of communication that disregards the very history of the social institutions and socioeconomic development. "Many communications problems nowadays are, in fact, centered around the complex relationships between those national formations and the powerful international market" (Ibid.).

On that topic, Mattelart (Michelle and Armand) in their *Theories of Communication*, remind us of Williams and his concern with the "historical forms that are assumed in each reality by the media institutions, the television and the press, the advertisement industry (Mattelart, Mattelart, 2005, 106). That perspective of studies on the history of communication is not well developed, as warned by Schudson.

The Mattelarts also have works in the field of communication history, both in the context of the history of communication theories and in the context of the history of communication in global and geopolitical relationships. The authors of *Theories of Communication* follow the path of the schools of thought in the field, whose theoreticians are contextualized in regards to their affiliations to philosophical paradigms. Chronological times is only one of the categories from which the Matellarts study communication thought; the *schools* and how the production of each of them is either related or not to one another are more relevant. In the Spanish edition of the work, in its introduction, they say:

This work takes into account the plurality and fragmentation of this field of scientific observation that, historically, is placed under the tension between the physical and immaterial networks, biological and social aspects, nature and culture, technical devices and speeches, economy and culture, micro and macro-perspectives, villages and the world, the player and the system, individuals and society, free will and social determinisms⁵. (1997: 10)

To them, the history of communication theories is the history of those divisions and the attempts at either articulating or not what is more frequently constituted as binary dichotomies than as levels of analysis. In another work, *World Communications: A History of Strategies and Ideas* (1994), Armand Mattelart makes an introduction with a very expressive title, *The triangle of communication*, (would that be a reference to the Bermuda Triangle?), in which he points out: “That history of international communication and its representations is the history of the intersections which have been built among war, progress, and culture, as well as the path of their successive adjustments, its flows and refluxes” (1994: 9). Armand Mattelart shows, in that work, how the global hegemonic forces couple economics, technological development, and war in the struggle of forces for maintaining or conquering power. Communication - as media and mediations - goes through that logic and is crossed by it. With that, we go back to the start: how can one make the history of communication without having in mind all relationships of forces which operate in society?

5. Free translation of the original text: “La presente obra trata de dar cuenta de la pluralidad y la fragmentación de este campo de observación científica que, históricamente, se ha situado en tensión entre las redes físicas e inmateriales, lo biológico y lo social, la naturaleza y la cultura, los dispositivos técnicos y los discursos, la economía y la cultura, las micro y macro perspectivas, la aldea y el globo, el actor y el sistema, el individuo y la sociedad, el libre albedrío y los determinismos sociales”.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR AN ANALYSIS OF STUDIES ON THE HISTORY OF COMMUNICATION IN BRAZIL

An interesting summary, which is nonetheless too synthetic, on the study of the history of communication in Brazil was conducted by Ribeiro e Herschmann (2008). In the context of the 200 years of press in Brazil, the book *Comunicação e História. Interfaces e Novas abordagens* (Communication and History. Interfaces and New Approaches) brings a miscellaneous of texts on different topics and perspectives in the field. Its divisions in chapters name the investigation paths in the history of communication, and the book is thus organized: *In search of an epistemology* (*Em busca de uma epistemologia*), a chapter where the abovementioned paper from Martino and the one by Ribeiro e Herschmann are located; *History of and in the medias* (*História das e nas mídias*), in which we highlight the paper by Marialva Barbosa, *Meios de comunicação e usos do passado: temporalidade, rastros, vestígios e interfaces entre Comunicação e História* (*Communication media and their uses in the past: relations of time, traces, and interfaces between Communication and History*); *Trend in the History of Journalism* (*Tendência na História do jornalismo*), a chapter in which we highlight the paper by Isabel Travancas, *National literature in the literary supplements from the late 20th century: the case of Brazil and France* (*A Literatura nacional nos suplementos literários do final do século XX: o caso do Brasil e da França*); *Interfaces with politics* (*Interfaces*

com a política), in which Eduardo Granja Coutinho deals with press and the hegemony in the First Republic; and, finally, Building memory and knowledge today (*Construindo memória e conhecimento hoje*), a chapter in which the paper by Jesús Martín-Barbero can be found, Knowledge today: disseminations, competences, and transversities (*Saberes hoje: disseminações, competências e transversalidades*).

Ribeiro and Herschmann (2008) in their summary, point out as “theoretical stalemates and methodological problems” the local and regional studies that focus on the particularities of local communication media; the absence of comparative research; few synthesis works; focus on the Southeast region, as a mirror for the country; memorialism; centrality in the individual action; privilege in linear breach and temporality; descriptive nature; predominance of political history; disregarding the external context (excess ideological aspects and few of them on production conditions); disregarding the internal dimension (that is, focus on the historical context, without dealing with professional and deontological specificities. From the diagnose of the field, we want to comment what the authors identified as a “privilege in linear breach and temporality”, as that is a background issue that does not recover a theoretical and methodological aspect, but which rather involves the research paradigm to be adopted. Because, as the authors point out:

The history of communication media - especially the one produced in the field - is impregnated with a vision through which linear narratives and the stream of events give the narrative its tone. (...) The tensions, and especially the articulations between breach and continuity are rarely taken into account. (Ribeiro, Herschmann, 2008: 21)

Such diagnose refers to what we have been discussing about the approach of history as a method that guides the understanding of society and culture, without necessarily denying the notion of history as a progression (progress) in time.

Resuming that discussion, we focus again on what Schudson classifies as the *history of institutions*, in order to contextualize a very advantageous production that is led by professor Marques de Melo, who is undoubtedly a leading author in the field of communication. In that line of historical studies of institutions, we mention some of his books with contributions on the memory of communication studies in Brazil. Two of those were published in the 1990s: *Memórias das Ciências da Comunicação* (Memories of Communication Sciences - 1997); and *O Pensamento comunicacional brasileiro* (*Brazil's communication thought*). *O grupo de São Bernardo* (*The group from São Bernardo*), which is organized

along with Samantha Castelo Branco, (1999). The remaining ones are works that were published as of the 2000s: *História Social da Imprensa* (Social History of the Press) (2. ed. 2003); *Pensamento Comunicacional Latino-Americano: da pesquisa-denúncia ao pragmatismo utópico* (Latin American Communicational Thought: from the accusation-research to the utopic pragmatism - 2004); *História Política das Ciências da Comunicação* (Political History of Communication Sciences - 2008); *Mídia e Cultura Popular: História, Taxionomia e Metodologia da Folk comunicação*, (Popular Media and Culture: History, Taxonomy, and Methodology of Folk Communication - 2008); *Imprensa Brasileira, Personagens que Fizeram História* (four volumes) (2009); *Televisão Brasileira: 60 anos de ousadia, astúcia, reinvenção* (Brazilian Press: 60 years of boldness, wit, reinvention - 2011); *Ciências da Comunicação no Brasil, 50 anos: Histórias para contar* (Communication Sciences in Brazil, 50 years, Histories to tell - 2015).

A more recent paper by Marques de Melo, “Os processos comunicacionais na historiografia brasileira” (Communication processes in Brazilian Historiography - 2013), may be identified with Schudson’s class of the history of communication per se. In that paper, Marques de Melo deals with the paradigms of the historical method and refers to the work of Virgílio Noya Pinto, a professor of Escola de Comunicações e Artes (School of Communications and Arts), who, being sensitive to the objects of study of the history of mentalities, starts discussing communication in time and space as an object for historical study. As Noya Pinto⁶, Marques de Melo analyzes the work of Brazilian scholars to then start identifying how communication begins to be highlighted in the research of historians. It is interesting to point out that Marques de Melo, by reclaiming the references of historical dialectic materialism in order to introduce the relevance of claiming communication as a topic for history, he gets estranged from the former, thus showing what Ribeiro and Herschmann summarized well, when they said that “despite its growth, the movement of strengthening and institutionalizing the history of communication is still not ver systematic” (2008: 15).

In the perspective of a history of communication in Brazil, Marialva Barbosa is an important intellectual expression. As a historian and journalist, she chose the paths of research and history, getting closer to the group involved with cultural history. Her first study searches for representations of workers in Rio de Janeiro’s newspaper publications in the early 20th century. From such research results the book *Os donos do Rio: imprensa, poder e público* (The owners of Rio: press: power, and public - 2000); and she later published *Percurso do olhar: comunicação, narrativa e memória* (Path of a glance: communication, narrative, and memory - 2007); and *História cultural da imprensa: Brasil (Cultural history of press: Brazil - 1900-2000)* (2007).

6. Virgílio Noya Pinto was a full professor in the Department of Communications and Arts of USP’s School of Communications and Arts, and one of its founders. He was a vice director of ECA, and mainly conducted research on: Communication, culture, history. He published, among others: *Comunicação e Cultura Brasileira* (Brazilian Communication and Culture); *O ouro brasileiro e o comércio anglo-português* (The Brazilian gold and the English-Portuguese trade); *Ritmos da economia e dependência econômica em face dos Mercados Externos* (Paces of economy and the economic dependency considering the External Markets).

In the introduction of *História da comunicação no Brasil* (History of Communication in Brazil - 2013), Barbosa outlines the argumentative bases he offers to readers. He defines history by means of the cultural approach, by stating:

If we consider that history is everything that has arrived in present times from the past, the traces that lasted through time in several bases will be the ones to turn into the sources to be interpreted in order to explicit past gestures and actions. (2013: 8)

If history can be understood as such, recording it is also a topic to be discussed, as each society has its own expressive and peculiar ways to do it, and that is often disregarded as we follow European cultural and intellectual standards. On that controversial subject, Barbosa states such recording “always implies a relationship between the text that was built by a researcher with its reference base” (Ibid.). In regards to the past that is revealed by history, Barbosa subtly leans towards the undeniable condition that historians are the protagonists of their accounts: “when one is allowed to talk about the past, the supposed past times they put their spotlight on are assumed to be true” (Ibid.). By choosing such posture, the author allows us to infer that, from an ontological standpoint, she does not create the false expectation of objectivity or the distancing from the subject, their values, and points of view, including institutional ones. Making history or any other science requires consciously mobilizing the indissociable human condition of its production.

In his understanding, Barbosa divides the study of the history of communication, from the European reality, in three dominant paradigms: (1) relationships between press and politics; the landmark of its appearance as an expression from the Enlightenment (2) cultural histories of communication, whose emergence of the *feuilleton* as a genre and noteworthy expression; (3) history of communication, based on mutations enabled by technologies. That classification from Barbosa is presented in a different way from the one dealt with by Schudson, but both dialog from very close. However, the author insists on stressing that, in countries such as Brazil, in which the path regarding written texts, printed recording, and the culture of reading is late, communication and culture must be considered through other traces; orality is what characterizes in the long run. Showing to be close to historians of cultural history, Barbosa takes a stand by asking the questions that guide his research: how does the communication process take place throughout time in a specific cultural universe and in a territory that is filled with particularities, which we call Brazil? What are its central players? Which is the world around? How are communication systems

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The historical method(s) in communication research

perceived after all? The result may allow us to verify that the history of communication is the history of human communicational actions. With those good questions, we have outlined the theoretical-methodological field that is relevant for the researcher. History will be written with that clearness of objectives.

As verified in Barbosa, the theoretical-methodological design is built from questions. That aspect is fundamental to Bonin (2008). The researcher, in *A dimensão metodológica na pesquisa comunicacional e os desafios da observação em perspectiva histórica* (The methodological dimension in communication research and the observation challenges in the historical perspective - 2008), presents us with a framework of epistemological concerns that requires researchers to choose a side, and from it, clearly enunciate objectives and procedures adopted. The author calls attention to the relevance of time and space to be observed in the historical dimension. She also defends that the communication objects, due to their multi-dimensional complexity, demand “heterodox logics in the context of research methods and procedures” (2008 137). Her references are Gaston Bachelard and Pierre Bourdieu, both defenders of a rationalism that builds the scientific object in the dimension of consciousness of the permanent movement for transforming reality. Hence the need for epistemological reflection by the one who knows it. Indeed, the relationship of Kantian rationalism and Bachelard’s science theory are the reference for many researchers in the field of communication. In the abovementioned paper, in which Bonin discusses the epistemological implications in methodological choices, a dialog with the research trends on the history of communication is seen. Bonin also calls our attention to the need for placing the time perspective back as a problem, especially in mediatization studies. In the author’s words:

The historical perspective is fundamental to understand the systemic configuration of the media field; the specificities of the production fields and their concrete constitution in each society; the particularities of operation of production routines; the constitution of genres. (2008: 139)

The author points out, therefore, *the systemic configuration of the media field* and the need for including production, operation, and genre specificities. The question to be asked is: how is that systemic configuration, which belongs to the media field, may be observed in spite of the broader social relationships, without the proper connections with social totality? How to understand the historical process of production specificities, of operation, and genres, without considering their relationships with the most general movement of productive forces?

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our aim was to discuss the topic of the historical method(s) in Communication. We attempted at contextualizing it in the perspective of the rise of history as a narrative and as a scientific discourse; it (history as a science) was also attempted to be contextualized in a historical perspective where the fundamentals that conform the opinion of a researcher (historian/communicator) are discussed.

If, to Herodotus, history is a particular narrative about time; if, to Thucydides, history must be told based on objective information, being concerned with the facts, which permanences from both discourses do we find in the context of current historical method(s)? The dichotomy between subject and object, which is taken by a science that designated itself to be scientific, has been the mark of the path the studies of the history of communication follow, rather than only of the history of communication. In the case of Brazil, there is a considerable number of quality productions that are at times more and at times less aligned with one of those conceptions of science.

On the other hand, it is evident that the dialectic materialist thought has not been very explored as an analysis method in the history of communication. As a method, it may, such as Raymond Williams' indications, bring effective contributions for us to understand, in the historical perspective, the liaisons in the development of the communication media as productive forces in communication culture and relationships. In that sense, we observe that the knowledge field of communication in Brazil has not produced an account of the history of communication yet, whose dialectic historical method were adopted in order to intend on the already produced knowledge as a more complex approach, which can show the relevance of communication in the current economic and social situation of Brazilian society. 

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