

Refining Reflections about Information-Communication

ICTs and social logics of communication

MAYRA RODRIGUES GOMES

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Resumo

Esta resenha acompanha as linhas de pensamento de livro de Bernard Miège, em que o autor se propõe a tarefa de analisar os desenvolvimentos técnicos através de suas determinações sociais. Reitera, com suas reflexões, a ideia de que a esfera técnica é constituída, igualmente, por lógicas sociais da comunicação, que reencontram os objetos técnicos e se sedimentam neles.

Palavras-chave: Tic, social

Abstract

This review follows the trail of thought of a book by Bernard Miège, in which the author proposes to analyze technical developments through its social determination. He reasserts, with his examination, the conception that the technical dimension is constituted, equally, by social logics of communication., which encounter technical objects and in them precipitate as sediment.

Key words: ICT, social

This review article is about a book by Bernard Miège, scholar who has developed a well-respected reflection in the field of communication, and intends to trace the book's main focuses and some of its reflections, despite the density and extension of the work.

¹ Mayra Rodrigues Gomes is a full professor of the Department of Journalism and Publishing of the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo (ECA/USP). She is the author of *Jornalismo e Ciências da Linguagem; Repetição e Diferença nas Reflexões sobre Comunicação; Poder no Jornalismo; Comunicação e Identificação. Ressonâncias no Jornalismo*, besides numerous scientific articles.

The book is the product of a series of studies and publications. By using previously achieved results, it aims at examining the complex relations among information-communication and society, according to the transformations caused by technical means.

The book tackles the information-communication techniques issue, the development of ICTs, and develops a critical text whose aim it so clarify some misunderstandings that are common in the field of communication and considered to be obstacles to the development of studies in this field.

The work has an interdisciplinary perspective, which aggregates knowledge, concepts and perspectives that come from sciences of information, sociology, communication, semiotics, economy, politics, psychology and cognitive sciences. It mentions well-respected scholars and their lines of thought and comments the applicability of the concepts by either problematizing or extending their meaning. Above all, it aims at clarifying information about the current promotional effects related to ICTs, which the author called “promise discourse”.

In order to make progress on this reflexive project that intends to distinguish the true participation that ICTs have in transformation of ways of sociability, two orientation axes are proposed: the maintenance of an organized list of technical apparatus that do not result from the criteria of order of appearance, but from the criteria of goods and services, market products, network of devices or instruments/contents; and the conception that social anchorage of ICTs takes place by means of processes considered to be “social logics of communication”, which operate according to their own dynamics and are independent from ICTs.

In the 1st chapter, which is dedicated to techno-determinism as both an ideology and an inflection point for the study of information-communication, the author points out the need for studies that do not deal with evaluation of media, since not all ICTs result in media or guide themselves according to the opposition old/new, due to the mobility (creation/obsolescence, unsuspected usages...) of technologies.

Therefore, it examines studies that still attach reduction of information-communication development to technical improvement, analyzing types of arguments/repeated positions, such as the anticipation of usages that neglects the fact that they are created indeterminately.

In chapter 2, the author demonstrates that techno-determinism, in multiple forms, does not provide a clear representation of how techniques have contributed for the development of information-

communication, and tries to establish four positions, or pillars, that should guide the study of technique and its roles. This is about the issue of double mediation (mediation, is at the same time, technique, because the tool that is used gives structure to the practice, but it is also social, because the ways it is used and the sense that is given to the practice emerge from the social body), of the focus given on the information-communication sector, because ICTs do not necessarily diffuse programs, since they are techniques of media and communication), of the temporality that must be considered when carrying out analysis (without oppositions between short and long time, but as a changing feature) and innovations free from the principle of mutation (after all, ICTs follow ongoing movements, reinforce and accelerate in unexpected directions, along with a series of gradual changes).

Then, the author talks about the observation that informationalization is a background process for the functioning of ICTs and defines it as “(...) the process of a social knowledge of communication that is characterized by the increasing and accelerated circulation of the flow of information, edited or not, in the private sphere, as well as in the public space and working sphere (Miège, 2007: 66)². Based on these three spheres, he elaborates interpretative hypothesis in order to point out fluxos que se distribuem desigualmente, conforme a orientação para uma ou outra esfera, mas que implicam uma significação necessariamente plural do processo.

Chapter 4 tackles mediatization of communication, which is defined as: “(...) mediatization is opposed to mediation and aims at identifying phenomena that are mediated by the intermediate of media in the strict sense of the word and not by numerous social mediation bodies” (Miège, 2007: 81). In this chapter, the author mentions the work of various authors that focus on mediatization, but who oscillated between this one and mediation. Such a fact generates discourses about fragmentation and speculation, pessimistic outlooks and moral judgments, due to the emphasis given to oppositions, such as old/new, directive/interactive, etc. these works prevent a substantial view and, in order to avoid this obstacle, the author proposes a framing operation, understanding the mediatization involves action upon contents and what is produced in inter-individual relations.

Focusing on the growth of the mediatic domain, the development of Chapter 5 is based on the analysis, nuances and implication of the following assertion:

² All quotes were translated from French by the author of this review. From our side, we regularly define media a socio-technical and socio-symbolic, which have been progressively based on a group of techniques (and not on a single technique, as it was done in the past), allowing the continuous, or more permanent, emission and reception information, culture and entertainment programs within an economy of their own (therefore, the “double market” economy of the press), and whose practice is assured by organizations with determined specificities (a television chain would not be mistaken by a music recording company, or, record label) that aim at publics that have more or less stabilized characteristics (newspaper and radio chains would never be able to follow the erratic variations of the electorate or the audience) (Miège, 2007:106).

In the next phase, when commenting that no one disagrees of the fact that communicational activities are weaved in the heart of the mercantile sphere, the author emphasize that the current approach among scholars limits itself to compare, superficially, the present situation (the venture of groups and companies that have an omnipresent propaganda) to a past situation, described as being focused on the satisfaction of goods and services that are considered to be public. In order to correct this insufficiency, he proposes the careful analysis of aspects that involve consumers/users, emphasizing on the dominance of consumerism and the market-oriented approach of communication activities.

Chapter 7 talks about the effective generalization, in which everything becomes public relations, whose origins are on the internet and which has direct link with ICTs, effective mean, for social or public organizations and institutions to perform an active role in the informationalization process, diffusing their own information.

The author continues, with an extensive tracing and examination of the role of various media in the public relations generalization process and the stands that were taken by scholars regarding these relations.

In chapter 8, which is dedicated to pointing out differences between practices, the author draws the attention to notions that are frequently confused with one another. In the case of quantitative studies, they show a disruption, which leads to projections based on short term observations, for example. In the case of monitoring behaviors, conducts or participations, which are always volatile, it shows that there are no safe assertions.

This is why he criticizes the use of the expression “social use”, as well as of the expression “internet users”. According to him, the last one is an empty name, originated from the contrast with the notion of “non-user” without, however, defining or revealing something about the diversity of usages and ways. He proposes an analysis chart of the evolution of practices in order to truly cope with cultural and informational specificities.

The ninth and last chapter, which is about flow circulation and transnationalization of info-communicational activities, presents some definitions, such as globalization, which conduct the author’s line of thought.

According to him, expressions such as “age of communication” or “society of networks” are supported by works that end up by justifying the rise of a society of information, since these discourses have an implied theory of technical evolution. Analysis that understand them as closed issued must be avoided, because of their theoretical insufficiency and practical limitation, as well as because they contribute to a kind of *doxa* or belief system.

The author proposes the close study of the Access to ICTs and of globalization operating ways by asserting that:

This reflexive journey around the world of ICTs, based on the most recent researches allowed, therefore, to put in evidence the complexity of codetermination among technical and social aspects that are in the origins of the rise and development of these instruments and services that have to be firmly understood as social-technical (Miège, 2007: 211).

Based on the present review, it is possible to understand that Miège's book makes a panorama of the most important theories that have reached importance in reflections on communication. This panorama, which analyses, ponders, criticizes and offers different point of view, constitutes a sort of refinement of thought, which must remain in the mind of scholars of this field.