

The concept of *hegemony* in the path from the media to mediations

O conceito de hegemonia no percurso dos meios às mediações

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ABSTRACT

The theoretical-methodological shift from the media to mediations, proposed by Jesús Martín-Barbero, implies the adoption of a perspective in which communication is associated with political-cultural processes. In this approach, the concept of hegemony occupies a central position. This article aims to show how this theoretical contribution helped to develop an original approach to mass communication in Latin America. In order to do so, it begins with an explanation about the origin of the term and its appropriation by communication and culture studies. Next, it locates historically Martín-Barbero's researches that introduced the concept in the continent, allowing the understanding of its singularities in the book *From the media to mediations*.

Keywords: Hegemony, mediations, mass communication, popular culture, Latin America

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RESUMO

O deslocamento teórico-metodológico dos meios às mediações, proposto por Jesús Martín-Barbero, implica a adoção de uma perspectiva na qual a comunicação é associada a processos político-culturais. Nessa abordagem, o conceito de hegemonia ocupa posição central. Este artigo propõe-se a evidenciar como essa contribuição teórica auxiliou no desenvolvimento de uma abordagem original sobre a comunicação de massa na América Latina. Para tanto, inicia com uma explanação sobre a origem do termo e sua apropriação pelos estudos de comunicação e cultura. Em seguida, situa historicamente as pesquisas de Martín-Barbero que introduziram o conceito no continente, possibilitando a compreensão de suas singularidades no livro *Dos meios às mediações*.

Palavras-chave: Hegemonia, mediações, comunicação de massa, cultura popular, América Latina

INTRODUCTION

THE APPROPRIATION OF the Gramscian concept of hegemony by cultural studies has produced important inflections in the history of theories of communication. In conceiving culture as a battle arena in which the construction of meanings is marked by attempts at domination, resistance and consensus formation, the concept allowed us to envision media productions not only as mechanisms for the reproduction of reality, but also for social change. Besides that, the adoption of a perspective that breaks with the hierarchical division between high and low culture paved the way for the study of diverse cultural formations, especially those originating in the popular scope (Matellart; Mattelart, 1999; Kellner, 2001).

This research tradition, which started with British Cultural Studies in the 1960s, found fertile soil in Latin America in the late 1980s, when theoretical-methodological proposals emerged to understand the region's specificities. Focusing especially on the popular universe and everyday practices authors such as Martín-Barbero and Néstor García Canclini have set the founding stone for that type of study un the continent, under the influence of Gramscian thought (Costa; Machado; Siqueira, 2006).

The book *From the media to mediations* (Martín-Barbero, 2009), originally published in 1987, is inserted within this context. In it, Martín-Barbero proposes that research in communication shift their focus from *the media* and its effects to *mediations*, that is, to the articulations between communication practices and social movements. This theoretical-methodological shift implies the adoption of a perspective in which communication becomes understood in association with cultural processes, undoubtedly political. It is an approach in which the concept of hegemony occupies a central position.

But how could an imported theoretical contribution lead to the development of an original approach to mass communication in Latin America? The present article proposes to answer this question. To do so, it adopts an explanation about the origin of the term and its appropriation by the studies of communication and culture as a starting point. It then seeks to situate, in the history of communication theories in Latin America, Martín-Barbero's researches that introduced him to the continent, making it possible to understand his uniqueness in the conceptual framework of the book *From the media to mediations*.

THE CONCEPT OF HEGEMONY AND THE STUDIES ON CULTURE AND MEDIA

In contrast to the economics-based conceptions of Marxism, which imprint a mechanistic and fatalistic character to historical materialism, Antonio Gramsci

reaffirms the foundations of Marx's thought by emphasizing the importance of human action in transforming reality. The Italian philosopher adopts as the starting point of his reflection the base-superstructure model, but instead of conceiving the second term as a reflection of the first, he considers both as inserted in reciprocal relations.

In the superstructure, subjects become aware of the contradictions of material life and fight. But this is not an immediate and mechanical process. Although all men have a conception of the world, it is not always consistent with their reality. The average man is governed by common sense, whose "fundamental and most characteristic feature is that it is a disaggregated, incoherent and inconsequential conception (even in the brain of one individual), according to the social and cultural position of the multitudes of which it is the philosophy" (Gramsci, 2013: 114).

Within common sense lie from vestiges of conservative and reactionary worldviews to a nucleus of creative and progressive innovations. The overcoming of this fragmentary and incoherent conception of the world results from a polemical and critical attitude mediated by the intellectuals, who are the "representatives" of the exercise of hegemony (Gramsci, 2011). The intellectuals elaborate a worldview that is coherent with the economic action of the social group for which they are representatives, bearing in mind not only of the unification of its members, but also of hegemony, the exercise of the ideological and cultural direction of society.

The work of cultural organization mediated by the action of the intellectuals occurs in one of the superstructural planes identified by Gramsci: civil society. It consists of a set of "private" bodies – such as the party, the school, and the press – for the exercise of hegemony. Civil society organizations are advanced trenches of the state, which are placed before another superstructural plan: the political society, constituted by the apparatuses of police-judicial repression, which assert dominion by coercion.

The conceptions of the world created in the organisms of civil society are inserted in the set of relations of force of a certain historical period. Therefore, the presentation of the interests of a social group as general interests, necessary for the exercise of the ideological-cultural direction of society, is influenced by this factor.

This is the most strictly political phase [that of moving from corporate interests to general interests], which marks the clear passage from structure to the sphere of complex superstructures; it is the stage in which the ideologies generated previously become a "party", come into confrontation and struggle until one of them tends

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to prevail, to impose itself, to radiate throughout the social area, determining, in addition to the uniqueness of the economic and political ends, also the intellectual and moral unity, putting all the questions around which the struggle boils not in the corporate plane, but in a “universal” plane, thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group on a series of subordinate groups. (Gramsci, 2012: 41-42)

Gramsci attaches great importance to the unity between theory and practice. The Italian Communist considers that for a social group to transform reality, the awareness of its action on the world and the conquest of hegemony are fundamental. The struggle waged in the superstructural sphere thus retroacts on the material base, generating objective conditions for the subversion of praxis.

In analyzing the acceptance enjoyed by hegemony in Gramscian thought, Luciano Gruppi (1978) rightly emphasizes this connection between theory and political action, inherited from Lenin. The concept, which is explicitly or implicitly invoked in the formulations of the Russian communist, is associated with the element of decision, of consequence in revolutionary action. For Lenin, as for Gramsci, hegemony is only possible if there is unity between theory and action, because the full theoretical and cultural awareness of the action itself allows it to overcome its spontaneity by giving it a new direction.

In this way, Marxian materialism is understood not as mechanical materialism, which cancels out the function of the subject, but as a method for the analysis of society that allows the founding of revolutionary action on a precise knowledge of the objective situation. Hegemony becomes possible, precisely, from the existence of an objective condition and its knowledge and, at the same time, from the subjective initiative. (Ibid.: 42)

Carlos Nelson Coutinho (1989) also acknowledges Lênin's influence on Gramsci and maintains that the great contribution of the Italian philosopher to Marxist thought was not the concept of hegemony but rather the theorizing about the institutional materiality of civil society, of hegemony. “In Gramsci there is no hegemony, or political-ideological direction, without the set of material organizations that make up civil society as a sphere of social being” (Ibid.: 78).

According to Coutinho, the emergence of private apparatuses and the consequent formation of a new superstructural plan, absent from the classical Marxist base-superstructure model, were made possible by a historical movement subsequent to the time of Marx and Engels: the socialization of politics. The openness to the formal political participation of the masses was accompanied by the emergence of voluntary collective bodies, such as trade unions, political parties

and the press, which enlarged the state with the constitution and broadening of civil society.

Norberto Bobbio (1982) credits the originality of Gramsci's conception of civil society to another aspect. The author maintains that the meaning assumed by the concept in Gramsci adopts as reference not the philosophical system of Marx, but that of Hegel. In it, civil society is understood as a sphere that includes, at the same time, economic relations and spontaneous and voluntary forms of organization. It is an intermediate sphere, situated between the family and the State.

Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy re-signifies the concept of civil society, which refers only to the set of material relations between individuals, that is, the social sphere called by Marxism as the base or structure. The civil society thus conceived is the antithesis of the state, the superstructural sphere of political action and the manifestation of ideologies. Despite the undeniable Marxist foundation of his reflections, Gramsci follows a different orientation. Instead of devising civil society as a structural moment, he places it in the sphere of superstructures, which leads Bobbio to conclude:

Gramsci derives his own concept of civil society, not from Marx, but from Hegel, even though it is through a somewhat forced, or at least unilateral, interpretation of Hegelian thought. In a passage from *Passato and Presente*, Gramsci speaks of civil society "as understood by Hegel and in the sense in which it is often employed in these notes"; and then goes on to explain that it is a question of civil society "in the sense of political and cultural hegemony of a group over the whole of society as an ethical content of the state". (Ibid.: 34)

The interpretations of Gramscian thought surpass Political Science, also penetrating the researches of culture and media. The British Cultural Studies, a line of research that emerged in the 1960s at the Center for Contemporary Culture Studies in Birmingham, find an important foundation in the concept of hegemony. In a critical and multidisciplinary way, such research places culture within the framework of production and social reproduction relations, with the aim of uncovering its contributions to the processes of domination and social change (Kellner, 2001; Mattelart; Mattelart, 1999).

Under the influence of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, British Cultural Studies conceive culture as a central arena of the battle for society control. Aware of the asymmetrical and antagonistic relations of power – characterized by oppressions of class, sex, race, ethnicity and national strata – the authors of the research line propose to analyze hegemonic social and cultural forms as well as counter- hegemonic forms of resistance and fight.

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The theoretical perspective also breaks with the division of the field of culture between high/low, superior/inferior, elite/popular, shared even by critical slopes like the School of Frankfurt. The overcoming of these dichotomies of value judgments opens the way for the investigation of low-valued cultural forms, such as the manifestations of popular culture and mass media communication (cinema, radio, television etc.). It also allows us to see more than only domination in mass culture, considering the need for negotiation and the production of consensus in the construction of hegemony.

The attention to the modes of reading in mass communication reveals another distinctive feature of British Cultural Studies: the centrality of the receiver in the process of signification. Instead of being treated as the end point of the information circulation process, in which the decoding of messages previously defined by a sender is performed, the receiver becomes an active entity in the meaning production process.

Based on the conception of culture of the British Cultural Studies section and the interpretation of the Gramscian concept of hegemony undertaken by one of its most renowned representatives – Raymond Williams – Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva (1980) advocates the adoption of a perspective for the analysis of the cultural industry in Brazil that surpasses the pessimism and elitism impregnated to the term by the Frankfurtians. Instead of a criticism that totally denies bourgeois culture, the author proposes the recognition of the cultural industry as a system of production of symbolic goods tied to the capitalist logic, which, however, has gaps which are susceptible to be explored in the struggle for the construction of a new culture.

The possibilities of resistance and social change from the cultural industry are glimpsed by Silva (1980) with the substitution of the concept of ideology, which marks the Frankfurtian thought, for that of hegemony. The terminological change has repercussions on the vision of culture: it ceases to be a reflection of economic activity situated in the superstructural sphere and includes not only the system of values and beliefs, but also a set of practices that permeate the whole of life. In addition, hegemony does not imply the imposition of a homogenous world view – that of the ruling class – on the rest of society, but on the articulation of different worldviews, by neutralizing the antagonisms between them.

The influence of the concept of hegemony in communication research in Latin America goes beyond this contribution. It is also associated with a major dispute waged in the countryside, which eventually set up an autonomous line of investigation. The next section deals with this issue, focusing mainly on the seminal contributions of Martín-Barbero, fundamental for understanding the path taken by the author of *From the media to mediations*.

HEGEMONY IN THE THOUGHT OF MARTÍN-BARBERO

In the 1960s, communication research in Latin America was experiencing the clash between two perspectives: a diffusionist, which uncritically replicated in the Latin American territory theoretical-methodological models that emerged in the United States, and another autochthonous one, that was endeavoring to understand the singularities and to propose appropriate solutions to regional problems. Inspired by the US administrative and functionalist surveys, the first analyzed the communication process from the point of view of the sender, focusing in particular on the content transmitted and the behavior of the consumer. The second inaugurated a current of thought that reacted to foreign models, with the initial concern of denouncing the imperialist expansion of multinational corporations and the ideology of consumption.

This attempt to search for autochthonous theoretical-methodological alternatives, however, ran up against the epistemological limitations of many researchers and, several times, led to forms of political militancy confused with scientific innovations. Seeking alternative theories and methods generated “by Latin Americans and for Latin Americans,” some researchers have incorporated elements of regional politics, economics, and culture, turning to European Marxist and Semiological models and also to engagement in party organizations. (Costa; Machado; Siqueira, 2006: 100-101)

The autochthonous models gained projection on the continent in the mid-1970s, marking the transition from dependence to theoretical-methodological autonomy. The strengthening of this trend was accompanied by the cooling of political militancy. In this scenario, we highlight the seminal reflections of Martín-Barbero and the centrality that concept of hegemony would come to occupy.

In *Mass communication: discourse and power* (Martín-Barbero, 1978), a book in which he still treats communication as discourse, the author undertakes a movement of rupture with the functionalist model, approaching the semiological/structuralist perspective. However, their limits also became a target for criticism. Martín-Barbero problematizes the conception of the means of communication as instruments for ideological reproduction that manipulate the masses and raises questions about the complicity of the oppressed in its own domination:

what, in those dominated, works in favor of their domination? Putting at stake what contradictions domination is also activity and not passivity in the dominated, is

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¹The original reads: “¿qué en el dominado trabaja a favor, por su dominación? ¿Poniendo en juego qué contradicciones la dominación es también actividad y no pasividad en el dominado, la dominación es deseada? Solo si la opresión es de alguna manera actividad del oprimido, si se desmonta a complicidad será posible romper con el verticalismo populista y comprender que la liberación es problema, del oprimido, que es en él que se encuentran las claves de sua liberación”.

domination is desired? If oppression is in any way an activity of the oppressed, it is only by dismantling complicity that it is possible to break with populist verticalism and to understand that liberation is the problem of the oppressed, which is the key to their liberation¹. (Ibid.: 54)

Following in this direction, the author proposes the abandonment of the systemic-structural perspective underlying the functionalist and structuralist / semiological theories, in favor of a vision that privileges the discursive practice. This implies ceasing to treat communication as a superstructural phenomenon restricted to the problems of meaningful contents and to observe its multidimensional and pluri-determined insertion within a concrete social formation.

Although, in the book in question, Martín-Barbero did not mobilize the concept of hegemony, it quickly became an important analytical key for such reflections. In 1978, in the public intervention held at the first international meeting of scholars and schools of communication in Latin America, the author evoked the concept in association with Paulo Freire’s analysis of oppression internalized by Latin American societies to present the first version of that (Martín-Barbero, 2002). In this paper, we will focus on the role of communication as a process of domination.

These initial reflections became more complex with a new movement undertaken by Martín-Barbero and other Latin American communication researchers from the 1970s to the 1980s: the (re) discovery of the popular. Also strongly influenced by Gramscian writings, the (re) valorization of subjects and popular culture shed light on another aspect of the concept of hegemony: its condition as a battle arena. It began then to consider not only the complicity of the oppressed in the process of domination, but also its possibilities for rebuttal and resistance.

²The original reads: “Apenas estamos comenzando a sentir la necesidad del desplazamiento metodológico que nos dé acceso a la lectura que los diferentes grupos populares llevan a cabo. Lectura en la que tratan de abrirse caminos otras voces, una palabra que introduce ‘ruido’ y que burle y subvierte a su modo las relaciones de poder. Y ese ‘a su modo’ está indicando la existencia de otra ‘gramática’, de otra lógica en la producción de sentido, en la actividad de deconstrucción que se realiza en la decodificación”.

We are only beginning to feel the need for a methodological shift that gives us access to the reading that the different popular groups carry out. A reading in which the paths for other voices are opened, for a word that introduces “noise” and that mocks and subverts the relations of power in its own way. And “its own way” is indicating the existence of another “grammar”, of another logic in the production of meaning, in the deconstruction activity that is performed in the decoding². (Ibid.: 111)

Articulated with the conception of the State not as an agent exclusively in the service of the ruling class but as a space of struggle, such theoretical contributions

contributed to the rupture with the imaginary of a power without fissures and without contradictions, directing the look to the zones of tension. Reflection emerged at a unique historical moment when several Latin American countries lived under the power of military dictatorships and, despite the repression, social and popular movements were articulated in resistance to the regime and by the re-democratization of society (Coutinho, 1989).

The steps taken with these reflections were decisive for the theoretical-methodological shift undertaken by Martín-Barbero. As we will see further ahead, the problematizations that led to the appropriation of the concept of hegemony reappear in the shift from the media to mediations.

HEGEMONY IN THE BOOK FROM THE MEDIA TO MEDIATIONS

Martín-Barbero (2009), in his introduction to the book *From the media to mediations*, reports that his foray into communication research in the 1970s came about through theories that tended to emphasize the dominating and manipulative character of mass media.

For some time the work consisted in asking how this discourse manipulates us, which, through mass media, makes us endure the imposture, as the ideology penetrates the messages, imposing, then, the logic of domination to communication. I went through sociolinguistics and semiotics, carried out ideological readings of texts and practices. (Ibid.: 27)

The research carried out by the author was based on the critical aspect that marked the first autochthonous communication studies in Latin America. As highlighted in the previous section, this line of research incorporated contributions from European Marxism and Semiology in order to denounce the presence of the dominant ideology in the mass media. The adopted approach privileged the study of the political action exerted through the messages that circulated in the mass media.

The epistemological limitations of this theoretical slope were identified by Martín-Barbero and became object for the criticism that led to the formulation of the theory of mediations. The ideological perspective, as the author called it, reduced the means of communication to instruments whose primary purpose was to propagate the dominant ideology, imposing it from the outside to the dominated classes. It was an approach that deprived the media from cultural density and from its own institutional materiality.

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By considering only the mechanisms of domination, this perspective also relegated the possibilities of resistance and conflict. It was based on a conception of communication as a linear and unidirectional scheme in which an all omnipotent sender produced ideologically instrumentalized messages with the purpose of causing determined effects on a totally passive receiver.

The criticism of the ideological perspective was only one of the pillars of Martín-Barbero's reflection. Another slope of research, hegemonic at the time in Latin America, was also the subject of considerations: information theory, which equated the communication process with the transmission of information, adopting mathematical models for which communication problems could be reduced to technical issues.

Such a paradigm was rejected because it disregarded not only the questions related to the meaning of the messages, but also to the exercise of power. Everything that could not be mathematically calculated, such as the contradictions and social conflicts that permeate the discourse, was discarded by information theory as the residue of a process that should be objective and precise. In addition to that, it suffered from an evil that made it an accomplice of the ideological model:

an "economy" according to which the two instances of the circuit – sender and receiver – are supposed to lie in the same plane and the message circulates between homologous instances. That implies not only idealism, against which Lacan raised the question of the code as a space of domination clothed in "encounter", but also the assumption that the maximum of communication works on the maximum of information and the latter on the univocity of the discourse. Which makes it impossible, everything in communication remains irreducible and not comparable to the transmission and the mediation of information, either because it does not fit into the sender / message / receiver scheme – as a prom or a religious cult – or because it introduces such an asymmetry between the sender and receiver codes that implode the linearity on which the whole model is based. (Ibid.: 283)

The criticism addressed to both information theory and ideological theory has granted Martín-Barbero with a unique position. The denial of both theoretical models as a basis for understanding communication processes in Latin America paved the way for a break with the research agenda then in force. In order to arrive at mediations, however, another conception of culture was necessary, in which it was not reduced to a reflection of economic-social relations, to a form of domination imposed by the ruling classes to the dominated ones. It was also urgent to abandon the elitist vision of mass communication as a form of degraded cultural manifestation. To take this theoretical approach, remaining

within the framework of a critical perspective, was made possible thanks to the dialectical thinking of Antonio Gramsci, who promoted the “unblocking, from Marxism, of the cultural question and of the dimension of class in popular culture” (Ibid.: 112).

Communication, culture and hegemony. The subtitle for the book *From the media to mediations* points at the centrality assumed in it by Gramsci’s contributions. The articulation between the three terms touches directly at the heart of the issues dealt with by the Italian Marxist:

the “original potentiality” of Gramsci’s reflections on communication consists precisely in relating it to the totality of social life, understanding it as culture, interactive praxis, mediation between subject and object. And, as such, it is associated, in Gramscian thought, with the problematic of the State, of power relations, of hegemony, that is, of the intellectual and moral leadership of a social group over the whole of society. Ultimately, every process of hegemony is necessarily a communicational process. After all, it is through semiotic interaction, through the re-elaboration and the sharing of signs that subjects construct their identities, organize their world view, representing reality from a perspective and according to their interests, longings and expectations. (Coutinho, 2008: 43-44)

The concept of hegemony allowed Martín-Barbero to think of symbolic domination no longer as an imposition from the outside but as a dynamic process involving seduction and complicity. The hegemony of one class over others does not exist per se, it is constructed and reconstructed by subjective processes that require some level of recognition on the part of the dominated classes. Therefore, the subaltern and hegemonic cultures are not necessarily external or opposing, as one imagined. They wage a battle whose result is the frequent reworking and overlapping of each other.

The understanding of communication as culture and of it from the processes of hegemony makes it possible, therefore, to distance itself from a view of the popular as a synonym for pure, authentic, in favor of a dynamic conception of the culture of the subaltern classes as a plot, interweaving between resistance and domination, in which

not all assimilation of the hegemonic by the subaltern is a sign of submission, just as mere refusal is not resistance, and not everything that comes from ‘above’ are values of the ruling class, for there are things that, coming from there, respond to other logics that are not those of domination. (Ibid.: 114)

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The attention to the constitutive plot of the popular made possible the apprehension of what the author considers the “cultural truth” of the countries of the region: *mestizaje*. The concept refers not only to ethnic-racial hybridity originating from the Latin American peoples, but also to the contradictory coexistence of temporalities, memories and imaginaries that permeates the history of the continent. At the same time, the main expressions of this *mestizaje* are those that arise from the imbrication between tradition and modernity, such as impure indigenous identity and, as we will discuss below, the forms of existence of the popular within the massive.

The indigenous can not be separated from the process of late modernization of Latin America. He should not be treated either as the representative of a pure culture to be preserved, or as the bearer of an identity totally subjugated by capitalist modernity. The indigenous question must be reconciled “from the political and theoretical space of the popular, that is, as subaltern cultures, dominated but possessing a positive existence capable of development” (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 264). To think of the existence of the Indigenous from this perspective implies to be attentive to the impurity of relations between ethnicity and class, to the survival of the traditional in capitalist society.

The indigenous question illustrates the broader process of constitution of subaltern subjects in the singular Latin American modernization. These are not cut out in the image and likeness of that which arose in the central nations – the urban industrial worker. Although class remains an important social cleavage in the conception of the popular adopted by Martín-Barbero, a condition that keeps it faithful to the basic precepts of Gramscian thought, other forms of collective existence acquire prominence.

The new understanding of the problem of identity [...] is inscribed in the movement of profound transformation of politics [...]. In the face of the proposals that guided the thinking and action of the leftists until the mid-1970s – an exclusionary organization of the proletariat, politics as totalization, denunciation of bourgeois parliamentary deception – a new project, closely related to the rediscovery of the popular, that is, with the new meaning that this notion today acquires: revaluation of articulations and mediations of civil society, social sense of conflicts beyond its formulation and political synthesis, recognition of collective experiences not framed in partisan forms. (Ibid.: 286)

The attention to these popular subjects is decisive for the path from the media to mediations. The revaluation of the subaltern groups makes possible the investigation of the cultural practices of the mass media in articulation not only

with the hegemonic culture, but also with the cultural matrices of the groups that it intends to hegemonize. The receiver, as a member of a collectivity, is incorporated into the communication process as an active entity of signification and resignification.

What I began to call mediations were those spaces, those forms of communication that lied between the person who listened to the radio and what was said on the radio. There was not a single isolated individual upon whom the impact of the environment acted, which was the American way of seeing it [...]. Mediation meant that between stimulus and response there is a thick space of beliefs, customs, dreams, fears, everything that shapes the daily culture. (Martín-Barbero, 2000³ apud Silva, 2017: 303)

The concept of mediations opens the way for the critical reinterpretation of mass communication in Latin America as a hybrid of cultural domination and popular resistance. Without denying the mercantile and alienating character of the cultural industry, Martín-Barbero identifies another face of the phenomenon: the survival of popular cultural matrices. Mass culture ceases to be treated as a homogeneous whole and is seen as a space for the creation of heterogeneous products, which respond to the logic of domination, but also to the symbolic demands of the dominated space.

The theoretical-methodological shift from media to mediations is undertaken, in the book, from the analysis of Latin American television culture. This is because, although the television medium is undergoing significant transformations, the mediation from which it operates socially has not followed this process. Moreover, in Martín-Barbero's view, television culture is the one that best expresses the contradictory meaning of the masses, in seeking to deactivate social differences – thus promoting ideological integration – from the imbrication with the popular cultural matrix.

To investigate mass media communication through mediations implies privileging the places from which the constructions that delimit and shape the social materiality and the expressiveness of the medium, to the detriment of the logics of production and reception. In this approach, the author focuses on three mediations: everyday family life, social temporality and cultural competence.

As a primordial place of interpellation of the popular sectors, the family routine fulfills a decisive function not only in the reception of the contents, but also in the construction of the television discourse. It incorporates devices that seek to reproduce the close relationships and proximity of the family environment, among which the presenter-animator stand out, which facilitates

³ MARTÍN-BARBERO, J. Comunicação e mediações culturais. Interviewed by Claudia Barcelos. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação*, São Paulo, v. 23, n. 1, p. 151-163, jan./jun. 2000.

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the transition from reality to fiction, and the colloquial tone that simulates family dialogues.

The popular social temporality, characterized by repetition and fragmentation – the difference of productive time, which occurs and is measured in countable units – finds expression in television programming. Although the organization of the grid in temporal segments repeated at the same time is considered a manifestation of the standardization of the productive system, it does not fail to refer also to the seriality and repetition of popular cultural productions, such as the story and adventurous narrative.

Cultural competence is associated, above all, with discursive genres, understood not as properties of the text, but as strategies of communicability. The genres consist in a fundamental mediation between the logic of the productive system and the logics of social uses, insofar as its rules configure the formats that make the cultural recognition by the groups to which they are directed possible. In Latin American television culture, a genre in particular acquires prominence: the melodrama.

The melodrama stages the “drama of recognition”. The plot always revolves around the unawareness of an identity – that of the son by the father, of the mother by the child etc. – and involves a struggle against injustice and appearances, in search of recognition. It is a genre that says a lot about Latin American reality:

melodrama continues to be a precious ground for the study of non-contemporaneity and the miscegenation of which we are made. As in the market places, in the melodrama everything is mixed, the social structures with those of the feeling, much of what we are – macho, fatalistic, superstitious – and of what we dream to be, identity theft, nostalgia and anger. In the form of tango or telenovela, Mexican cinema or police reporting, melodrama explores in these lands a deep line of our collective imaginary [...]. What niche is it all about? About that in which the cultural matrix that feeds popular recognition in mass culture is made visible. (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 305-306)

The melodrama is considered as a new form of existence and struggle of the popular in the massive. The genre mediates between the time of life and the time of the narrative, reaffirming the form of primordial sociability of the popular strata, based on kinship, local solidarities and friendship. Their presence in mass culture represents both a strategy for obtaining the recognition needed to construct hegemony and a silent form of resistance to abstraction imposed on life by commodification, political exclusion, and cultural dispossession.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After (re)situating the communication in the field of the culture, undertaking the shift from the media to mediations, Martín-Barbero felt the need to realize a new route, this time from culture to communication – not to the media – due to the new place occupied by culture as a result of the globalization process. The movement, which took place in the 1990s, resulted in the map of the so-called “communicative mediations of culture” (Martín-Barbero, 2002).

The map is organized around two axes: a diachronic, vectorized by the Cultural Matrices and the Industrial Formats, and a synchronic, by the Logics of Production and the Competencies of Reception or Consumption. The relations between these axes are established by communicative mediations: the Cultural Matrices and the Logics of Production are mediated by different institutional regimes; the Cultural Matrices and the Reception Skills, by different forms of sociality; the Industrial Formats and the Reception Skills, by different ritualities; the Logics of Production and the Industrial Formats, by the technicities.

Institutionalization is strained by opposing powers and interests: on the one hand, the state and the notion of public service; on the other, the market and the logic of free trade. Sociality refers to the fabric of everyday relationships, encompasses the processes of questioning of subjects and the formation of cultural identities. The ritualities refer to the symbolic nexus of communication, to what there is form and rhythm, repetition and innovation. Technicity encompasses not only the instruments of communication, but mainly the language skills, the knowledges and practices demanded by the processes of signification.

Technicity and sociality are the mediations that most contribute to redefining the place of culture in the globalized world. The technological revolution of the last decades is not limited to introducing new instruments in society, but it creates a new structure, a new environment or communicative ecosystem that transforms the ways of inhabiting the world and the forms of social ties. In their turn, the processes of economic and informational globalization revitalize the demands for recognition and meaning, to the point of transforming the question of cultural identities into one of the main arenas of social conflict (Martín-Barbero, 2014).

These transformations have a perverse face, but they also open to new possibilities. On the one hand, they reinforce the communicational hegemony of the market, promoting a model of society that threatens the survival of cultures as it reduces them to the space-time of the market. On the other hand, they help

to break the exclusion, enhancing the capacity for survival and association of the subaltern groups, who take ownership of the new technologies in a search to build counter-hegemonies. **M**

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Article received on August 30th 2017 and approved in November 9th 2017.