

# From Mediations to Mediations: the issue of *technicality* in Martín-Barbero<sup>1</sup>

## *De mediações em mediações: a questão da tecnicidade em Martín-Barbero*

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we will analyze the epistemological turn proposed by Martín-Barbero when he shifted his attention from the *cultural mediations of the communication* to the *communicative mediations of the culture*. The focus of the analysis will be on the importance the notion of *technicality* – alongside institutionalality, sociality, and rituality – had in this epistemological turn. His notion of technicality will be here discussed from certain reflections posed by some studies on *new media* and *materiality of communication*.

**Keywords:** Materiality, mediations, technicalities

### RESUMO

Neste artigo será analisada a virada epistemológica proposta por Martín-Barbero ao deslocar sua atenção das *mediações culturais da comunicação para as mediações comunicativas da cultura*. O foco principal da análise estará concentrado na importância que a noção de *tecnicidade* – ao lado da *institucionalidade, da socialidade e da ritualidade* – passou a ter em seu pensamento. A sua noção de *tecnicidade* será tensionada a partir de certas reflexões produzidas pelos estudos das *novas mídias e da materialidade da comunicação*.

**Palavras-chave:** Materialidade, mediações, tecnicidade

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### FROM MEDIA TO MEDIATION

THE WORK *FROM media to mediations* is celebrating 30 years since its publication in 1987 by the Editor Gustavo Gili of Barcelona. In Brazil, the book was translated and published by a University publisher, UFRJ, in 1997<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Where applicable, the quotations in this article have been freely translated from the original Portuguese.

In the following years, Martín-Barbero produced some revisions and attempts to clarify what he meant by mediations, and which types of mediations are fundamental for understanding cultural-communicational processes (Martín-Barbero, 1995, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2009).

*From media to mediations* presents the first map of what might be called *mediation* (Signates, 2006) but it does not produce a more in-depth reflection on the notion of *media*<sup>3</sup>. The criticism the author makes of a certain *American Sociology*, centered on the *media effects*, and the so-called *information theory* of Shannon & Weaver, is very clear.

<sup>3</sup> See, also: Bastos (2008).

Martín-Barbero (1997) associates his project with that proposed by Walter Benjamin (1989, 1994)<sup>4</sup>. His emphasis on changes brought by new techniques and their connection to the modern urban experience are incorporated and expanded to the analysis of Latin American reality.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the media analysis in Benjamin, Martín-Barbero follows by a path that, for the author of this article, is somewhat different. An outline of this reflection can be found Girardi Junior (2017a) and Sá (2004).

The initial inspiration for his project, *From media to mediation*, highlights this complexity (new techniques – metropolis – sensoriality) in a very clear way:

Benjamin proposes then the task of thinking about the changes that shape modernity from the space of perception, mixing what is happening in the streets with what happens in factories, dark movie theaters, and in the literature, especially the *maudit*. (Martín-Barbero, 1997: 73)

In this first stage of his work, the researcher shifts the traditional attention to media and its effects on the reception process. Subsequently, under the influence of the debates on the so-called *new media*, the author focuses more and more on what he calls *technicalities*. This turn, however, maintains some coherence with its original map of analysis of mediations, but it did not concentrate its attention in the communication materiality (Bastos, 2012; Gumbrecht, 2010; Müller; Felinto, 2008).

In his seminal work, the abandonment of what he called *media-centrism* was necessary due to the particular historical circumstances of Latin America: the historical and cultural conditions of our type of development and the strength of the new social movements<sup>5</sup>. The reception gains centrality, but not without risks of locating these studies in another *step* or isolated *moment* of the communicational process.

<sup>5</sup> On Latin American trends in reception studies, see Jacks (1996).

Therefore, instead of performing the research from the analysis of production and reception logics and then looking for their imbrication or confrontation relations, we propose starting from the mediations, that is, from the places from which come the constructions that delimit and shape the social materiality and cultural expressiveness of television. (Martín-Barbero, 1997: 292)

The researcher highlights this risk and advises his readers to think of it as a kind of “re-encounter of the communication studies with the Latin American society of today” (Martín-Barbero, 1995: 39), in a rupture with a *conducive* and *mechanic* epistemology of communication focused only in the senders and in the absence of *real exchanges* between *real actors*. In this first stage of his work, he developed what he called *cultural mediations of communication* – the outline of a *nocturnal map* to explore the mediations<sup>6</sup>.

This new *place* is of paramount importance in the reflection on the connection between cultural practices and the communicational processes that guide them. It is “not only a stage within the communication process, a separable moment concerning discipline and methodology, but another kind of place, a place where it is possible to review and rethink the whole process of communication” (Ibid.: 40).

Analysis possibilities opened by the interpretation of his work, however, forced Martín-Barbero to clarify some questions. It is important to point out that this change in the *place* in which the relationship between communication, politics, and culture takes place in Latin American societies should not lead to the false impression that people can do whatever they want with cultural goods. Clearly, the actors’ ability to appropriate these goods and the world in which they live involves very particular historical, social, political, and cultural conditionings.

The idea that “we have to study not what media does to people, but what people do to themselves, what they do to the media, their reading” (Ibid.: 55) should not, as it has already been said, turn reception into a prominent and autonomous *stage* of research. One should understand how mediation becomes the articulator between the *logics of production* and its *industrial formats* in its encounter with the *cultural matrices* and consumption *practices of the users*.

At this point, the researcher focuses on *the capitalist logic of production of cultural goods* – the industrial logic of production of symbolical goods in the mass media – but he never turns his attention to the *materiality* of the sociotechnical media as part of a specific type of mediation<sup>7</sup>. Sometimes, his analysis highlights the *genres* as the articulator between *logics of production and production practices* and *logics and reception practices*<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> “And it was that craft that guided the long, nearly ten-year research that picked up *From media to mediations*, where I synthesized what I understood by nocturnal map: a map to investigate the domination, production, and work, but from another side: that of gaps, consumption, and pleasure” (Martín-Barbero, 2002: 6).

<sup>7</sup> A procedure that does not escape from the attention of Walter Benjamin (1994).

<sup>8</sup> “Jesus Martín-Barbero is a fundamental author for the construction of a new approach to television genres due to his effort in thinking of communicative models that encompass the whole process, his conception of genre as a communicability strategy, and for considering the contingent and transient nature of the genre and the different temporalities it evokes. Moreover, he investigates television, taking the television genre as a cultural category and adopting a strongly historicized approach, and offers us clues to think of the links between communication, culture, politics, and society” (Gomes, 2011: 113).

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Between the productive system logic and the logics of its uses, one can see the genre mediation. Basically, their rules configure the formats, and these formats are anchored in the cultural recognition of the groups. [...] In the sense we work here, a genre is not something that occurs *in* the text, but *by* the text, because it is less a question of structure and combinatorial parts than of competence. We assume then the proposal of a team of Italian researchers, according to whom gender is, above all, a *strategy of communicability*<sup>9</sup>. (Martín-Barbero, 1997: 301-302)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>In the original: “Entre a lógica do sistema produtivo e as lógicas dos usos, medeiam os gêneros. São suas regras que configuram basicamente os formatos, e nestes se ancora o reconhecimento cultural dos grupos. [...] No sentido em que estamos trabalhando, um gênero não é algo que ocorra *no texto*, mas *sim pelo texto*, pois é menos questão de estrutura e combinatórias do que de competência. Assumimos então a proposta de uma equipe de investigadores italianos segundo a qual um gênero é, antes de tudo, uma estratégia de comunicabilidade”.

<sup>10</sup>In the discussion being proposed by this article, regarding technicality, it is important to note that for Manovich (2001) the presence of *new media* brings a new element to the analysis of mediations and their relationship with communication. In the new media, one deals not only with the cultural layer (of which the genres are the main mediation) but also with its very particular mediality: the computational layer (see: Girardi Junior, 2017b).

<sup>11</sup>On the materiality and industrial formats differences between the newspaper (the chronicle) and the book, see the chapter “The cinematographic chronicle” of the work *João do Rio and his cinematographers* by Aline da Silva Novaes (2015).

### THE ANALYSIS OF MEDIATIONS IN *FEUILLETONS*

This orientation appears clearly in the development of *From media to mediations*. In speaking of the appearance of the *feuilleton* (a serialized novel in a newspaper), Martín-Barbero (1997) describes how the mediations related to production logics, industrial formats, cultural matrices, and reception skills (consumption) are articulated.

In a market of symbolic goods driven by the logic of capitalism, this industrial format – which initially finds its place in the newspaper – marks the appearance of new relations in the logic of production: the *relationship between the editor and the author*, on the one hand, and the change in the *relation of the writer with his own creative process* on the other. In the production logics of this new industrial format, this is manifests as follows:

1. in the wage relation the author of novels establishes with the journalistic organization.
2. in the rhythm of production, which demands *writing under pressure* for a short periodicity – to write *against the clock*.
3. in the mode of writing, which forces the writer to conform to a very particular form of narrative construction.

These new communication environments presuppose very particular mediations. One can highlight the “institutional mediation with the market that directs and re-articulates the ‘artistic’ intentionality of the writer” (Martín-Barbero, 1997: 175), which is evaluated concerning productivity and profitability and emphasizes the particularities of the genre more than the author’s own style.

Besides, the dynamics and consumer circuits around the newspaper are very different from those involving a book, for example. At the first moment, the novel, in its *materiality* and *institutionality*, will not assume the cultural status of the book. Its existence is linked to the newspaper form and to everything it represents on production and consumption logics: its temporality and rituality<sup>11</sup>.

Changes in the modes of acquisition (sale in newsstand, subscription, weekly or daily) and the strong presence of advertising, which characterize

journalistic productions in the modern capitalist order, will also produce a new type of mediation between the market and cultural practices.

Speaking of Eugène Sue's famous book, *The mysteries of Paris*, Martín-Barbero (1997) observes how the readers' participation through letters to the newspaper was intense. The letters criticized the harshness with which Sue described the lives of her characters or even the socialist tone of her novel. Some readers even believed that the characters who appeared in the narratives were real, and these fictional types came to be a reference to readers of the popular classes.

However, as the author observes, one should not pass "from the structures of texts to structures of society or vice versa, without going through the constitutive mediation of reading. From living-reading, that is, from what people do with their lives and the social movements in which life is entangled" (Ibid.: 179).

Mediations between the *logic of production/industrial formats* and the *cultural matrices/reception competences* leave their mark on the text. This interferes with their *materiality* such as, for example, the *typographic composition devices* (large and spaced letters) that seek to make the reading pleasant and easy for a large number of users who essentially live in an oral culture. The desire to read had to be stimulated, with clear commercial interests (Ibid.: 180).

In the articulation between the logic of production/industrial formats and cultural matrices/reception skills, *fragmented reading devices* are developed as a new narrative organization (based on episodes, chapters, subchapters). They are accompanied by *seduction devices*: the chain of these narrative fragments in a specific length of time, organized according to the logic of a thriller – in constant negotiation with its readership – allowing the narrative to be incorporated to the rhythm of everyday life (Ibid.: 181).

Its *open work* allows for an updating, a constant negotiation, a game of seduction through certain rules involving a creative balance between surprises and repetitions. The institutional legitimacy of creation is no longer in the hands of the author of the novels. Transferred to the genre; it becomes a type of standardized genre narrative.

This process is completed with the *recognition devices*. The reader recognizes in the narrative the intervention of a particular type of hero who has nothing to do with the supernatural: the character is *a person like us!*

In these narratives, ethical and aesthetic issues are directly related in the plot – a *moral of the story* that articulates the experience of violence, fear, and resentment, on the one hand, and the hope of retaliation and revenge, on the other (Ibid.: 184).

With the passing of time, this set of mediations reaches a level of maturity that ends up releasing the novel from the newspaper *materiality*. In this new

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logic of *institutionalization* – and in its new *book form* –, it starts to have its own production cycle, consumption, and cultural *legitimacy* evaluation.

It must also be remembered that, before it became part of the everyday ritual and sociality, this new urban cultural experience had to be learned – resuming a Benjaminian inspiration. It did not depend only on a mass literacy process, but on the incorporation of a new cultural form (Williams, 2016) – an institutional mediation of the market on urban industrial formats, their relations with cultural matrices, and new cognitive skills negotiated between producers and consumers of these goods.

This new cultural form became the space of hegemony struggles around the forms and meanings of symbolic production in a society marked by class division and market relations. But this is not exclusively a matter of submission to a mercantile logic or a pure and simple dominant ideology.

We are affirming that the communication modalities they bring were only possible due to the technology that materialized changes which, in the social life, gave sense to new relations and new uses. We are situating the media in the context of mediations, that is, in the process of cultural transformation that does not begin in or arise through them, but in which they will play an important role from a certain moment – the twenties<sup>12</sup>. (Martín-Barbero, 1997: 191)<sup>13</sup>

### THE PLACE OF MEDIATIONS

Martín-Barbero, along with representatives of Cultural Studies (Hoggart, 1973; Williams, 2016) and other Latin American researchers such as Orozco Gómez (2005), seeks to redefine what is really at stake in communicative practices. The researcher wanted to keep a distance from the theory of effects and the so-called media-centrism. However, he emphasized his distance from what he also calls a *culturalist approach*<sup>14</sup>: “The challenge presented by the cultural industry appears with all its density at the intersection between these two lines of renewal – which inscribe the cultural realm within the politics and the communication realm within the culture” (Martín-Barbero, 1997: 287).

To understand this new position, he *identifies three fundamental places of analysis of mediations*, which are related to the experience of users with electronic means of communication, i.e., *broadcasting*.

1. *Everyday family life* – family life becomes the place where the reception experience happens. Here, it is possible to see their instances of production, able to simulate presence and proximity: a remote contact relationship. It appears in the figure of the presenters/animators

<sup>12</sup> In the original: “Estamos afirmando que as modalidades de comunicação que neles e com eles aparecem só foram possíveis na medida em que a tecnologia materializou mudanças que, a partir da vida social, davam sentido a novas relações e novos usos. Estamos situando os meios no âmbito das mediações, isto é, num processo de transformação cultural que não se inicia nem surge através deles, mas no qual eles passarão a desempenhar um papel importante a partir de um certo momento – os anos vinte”.

<sup>13</sup> One of the purposes of this article is to begin a series of reflections on the relation between the *Theory of Mediations* and the so-called *Cultural Techniques* or, in other words, how the idea of mediations can be introduced into studies on the Materiality of Communication.

<sup>14</sup> On identifying the author as representative of a *culturalist* approach, see: Bastos (2008), Dalmonte (2002), Temer; Tondato (2014).

- and in the way in which they address their audience – *a speech that familiarizes everything*, from the events to the characters in the stories.
2. *social temporality* – is the articulation between the program schedules, genres; and the rituals of the domestic environment, where a certain type of routine can be seen.
  3. *cultural competence* – a kind of audiovisual literacy guided by a new cultural form based on serial production and in the division of audiovisual products/genres over the TV schedule; a game of repetition, recognition, and novelty regarding narratives<sup>15</sup>.

All these *places* support a series of differences in the actors' social and cultural conditions. For this reason, understanding how the *habitus* plays an important role in the evaluation of the types of resources/capital that will be activated by them and the forms assumed by these mediations is essential.

In the *multiple mediations model*, proposed by Orozco Gómez (2005), there is an unfolding and a broader configuration of the types of mediations that can be identified and studied. In this sense, mediations can be:

1. *Referential*: depends on values and family history, educational level, cultural repertoires, class relations, gender, age, and ethnicity.
2. *Cognitive*: this mediation occurs through *scripts*, forms of mental scripts that indicate frameworks and the cultural relevance of some themes, situations, and modes of perception (specific modes of reading) placed in the communication negotiation.
3. *Situational*: involves a type of specific relationship with the media, related to the place in which this *encounter* occurs, the way in which these media dispute the attention of their users (who may be alone or gathered in the room or performing other activities, while television occupies its place as a background noise, for example – a kind of *distracted attention*).
4. *Institutional*: television has become a *meaning-producing social institution* – in which the viewer is involved in a set of arrangements – in competition with other institutions (the family, school, work, and private arrangements).
5. *Video technology*: the media have their production dynamics of *particular representations and modes by which they address their users*. This mediation passes through the media genres, their greater or lesser denotative function, and the *erasure of production processes and codes* – their *naturalization*.

An important observation of Orozco Gómez on mediations is that they can be complexly articulated, mobilizing rituals, routines, recognitions, and affections. Sometimes, one of these mediations may overlap another, while at other times it can be canceled out.

<sup>15</sup> Martín-Barbero observes how this cultural competence is seen in a very particular way in the world of Art: there are practically no lists of classical television works, the most that can be found are almanacs. This issue is equal to that raised by Machado (2000).

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The author observes that *communities of appropriation* – the places where one has direct experience with these cultural goods, which may be the domestic environment – do not always coincide with the *communities of interpretation* – other spheres of meaning negotiation about that same experience, which may be work, school etc. (Girardi Junior, 2009). He points out:

Three basic assumptions guide the analysis of television reception. First, that the reception is interaction; second, that this interaction is necessarily mediated in multiple ways; and third, that this interaction is not confined to the moment of watching the screen. The object of study, therefore, will be the various mediations in the “long and winding” process of reception<sup>16</sup>. (Orozco Gómez, 2005: 37)

Williams (2016), in turn, tries to demonstrate how television in its cultural form is built within a set of transformations of the modern world: urbanization; increased wage, free time, and mobility; the implementation of public technologies of electrification, transportation, etc.

Alongside the increased mobility produced by modernity, a very particular and seemingly paradoxical process occurs: the construction of a kind of experience centered on home-based media – a series of *domestic technologies* (Mackay, 1997; Morley; Silverstone, 1990). These media can take the form of newspapers, magazines, catalogs, radios, and televisions, which occupy a specific place within the family life. Williams will identify this type of experience as a form of *privatized mobility*.

It is important to note the theoretical convergence that develops between the mediations theory and the new generations of cultural studies, particularly with the works of Morley (1992) and Silverstone (1991), focused on the construction of the so-called “domestic technologies” and of a new “moral economy” centered on the family. These studies show that the communication environment produced by television is both technological and social, and that the mediations present in it must be carefully evaluated as a series of routinized and ritualized cultural practices<sup>17</sup>. (Girardi Junior, 2009: 123-124)<sup>18</sup>

### THE PLACE OF TECHNICALITY

Much of Martín-Barbero’s analysis of mediations was related to the uses of *broadcasting* or, specifically, television. The emergence of new media, digital convergence, mobile technologies, and the possibility of enjoying cultural goods in multiple screens and environments, in addition to the interactivity and its

<sup>16</sup> In the original: “Três premissas básicas orientam a análise da recepção televisiva.

Primeira, que a recepção é interação; segunda, que essa interação está necessariamente mediada de múltiplas maneiras; e terceira, que essa interação não está circunscrita ao momento de estar vendo a tela. O objeto de estudo, por conseguinte, serão as diversas mediações ao ‘longo e amplo’ processo de recepção”.

<sup>17</sup> In the original: “É importante notar a convergência teórica que se desenvolve entre a teoria das mediações e as novas gerações dos estudos culturais, particularmente, com os trabalhos de Morley (1992) e Silverstone (1991), concentrados na construção das chamadas ‘tecnologias domésticas’ e de uma nova ‘economia moral’ centrada na família. Esses estudos mostram que o ambiente comunicacional produzido pela televisão é tanto tecnológico como social e que as mediações, nele presentes, devem ser avaliadas com bastante cuidado como uma série de práticas culturais rotinizadas e ritualizadas”.

<sup>18</sup> This situation has been changing rapidly since the expansion of mobile devices and Wi-Fi networks, 3G, 4G, etc. creating a very complex communication environment (Girardi Junior, 2009).



association with a new globalized cultural dynamic, made the author look to *technicity* as a new kind of mediation<sup>19</sup>.

Although this new communicative environment demands close attention, Orozco Gómez (2006) poses some recommendations:

1. It must be remembered that a new media or technology does not immediately replace a previous media.
2. New technologies demand learning and appropriation time by the users – new *literacies*.
3. Technologies (new or not) require different types of attention and provide different experiences – which can delay the transition from one to another.
4. It is quite possible that the new mobile technologies will better meet certain demands of their users than previous ones. However, they do not meet all the needs, which opens space for a recomposition of old media.
5. Users need to produce a series of adjustments in their everyday experiences to incorporate them.
6. They have a cost that may not be negligible for many users, which can affect the process of technological *migration*.

For Orozco Gómez, the experience with new mobile technologies not only produces a *shift* from the previous communicative environment and its mediations but also *particular types of recomposition*.

A (socio)cultural change supposes a sedimentary change in the symbolic production (which takes its time) [...]. These time-disruptions [*destempos*] demand substantive adjustments and learning processes by the social actors, and almost always end up unfinished<sup>20</sup>. (Orozco Gómez, 2006: 86)

Faced with this complex situation, Martín-Barbero (2002, 2006, 2009) has somehow been forced to face a question: what happens to culture and society when the new media no longer occupy only an instrumental position and begin to expand and intensify our relations with space and time and the communication “thickens, condenses, and becomes structural”<sup>21</sup> (Martín-Barbero, 2006: 54)?

How to be a mediation *cartographer* in such fluid communicative exchanges? What are the clues for understanding these multiple temporalities, “their time” and “memories disruptions” (Martín-Barbero, 2002: 2-3)?

Searching for these answer/explorations, the researcher emphasizes that the computer is not a traditional machine for producing symbolic objects but the carrier of a new type of technicity, which is constituted by the processing of information or data. Its raw materials are abstractions and symbols. Under

<sup>19</sup> An important reflection on the relationship between new types of mediations and new media can be found in Vaz (2001).

<sup>20</sup> In the original: “Uma mudança (sócio) cultural supõe então uma mudança de sedimentações na produção simbólica (que requer seu tempo) [...]. Destempos que supõem ajustes e processos de aprendizagem substantivos por parte dos atores sociais, e que quase sempre acabam inconclusos”.

<sup>21</sup> In the original: “espessar-se, condensar-se e converter-se em estrutural”.

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this new technicity, the numerical code becomes one of the universal mediators of symbolic production:

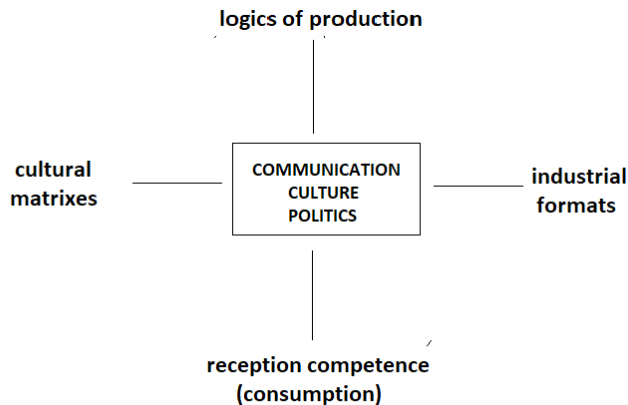
We are faced with the emergence of a “new figure of reason” that requires thinking the image – on the one hand, supported by this new socio-technical configuration [...] and, on the other, the emergence of a new paradigm of thought, which remakes the relations between the discursive (logic) and the visible (form) orders, the intelligibility and sensitivity<sup>22</sup>. (Martín-Barbero, 2006: 73)

<sup>22</sup> In the original: “Estamos diante da emergência de uma “nova figura da razão” que exige pensar a imagem, por um lado, desde sua nova configuração sociotécnica [...] e, por outro, a emergência de um novo paradigma do pensamento, que refaz as relações entre a ordem do discursivo (lógica) e a do visível (a forma), da inteligibilidade e a sensibilidade”.

<sup>23</sup> One of the challenges for Martín-Barbero would be to face this assertion of Gunkel (2009: 53): “the computer, despite everything we now read about new media, media convergence, and digital this and that, is neither a new form of mediated communication, an elaboration, continuation, and confluence of previous media technologies, nor a new tool in the arsenal of media production and distribution. Instead, it constitutes the end of media as we have known it. In other words, the computer marks the end not only of a particular form of media, as has often been argued by scholars of both literacy and media studies [referring to Bolter, Grusin, McLuhan, and Ong], but of a particular and paradigmatic concept of media as such”.

Although the above quote directs our attention to a kind of mediation related to the materiality of communication, the author falls back on the issue of genres and the possibilities of symbolic production<sup>23</sup>. What surprises him, in this case, is the meaning of the hypertext and the reticular form assumed by sociotechnical networks. This would be its technicality: the new fields of experience and human sensoriality.

In his first maps, the author focuses on the *places of mediations*, represented by *daily family life*, *social temporality*, and *cultural competence*. As already seen, this approach articulates a diagram consisting of a *horizontal axis* – which identifies the relationship between *cultural mediations* on the one hand, and *industrial formats* on the other – and a *vertical axis* – which relates the logic of *capitalist industrial production* and *reception competence of the user*. Through this *map of cultural mediations of communication*, the articulations between communication, culture, and politics would be thought (Martín-Barbero, 2009).



The first Map of Cultural Mediations of Communication

FIGURE 1 – First map of the cultural mediations of communication

In the preface to the fifth edition of his work *From media to mediations*, Martín-Barbero points out that he was also developing a *nocturnal map* for the identification and localization of mediations. However, on a seminar coordinated by Orozco Gómez, he began to think about the use of new media and new communicative practices, and shifted his analysis to what he called *communicative mediations of culture*.

I invert my first map and propose the “communicative mediations of culture”, which are: “technicality”; the growing “institutionality” of the media as social institutions and not only apparatus, as institutions of economic, political, and cultural importance; “sociality” – as the social bond is changing for young people since the relationships between parents and children, and between couples, are also changing. [...] and, finally, the new “ritualities” that take place regarding the new industrial formats made possible by the technicality<sup>24</sup>. (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 152)

As observed by Lopes (2014), the author seemed to be strongly pressed to make a reverse movement to that proposed in his seminal work.

Would that be the time for some “ancient issues” which were put aside of our concerns? Would not be the case of a new displacement *from mediations to the media* to compensate a certain imbalance in the analysis of communication environments and their mediations?

However, Martín-Barbero resists following this way. He accepts changing the “place from which I was looking” but he makes clear that this does not mean to “assume the priority of the media.” He only recognizes that “the communicative is becoming a protagonist in a much stronger way” and that communication “becomes stronger in the era of new technicality” (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 152)<sup>25</sup>.

Due to this new *socio-communicative* environment, the approach should now focus on the *communicative mediations of culture*: the rituality, institutionality, sociality, and technicality (Gomes, 2011; Lopes, 2014; Martín-Barbero, 2009; Ronsini, 2010; Sifuentes, Escosteguy, 2016; Silva, 2012).

A complementary diagram is proposed. A new kind of mediation is introduced, which, until that moment, did not have the proper prominence in Martín-Barbero’s thought: the technicality. The idea of an interlocution between it and the Materiality of Communication and the study of New Media goes through this opening found in this new diagram of the *Theory of Mediations* (Martín-Barbero, 2003: 16).

<sup>24</sup>In the original: “Inverto meu primeiro mapa e proponho as “mediações comunicativas da cultura”, que são: a ‘tecnicidade’; a ‘institucionalidade’ crescente dos meios como instituições sociais e não apenas aparatos, instituições de peso econômico, político, cultural; a ‘socialidade’ – como o laço social está se transformando para os jovens, como as relações entre pais e filhos, e entre casais, estão mudando. [...] E, finalmente, as novas ‘ritualidades’ que acontecem em relação aos novos formatos industriais possibilitados pela tecnicidade”.

<sup>25</sup>Couldry (2016) and Couldry and Hepp (2017) emphasize the “waves of mediatization”, “deep mediatization”, “media manifold” (the complex network of production, sharing, and access platforms to content), but their view of materiality follows the same logic adopted by Martín-Barbero: “The social world is not just a given. We *make it*, as human beings; it is, in this sense, socially constructed [...]. Indeed, it involves insisting that the social *is* material, materiality that is not a ‘pre-given’ stratum into which human beings are inserted but a product of human interaction itself, with all its power-relations and inequalities. (Couldry; Hepp, 2017). Scolari (2015), in turn, proposes that, in the same way that Martín-Barbero went from media to mediations, it would be necessary to go now *from new media to hyper mediations*.”

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<sup>26</sup>In the original: “Ao aplicar uma perspectiva institucional, é importante considerar como podemos pensar as diversas mídias – particularmente as novas mídias – como instituições”.

<sup>27</sup>It is possible to say that the relationship between mediation and mediatization assumes a complex form for Livingstone (2009), Hepp (2014), and Hjarvard (2015).

The difficulties regarding their understanding refer to both semantic as historical and conceptual issues: “Recent international discussions

point to the resolution of these terminological disagreements in favor of the continental European distinction between

“mediatization” (denoting the long-term structural dimension) and ‘mediation’ (meaning the use of the media in communicative encounters)” (Hjarvard, 2015: 53) – in the original:

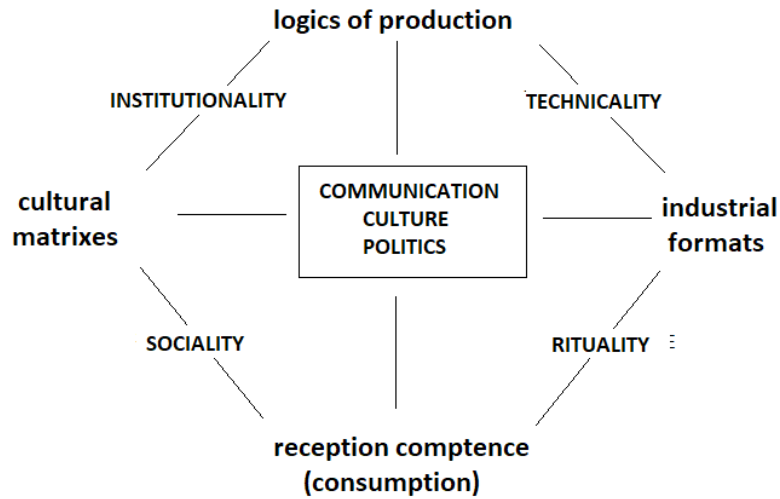
“Discussões internacionais recentes apontam para a resolução destas discordâncias terminológicas em favor da distinção europeia continental

entre ‘mediatização’ (denotando a dimensão estrutural de longo prazo) e ‘mediação’ (significando o uso da mídia em encontros comunicativos)”.

In discussing this new map of mediations, Martín-Barbero

observes that it is composed of: 1) a diachronic axis, which links the Cultural Matrices to the Industrial Formats and 2) a synchronic axis, which connects the Production Logics to the Reception Competencies.

The idea of this diachronic axis, which concentrates on a “long history”, does not fail to approach the emphasis given by the theories of mediatization.



Map of Communicative Mediations of Culture  
( Martín-Barbero, 2003 p.16)

FIGURE 2 – Map of the communicative mediations of culture

Hjarvard (2012, 2015) seems to recognize this same *institutionalization* of the new media formations as a fundamental factor for analyzing the contemporary world: “In applying an institutional perspective, it is important to consider how we can think of the various media – particularly the new media – as institutions”<sup>26</sup> (Hjarvard, 2015: 56).

None of them – theories of mediation or mediatization<sup>27</sup> – focus on the particular materialities that characterize these new media and how they open up a *field of possibilities* for their institutionalization forms and uses<sup>28</sup>.

Therefore, some questions would arise: Is not the materiality of the media itself related to certain specific types of mediations? Should Martín-Barbero’s Theory of Mediation find a *place* to explain what is *new* in these new media – that allow a “communication densification” – and how does this create the conditions for a qualitative change in his analysis of mediations?

His refusal in turning his eyes to the media, however, is consistent with his intellectual position throughout this time. For him, mediations are the “symbolic dimensions of collective construction” (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 151); therefore, the place of the materiality of the *new media* does not appear, except in an indirect way, as part of the symbolic experience<sup>29</sup>.

This issue can also be found in Hjarvard’s epistemological position, arguing that new practices and forms of expression, genres, and formats within the new media cannot be simply reduced to the existence of the

binary code. For him, the new communicative performances must be seen from an institutional perspective, amid which users articulate their daily and social existence<sup>30</sup>.

News, audiovisual narratives, and social networks are influenced by digitization but are also communicative genres or media formats of a higher order, having a structure of their own. Such characteristics cannot be reduced to their elementary binary composition. Media and genres are both communicative formats with particular *affordances* and institutionalized forms of social interaction<sup>31</sup>. (Hjarvard, 2015: 55)

It is clear, too, for Martín-Barbero that in *communicative mediations of culture*, the “the notion of communication leaves the engineering paradigm and connects with the ‘interfaces’, with the ‘nodes’ of the interactions, with the communication-interaction, with the intermediality”<sup>32</sup> (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 153).

What he calls *intermediality* makes the difference in his analysis. It is not a concept analogous to a new form of intertextuality but a *contamination* between sounds, texts, images that are the raw materials of narrative genres – that demands a new order of knowledge and skills based on transdisciplinarity<sup>33</sup> and new forms of convergence. That is a relevant analysis but at any moment such intermediality is seen from a perspective of the paradigm of communication materiality.

For Hjarvard, this issue deserves a little more attention. For him, the materiality of communication (and its *affordances*) restricts some possible forms of social uses of new media<sup>34</sup>.

Martín-Barbero points out the risk in thinking this “technological-communicational density” from the standpoint of technological determinism or the mechanical analysis of its effects on social life. There would also be a risk of surrendering to a discourse that associates a certain technological optimism with a deep political pessimism, driven by the omnipresence and inevitability of the market logic (Martín-Barbero, 2003).

These are relevant alerts, but there are ways to escape from these pitfalls and to propose new directions for this debate.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of this article was to face some of Martín-Barbero’s efforts in the construction of a *Theory of Mediations*, at its current stage, and to create an interlocution<sup>35</sup> with studies on *New Media* and the *Materiality of Communication*.

<sup>28</sup> In the same direction, Finnemann (2011), inspired by Meyrowitz (1985), identifies five media matrices that can guide the analysis of media and “mediations” (term not used by authors): societies articulated by the predominance of orality, writing, printed forms, analog electronic media, and digital media. Each of them can be characterized by the orientation or reorientation of time and space perceptions, of their particular modes of storage, reproduction, and distribution, and of the possible perceptive and semiotic repertoires they enable. The meaning of any media can only be found within this matrix and the specific *institutionalizations* it can help produce. The particularity of the digital media – its *technicity* as an articulator of the new matrix – has very clear consequences for the understanding of *sociality*, *institutionality*, and *rituality* conditions.

<sup>29</sup> Here it is possible to see the attempt of integrating these models in a line of research: “My proposal is not to substitute one model for the other, but to try to articulate both without losing sight of the bases of the previous model, which was based on production and reception logics, cultural matrices, and industrial formats, which are more explanatory than the categories times, spaces, migrations, and flows. In my understanding, identities and cognivities can be notions embedded in both the mediation and rituality of sociality, and the concept of technicity acquires a new status in addition to mediating the relationship between the logics of production and industrial formats. Therefore, technicity can be understood in a strict sense, as the textual, narrative, or discursive aspect of the media that functions as a perceptive organizer”

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(Ronsini, 2010: 7) – in the original: “Minha proposta não é substituir um modelo pelo outro, mas tentar articular os dois sem perder de vista as bases do modelo anterior que se assentava em lógicas da produção, lógicas da recepção, matrizes culturais e formatos industriais que são mais explanatórias do que as categorias tempos, espaços, migrações e fluxos. Em meu entendimento, identidades e cognitividades podem ser noções embutidas tanto na mediação da socialidade quanto da ritualidade e o conceito de tecnicidade adquire um novo estatuto para além de mediar a relação entre as lógicas da produção e formatos industriais. Portanto, a tecnicidade pode ser compreendida em sentido estrito, como o aspecto textual, narrativo ou discursivo da mídia que funciona como organizador perceptivo”

In this sense, understanding communication, culture, and politics from mediations such as *institutionality*, *sociality*, *rituality*, and *technicality* becomes epistemologically relevant for the field of communication studies. However, the analysis of this technicalities as a *communication mediation of culture* should also consider the construction of the *communicational architectures* themselves towards a *materiality of possibilities*.

Should not the option of articulating communication, culture, and politics pass through the mediations that involve this materiality of *communicative formations*?

Although the *Theory of Mediations* has an indisputable intellectual and historical legacy, the notion of technicality proposed by Martín-Barbero in his last works opens a field for enriching the dialogue with the mentioned theories.

In the search for this interlocution, the proposed path to the debate is not so much to go *from the media to the mediations* or *from the mediations to the media* but *from mediations to mediations*, to be able to identify the communicative configurations of the culture. ■

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<sup>31</sup> In the original: “Notícias, narrativas audiovisuais e redes sociais são influenciadas pela digitalização, mas são também gêneros comunicativos ou formatos de mídia de uma ordem superior e possuem uma estrutura própria. Tais características não podem ser reduzidas à sua composição binária elementar. Mídia e gêneros são ao mesmo tempo formatos comunicativos com *affordances particulares e formas institucionalizadas de interação social*”.

<sup>32</sup> In the original: “noção de comunicação sai do paradigma da engenharia e se liga com as ‘interfaces’, com os ‘nós’ das interações, com a comunicação-interação, com a comunicação intermediada”.

<sup>33</sup> “I then prepared a document to defend, even in the Ministry of Education, the transdisciplinarity between philosophy, history, studies of language and literature. [...] However, the origins of transdisciplinarity go back to 1944, just before the end of the world war, at the MIT, when Norbert Wiener, a neuropsychologist, Arthur Rosenfeld; a psychologist, Kurt Lewin; and a young anthropologist, Gregory Bateson got together” (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 154) – in the original: “Elaborei então um documento para defender, até no Ministério da Educação, a transdisciplinaridade entre filosofia, história, estudos da linguagem e literatura. [...] Mas as origens da transdisciplinaridade remetem ao ano de 1944, um pouco antes de terminar a guerra mundial, no MIT, quando se reúnem, com Norbert Wiener, um neuropsicólogo, Arthur Rosenfeld; um psicólogo, Kurt Lewin; e um jovem antropólogo, Gregory Bateson”. Martín-Barbero is referring, probably, to the *Macy Conferences* that were a mark of the cybernetic thought. A thought that was never much welcome in the field of communication.

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<sup>34</sup>“As affordances of a media; we understand the communication and interaction possibilities that this media provides to a potential user. The user may or may not use these affordances, and may end up taking advantage of some affordances that have not been anticipated by media developers” (Hjarvard, 2015: 58) – in the original: “Por affordances de uma mídia, compreendemos as possibilidades de comunicação e interação que esta mídia proporciona a um usuário potencial. O usuário pode fazer ou não uso dessas affordances, e pode terminar tirando vantagem de algumas affordances que não foram antecipadas pelos desenvolvedores da mídia”. Gentikow (2015) rescues the notion of “architecture of communication” proposed by Holmes (2005). See also Meyrowitz (1985), and Finnemann (2011), cited above.

<sup>35</sup>These stresses were exposed in the footnotes so that the thought of Martín-Barbero would have the required highlight. About this option, see: Waizbort (1997).

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