



## Editorial

**T**HE DEATH OF Jesús Martín-Barbero, in June of this year, mourned the field of Communication, especially, the Latin American academic community. Spanish by birth, Martín-Barbero became Latin American by choice and managed to build, in deep dialogue with individuals and the reality of this region, a work with seminal and remarkable contributions to communication studies, being the formulator and main author of the so-called *Latin American theory of mediations*.

With the relevance of Jesús Martín-Barbero, the Editorial Committee of **MATRIZes** did not hesitate in, already in this issue, dedicating our tribute to him in an intermediate section of the journal.

Martín-Barbero was also an extraordinary builder of reflective networks that stimulated Latin American theory and research – and a regional perspective on these activities – with a strong dialogue with Brazilian researchers. Therefore, in this tribute, we published a text written by him, unpublished in Portuguese and English, whose title is **What Latin American Communication Research Owes to Brazil: Personal Account of an Intercultural Experience**, originally a conference held by the author at the congress of the Brazilian Society for the Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication (INTERCOM), in 1997.

To serve as an introduction to this text, Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, director of **MATRIZes** and permanent representative of Martín-Barbero, makes considerations about the work and the author.

We continue our tribute with a series of testimonies about Jesús Martín-Barbero that highlight the burgeoning role of his ideas. Organized by Ana Carolina Escosteguy, Raúl Fuentes Navarro and Isabel Ferin Cunha, these accounts were

made by eminent researchers, from different generations, Brazilians – Muniz Sodré, Renato Ortiz, Nilda Jacks and Simone Maria Rocha – Latin Americans – Eduardo Gutiérrez, Carlos A. Scolari, Omar Rincón and Néstor García Canclini –, Europeans and United Statesian – Manuel Pinto, Margarita Ledo Andión and Joseph Straubhaar. We are grateful to all these colleagues who responded promptly to the request of **MATRIZes**.

We are even more grateful to the author here honored, with the certainty that the promise of the “*field with a great future*” (Fuentes Navarro, 1991) of communication research in Latin America was fulfilled and projects itself, today, in other futures. The role of Jesús Martín-Barbero was fundamental. Therefore, we wish a long life to the legacy of this essential author.

Somehow the **Dossier** of this issue reinforces the referred relevance of research in Latin American communication by bringing authors from this region or themes about it. Thus, the article **Metaevent: Media, Networks, and Citizens in the Pandemic**, by Raúl Trejo Delarbre, reflects on the current pandemic, seen as a *metaevent* that generates countless information that goes through the entire communication ecosystem. The author seeks to discuss the characteristics of the *metaevent* and its consequences for the journalistic coverage of the professional media, as well as the intense production, circulation, and appropriation of content made by ordinary people.

The following three articles of the **Dossier** bring contributions to audiovisual studies. **Lucrecia’s Step Back: Discursive Disputes Between Films, and TV Series**, by Marcel Silva, addresses a critical observation made by Argentine filmmaker Lucrecia Martel concerning recent television series in order to discuss the continuing tensions between film and television, problematizing arguments that affirm, aprioristically, the superiority of the film in relation to the series. On the other hand, **Towards a Transnational Approach to Latin American Television: Journeys, Borders, and Centers, and Peripheries**, by Nahuel Ribke, presents an innovative proposal of a *historical transnational approach* for the studies on television in Latin America. As the author exemplifies in the work, this perspective helps to understand patterns and challenges related to the production and consumption of television works in the region. Then, Sílvio Antonio Luiz Anaz, in **Archetype and Catharsis in Audiovisual Narratives**, conducts a study on the role of archetype in catharsis in audiovisual narratives when it operates as an emotional trigger, evidencing this characteristic in audiovisual productions.

The last article of the section, **Middle Range Theory in Communication: Constitutive, Elements for a Communication Approach as Culture**, by Gustavo Adolfo León-Duarte, continues the discussions about the role of medium-range theories in communication, discussing implications of the construction of such a theory in the field.

Contemporary themes characterize the first two articles of the section **Agenda**. Thus, misinformation is addressed in the work **Disinformation About Gender and, Sexuality and the Disputes Over the Limits of Morality**, by Thales Vilela Lelo and Lorena Caminhas, in which the authors analyze fake news and rumors, noting the importance of sexuality and gender issues in this type of production, and Leonardo De Marchi, in **Financial Capital Goes to Heaven: Bitcoin, Fintech 3.0 and the Massification of the Indebted Man**, analyzes the Bitcoin, the best-known cryptocurrency, thought of as a media whose creation involved libertarian values, but, related to fintech 3.0, promotes the logic of the indebted man.

In the article that continues the section, **Black Press and Citizenship: Contents of *Correio Nagô*, *Mundo Negro* and *Nação Z***, Valmir Teixeira de Araujo and Cicilia Maria Krohling Peruzzo discuss the production of the black press in Brazil today, reflecting on how the elaborated contents dialogue with concepts of citizenship and black citizenship.


Closing the section **Agenda** of this issue, the article **Conservatism and Toxic Masculinity in Gamer Culture: An Approach to *Magic: The Gathering***, by Thiago Falcão, Tarcízio Macedo and Gabriela Kurtz, analyzes, from ethnographic data, spaces of conviviality related to the game mentioned in the title, suggesting that the observed behaviors reinforce conservative values in the community of players.

The text of Leticia Cantarela Matheus and Maria Cristina Guimarães Rosa do Amaral, **Research Lore and Vanguard, in Communication Studies**, which closes this edition, is a review of the book *Comunicação e Método: Cenário e Práticas de Pesquisa*, by Marialva Barbosa, highlighting aspects of the work, such as methodological trends in communication research pointed out by the author.

Before concluding this **Editorial**, we inform you that the next issue of **MATRIZES** will be a special edition dedicated to Paulo Freire, in his centenary of birth, with contributions that discuss different aspects of the legacy of this also essential author. The issue is being organized by Ana Cristina Suzina and Thomas Tufte, both from Loughborough University, and Adilson Odair Citelli,

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from the University of São Paulo. The fact that Freire was one of the influences of Jesús Martín-Barbero, as can be observed in the author's text in the edition, proves the commitment of **MATRIZes** to Latin American communication thinking and its consequences.

We wish everyone enjoy this new edition of **MATRIZes**.

## REFERENCES

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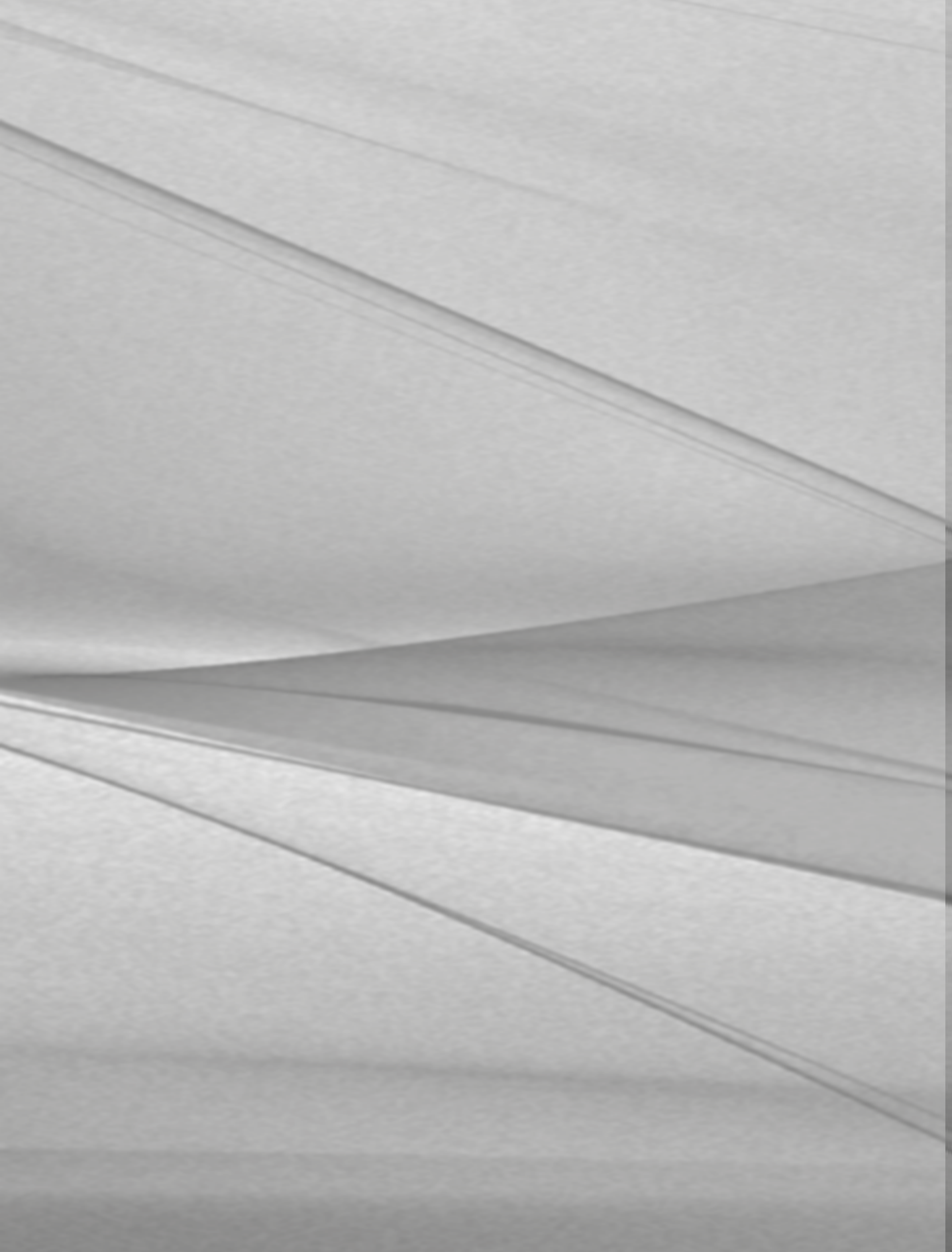
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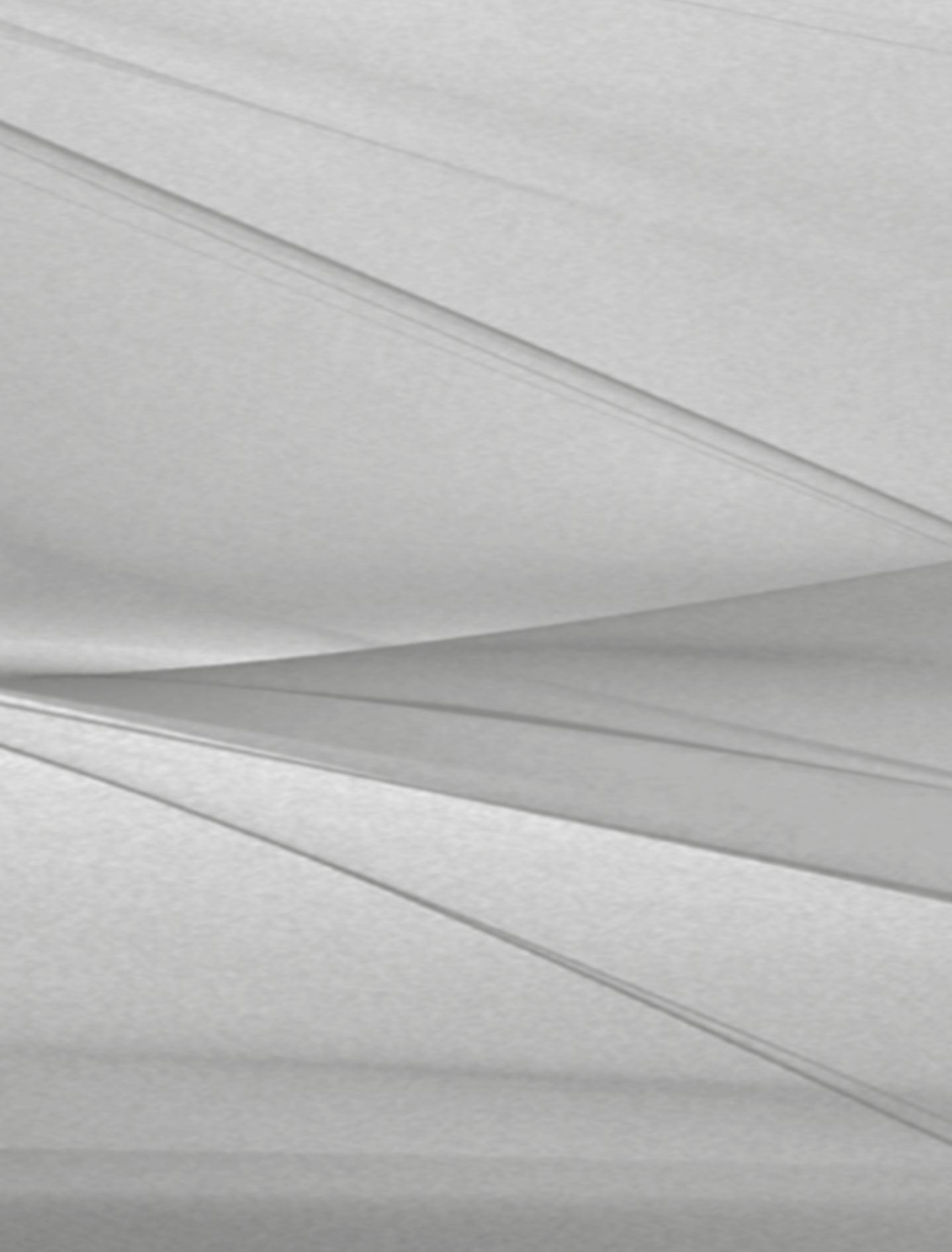
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# DOSIÊ

*Novas Perspectivas em Teorias da Comunicação*





# Metaevento. Medios, redes y ciudadanos en la pandemia

## *Metaevent: Media, networks and citizens in the pandemic*

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### RESUMEN

La pandemia es planetaria. No tiene una fecha precisa de inicio, ni tendrá una fecha de conclusión. No es un acontecimiento sino un metaevento. La realidad del metaevento se nos impone y propicia un sinnúmero de informaciones que transitan por todo el ecosistema comunicacional. En este artículo se discuten rasgos del metaevento, así como sus consecuencias en la cobertura periodística de los medios profesionales, en su intensa y contradictoria propagación en redes sociodigitales y en las apropiaciones que las personas hacemos de esa información de la cual somos destinatarios, pero también protagonistas.

**Palabras-chave:** Metaevento, pandemia y medios, ecosistema comunicacional, COVID-19

### ABSTRACT

The pandemic is planetary. It does not have a precise start date, nor will it have an end date. It is not an event but a metaevent. The reality of the metaevent imposes itself on us and provides countless information that travels through the entire communication ecosystem. This article discusses features of the metaevent, as well as its consequences in the journalistic coverage of professional media, in its intense and contradictory propagation in the social media and in the appropriations that people make of that information of which we are recipients, but also protagonists.

**Keywords:** Metaevent, pandemic and media, communicational ecosystem, COVID-19

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**T**ODAS LAS NOCHES, durante meses, me asomé a los datos de la pandemia. Los nuevos casos de infecciones, la suma de los fallecidos, las camas de hospital disponibles y las que ya no alcanzaban fueron parte de la información cotidiana que visitaba en línea. Esa era mi manera de apreciar el bosque en llamas que suscitó el SARS-CoV2. Algunos de sus árboles, los más cercanos, los miraba en las noticias de amigos que eran víctimas de la enfermedad, en las vicisitudes de familiares cercanos que en la fase más difícil de la epidemia sufrían por la escasez de tanques y concentradores de oxígeno, en la incertidumbre ante la epidemia que desbordaba todas las previsiones y se prolongó mucho más de lo que inicialmente imaginamos. Igual que aquellas cifras de víctimas e infraestructura sanitaria, las imágenes de la pandemia cambiaban y azoraban de maneras distintas cada día. Las redes sociodigitales traían versiones remotas, pero que nos resultaban próximas porque se emparentaban con nuestra propia cotidianidad, de personas que sufrían y de otras que expresaban su esperanza.

Cada día, las escenas de la pandemia que se han reemplazado unas a otras son fragmentos de una misma historia –el relato poliédrico e inasible de esta calamidad global– y son a su vez episodios que tienen valor específico. La pandemia es una colección desmesurada e inaprensible de acontecimientos. No es solamente un hecho histórico, sino la catástrofe de consecuencias extendidas espacial y temporalmente que acota a una época. La pandemia no está delimitada a un territorio ni a una región, es planetaria. La pandemia además no tiene una fecha precisa de inicio, ni tendrá una fecha de conclusión. La pandemia no es un acontecimiento sino un metaevento.

### **UNA CATÁSTROFE QUE NO ESTÁ ANCLADA A UNA FECHA CONCRETA**

Un hecho histórico tiene plazos y alcances precisos, aunque muchos de ellos sólo se pueden aquilatar con la distancia que da al tiempo. El asesinato de John F. Kennedy en Dallas en noviembre de 1963, la llegada de dos astronautas a la Luna en julio de 1969 o la destrucción de las Torres Gemelas en septiembre de 2001 fueron hechos tan impactantes que quienes vivíamos en esos años recordamos qué estábamos haciendo cuando ocurrieron. Para los historiadores, el hecho histórico “es aquel acontecimiento que cobra significación dentro de un todo, para lo cual requiere no sólo ser conocido, sino también ser trascendente y estar ubicado en un marco de referencias” (De la Garza, 1991, p. 40). Es decir, el hecho histórico, para serlo, requiere contexto que permita situarlo y distancia para aquilatarlo. Desde el punto de vista de la sociología los hechos sociales, como

estableció la bien conocida definición de Durkheim (1895/1986), “consisten en modos de actuar, de pensar y de sentir, exteriores al individuo, y están dotados de un poder de coacción en virtud del cual se imponen sobre él” (p. 41). De acuerdo con esa perspectiva el hecho social acota a la persona, tiene un carácter coercitivo o inevitable y no depende de la subjetividad del individuo.

En cambio la pandemia la experimentamos como un hecho definitorio, que desordena y modifica muchas cosas, independientemente de la intensidad que sus efectos hayan tenido para cada uno de nosotros. Sabemos desde ahora que reviste implicaciones históricas, tanto en nuestras biografías personales como en la evolución de nuestras sociedades. La pandemia nos impone consecuencias de carácter compulsivo y objetivo pero además sus efectos los apreciamos, o padecemos, de acuerdo con nuestras circunstancias y subjetividades.

La pandemia no sólo se prolonga por meses y años sino que su temporalidad, cualquiera que llegue a ser, no está anclada a una fecha concreta. Ahora mismo, y en el futuro, cada uno de nosotros tendrá sus propias memorias de la epidemia de acuerdo con las maneras como nos haya afectado, siempre ubicadas en las consecuencias que el coronavirus habrá tenido para nuestra familia y nuestro entorno, nuestros países y nuestra época, el mundo y su historia. Igual que los hechos que la conforman, la pandemia se expande en círculos concéntricos que trascienden coordenadas cronológicas y geográficas. Es más que un hecho histórico y mucho más que un acontecimiento. A la pandemia, por ello, la denominamos metaevento.

Un metaevento solamente se puede apreciar a partir de una suma de experiencias. De la pandemia tendremos el recuerdo de nuestras zozobras y de las de aquellos que nos rodean, pero también el amplísimo bagaje de informaciones que habremos conocido acerca de ella.

La pandemia nos ha afectado a todos. Nadie se ha podido sustraer a la amenaza, al miedo, en muchos casos a la enfermedad, que trajo el virus SARS-CoV2. En términos sanitarios y económicos ha ocasionado un desastre. Nuestras sociedades, y el mundo entero, en buena medida quedaron en pausa durante los meses más difíciles; la aprensión ante nuevas oleadas de contagios se mantendrá largo tiempo.

De la pandemia en 2020 y 2021 hemos tenido información, reflejos y contrastes en los medios de comunicación convencionales y, de manera constante, también en las redes sociodigitales. Durante la dilatada temporada en la que muchos hemos estado confinados –y siempre y cuando contáramos con recursos económicos e infraestructura técnica para conectarnos desde nuestros hogares– vivimos la pandemia en y a través de pantallas digitales. Hemos reemplazado, aunque sea de manera parcial, nuestras prácticas de

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trabajo, intercambio y socialización por la comunicación en la computadora, el celular y las tabletas. En ellos nos hemos encontrado con colegas y amigos, intensificamos el entretenimiento, el comercio y otras actividades en línea y, desde luego, nos hemos enterado del desarrollo de la pandemia misma. Nuestros dispositivos conectados a la Red no han sustituido –o no del todo– a los medios de comunicación convencionales, pero se han convertido en canales de interacción con toda índole de tareas y personas. Los miedos e incertidumbres que ha suscitado la pandemia los hemos replicado y expresado, pero también hemos podido atemperarlos y compartirlos, a través de nuestras redes sociodigitales.

Hemos estado ante la primera epidemia difundida de manera intensa por redes de Internet, a la vez que en los medios de comunicación tradicionales. De otras epidemias, como la de influenza que padecemos en 2009, se habló mucho en línea pero las redes digitales no tenían la cobertura ni la presencia pública que alcanzan una década más tarde. Para el historiador John Keane (2020) la omnipresencia de medios y redes diferencia a esta pandemia

de, digamos, las gripes rusa y española, de las que se informaba y que se publicitaban por medio del vehículo lento de los mensajes de telégrafo, los barcos de vapor y los periódicos. Nuestra pandemia, en cambio, es un acontecimiento velocísimo y global que produce miedos de enfermedad y muerte a una escala que nunca antes se había visto. (p. 11)

### **AL ACONTECIMIENTO SE LE CONSTRUYE, EL METAEVENTO SE IMPONE**

Las redes asentadas en internet ya no son un ámbito paralelo, ni complementario, al que constituyen los medios de comunicación tradicionales. Televisión, radio y prensa son emisores con prácticas de producción y mecanismos de transmisión manejados por pocas personas y que difunden mensajes hacia muchas más. Debido a esas características los denominamos *medios de comunicación concentrados*.

Los medios digitales tienen distintos grados de concentración en la producción de sus mensajes pero por lo general admiten la retroalimentación instantánea con sus audiencias y, sobre todo, difunden sus contenidos de manera reticular. Esos contenidos se propagan en un enjambre constituido por nodos que los replican de uno a otro. Por eso a la prensa digital y sobre todo a redes como Twitter, Facebook, YouTube e Instagram, entre muchas otras, las denominamos *medios de comunicación descentrados*.

Unos y otros, medios concentrados y descentrados, forman parte del *ecosistema comunicacional* que acapara la circulación de mensajes de toda índole en nuestras sociedades. Se trata de un ecosistema definido por la desigualdad, la irradiación, la omnipresencia, la ubicuidad, la velocidad, la volatilidad y la convergencia, entre otros rasgos con los cuales caracterizamos hace tres lustros a internet y la sociedad de la información (Trejo Delarbre, 2006).

El acontecimiento, particularmente el acontecimiento noticioso, es propio de los medios concentrados. Esos medios recaban, verifican (o deberían hacerlo), jerarquizan y publican los contenidos noticiosos. Cada vez más las noticias circulan antes en redes sociodigitales como Twitter y de allí son tomadas por los medios convencionales. La noticia, entendida de acuerdo a los cánones del periodismo, es un “hecho o acontecimiento verdadero, inédito y actual, de interés general, que se comunica a un público masivo” (López de Suazo Algar, 1990, p. 38). Esa definición no se cumple en el caso de numerosas informaciones que se repiten, o que están lejos de ser de interés general, y que suelen ocupar amplios espacios en publicaciones digitales en busca de clicks por parte de sus lectores. La noticia, al menos de manera ideal, responde a las conocidas cinco cuestiones que plantea el periodismo: qué, quién, cuándo, cómo y por qué.

La cobertura noticiosa acerca de la pandemia se desenvuelve en un flujo constante de informaciones que van de los panoramas amplios, nacionales o globales, a las vivencias de personas concretas, en casos emblemáticos pero que son diferentes unos de otros. Con frecuencia las noticias del metaevento han señalado el qué y el cuándo, en ocasiones el quién se difumina sobre todo cuando se trata de personas cuya notoriedad se deriva del padecimiento que sufren ellas o sus allegados y el por qué se sobreentiende porque la causa es el virus.

En los medios concentrados el acontecimiento es modelado a partir de decisiones y enfoques editoriales. En su conocido libro que describe cómo se informó acerca del accidente en la planta nuclear de Three Mile Island en Estados Unidos, Eliseo Verón (1983) subrayó que al acontecimiento se le construye: “Los acontecimientos sociales no son objetos que se encuentran ya hechos en alguna parte de la realidad y cuyas propiedades y avatares nos son dados a conocer de inmediato por los medios con mayor o menor fidelidad” (p. II). Los acontecimientos surgen de la realidad pero son presentados como noticia de acuerdo con el tratamiento, o los tratamientos, que les adjudican los medios. Cada medio selecciona la perspectiva desde la cual mirará y describirá tales hechos, el entorno en el que los ubicará, la manera como serán presentados a sus públicos.

**MIL NOMBRES EN UNA PRIMERA PLANA. OTRA PORTADA, EN BLANCO**

En el metaevento la capacidad de los medios para privilegiar un enfoque u otro no desaparece pero queda enmarcada, a su vez, por la contundencia del acontecimiento. Las personas ya saben que hay una epidemia. Ese tema central, que es el eje del metaevento, ya no es noticia. Lo son, en cambio, y las personas tienen un vehemente interés en ellas, las informaciones que dan cuenta de cómo se extiende la epidemia, cómo afecta a otros, qué implicaciones puede tener para ellas y sus familias, etcétera. La pandemia es el hecho esencial que sigue allí durante meses o años y los medios reportan cómo va cambiando y qué implicaciones alcanza. El protagonista del metaevento es la pandemia pero a fin de aprehenderla indagamos sus efectos en comunidades, personas y momentos específicos.

Ese acontecimiento es el mismo y, a la vez, cambia constantemente. Su propagación y las maneras como nos envuelve las conocemos y experimentamos con mayor intensidad debido a las informaciones que nos traen constantemente las redes sociodigitales. De la pandemia, en las redes, somos espectadores y víctimas, públicos y protagonistas, todo a la vez. Permanecemos saturados pero a la vez ávidos ante la incesante catarata de mensajes que recibimos acerca del metaevento. Se trata de demasiados contenidos, que nos permiten informarnos pero que a la vez nos dejan obnubilados. A menudo, en estos días de pandemia, nos confundimos en ese torbellino de informaciones y de pronto olvidamos la fuente de una noticia que nos llama la atención, o entreveramos un hecho con otro. Nos resulta difícil jerarquizar las informaciones que, mezcladas, escuchamos en la radio, miramos en Twitter, atisbamos en la prensa y recibimos y además reenviamos a otros en WhatsApp. En esa vorágine de datos, hechos y casos tenemos dificultades para determinar si esas informaciones son verdaderas.

Las noticias de la pandemia documentan y propician, y a la vez retroalimentan, nuestra ansiedad. Sabemos que estamos atiborrados de cifras, relatos y diagnósticos de la pandemia pero necesitamos más. Las circunstancias de esta crisis cambian a cada momento pero, además, consumimos noticias sobre ese tema y sus derivaciones como si la acumulación informativa nos permitiera apreciar sus descomunales dimensiones.

Los medios profesionales se esmeran para comunicarnos el tamaño y los alcances de una pandemia que rebasó a gobiernos, instituciones y sociedades. El 24 de mayo de 2020, cuando los muertos por COVID-19 en Estados Unidos estaban por llegar a 100 mil, *The New York Times* (NYT) ocupó toda su primera plana con los nombres de un millar de esas víctimas. No había imágenes, sino una sucesión de nombres y apellidos acompañados de una frase alusiva a la persona fallecida. Por ejemplo:

Floy Cardoz, 59, Montclair, N.J., chef indio de delicada cocina. Kious Kelly, 48, Ciudad de Nueva York, enfermera en la batalla contra el Covid. Romi Cohn, 91, Ciudad de Nueva York, salvó a 56 familias judías de la Gestapo. Kenneth R. Going, 87, Grafton, Wis., tuvo boletos para la temporada de los Green Bay Packers durante 50 años. . .

Con referencias como esas, aquella primera plana del *NYT* publicó los nombres apenas del uno por ciento de las 100 mil víctimas que, para esas fechas, alcanzaba el coronavirus en ese país. Fue una manera directa y sencilla para dar dimensión humana a una tragedia que, más allá de los números, implica nombres, apellidos, biografías (Grippe, 2020).

Un recurso inverso al anterior fue el que utilizó *Folha de S.Paulo* el 20 de junio de 2021 cuando, según las cifras oficiales, en Brasil se registraba medio millón de fallecidos por la pandemia. El diario publicó su portada en blanco, con una leyenda en la parte inferior que decía:

#### **¿HASTA CUÁNDO VAMOS A MORIR?**

SI UNA PORTADA VACÍA CAUSA INCOMODIDAD, IMAGINEN EL  
DOLOR QUE CAUSA EL VACÍO EN LAS FAMILIAS DE LOS 500 MIL  
BRASILEÑOS QUE PERDIERON LA VIDA POR EL COVID-19

El metaevento es inconmensurable. Para narrarlo se pueden acumular centenares de nombres, como homenaje a la vez que para humanizar las dimensiones de la tragedia. O se puede acudir al grito silencioso de la portada en blanco. Los dos diarios que mencionamos no ofrecieron noticias en esas portadas. Los lectores ya sabían que primero en Estados Unidos, y luego en Brasil, se estaba llegando a cantidades enormes y emblemáticas de víctimas por la pandemia. Esas portadas no informaban pero sí dieron sentido a la noticia que todos conocían y subrayaron que, más allá de las ominosas cifras, lo más grave era el costo en vidas humanas de una pandemia que seguía descontrolada.

#### **UN INMENSO PUZZLE DE VERSIONES E INTERPRETACIONES**

Si los medios concentrados nos dan el panorama siempre incompleto, pero a la vez siempre cambiante de la pandemia con todo y sus novedades, en las redes sociodigitales encontramos versiones que ratifican la impresión que ya tenemos de ella. Quienes en los primeros meses de la epidemia estuvimos esperanzados en el desarrollo de la ciencia para diseñar vacunas contra el Covid-19, encontramos en Facebook centenares o millares de informaciones que

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coincidían con esa apreciación. Quienes, en cambio, desconfían de las vacunas y las consideran resultado de conspiraciones para manipularnos, también pudieron hallar muros de esa red que alimentan la paranoia y los infundios. En las redes sociodigitales, como mucho se ha explicado, construimos ambientes en donde retroalimentamos nuestros conocimientos, pero también nuestros prejuicios, con personas de convicciones similares a las nuestras.

Las redes sociodigitales nos envuelven con informaciones que reafirman lo que ya creemos, queremos o pensamos. Nuestras elecciones y amigos en esas redes son una suerte de filtros que nos colocamos delante de los ojos para mirar de una u otra manera a la realidad, o para disimularla. Si consideramos, apoyados en el conocimiento científico, que tras la pandemia hay destellos de esperanza y hemos buscado información de acuerdo con ese punto de vista, Facebook y otras redes nos ofrecerán contenidos de ese tono. Si lo que más nos inquieta es la tragedia, hallaremos millares de textos e imágenes coincidentes con ese ángulo de la pandemia. En la era de la información y las burbujas autorreferenciales, apreciamos al metaevento con las lentes que hemos configurado en las redes sociodigitales.

Sobre la pandemia se habrán dicho, producido, escrito o trazado millares de contenidos noticiosos. Ninguna información reúne todos los rasgos del metaevento. Cada noticia, y cada versión que conocemos, son piezas distintas de un enorme rompecabezas que cada uno de nosotros ensambla de acuerdo con la información que conoce pero, además, según sus creencias y expectativas. El metaevento es un inmenso y cambiante puzzle de hechos, versiones e interpretaciones.

### **DIEZ RASGOS DEL METAEVENTO**

En las siguientes páginas mencionamos algunas peculiaridades del metaevento y de sus implicaciones para la comunicación social y especialmente para la práctica periodística. No se trata de una enumeración exhaustiva sino de rasgos que pueden ampliarse, y complementarse con otros, conforme avance el estudio de los efectos mediáticos, y en las redes, que ha tenido la pandemia.

1) *Las noticias del metaevento se propagan y reconfiguran al transitar de un espacio a otro.* Las informaciones de la pandemia recorren todo el ecosistema comunicacional y, de un ámbito a otro, son corroboradas, ampliadas o desmentidas. Muchas de ellas surgen de medios concentrados y abiertos (televisión, prensa, radio) y de allí son recuperadas en redes sociodigitales. Pero otras informaciones y versiones más se originan en espacios semi abiertos como Facebook, Twitter



o TikTok, que requieren de una afiliación previa y a la que tienen acceso los usuarios de cada una de esas redes.

Al mismo tiempo, la pandemia y sus consecuencias se difunden por espacios privados como las redes de mensajería al estilo de WhatsApp o Telegram. En estas últimas circulan las versiones más personales, pero también las más disparatadas acerca de la epidemia. Los mensajes en ellas no siempre transitan a redes semi abiertas, o a medios abiertos, en donde las noticias falsas pueden ser identificadas y esclarecidas. En las redes de mensajería privada se propalan contenidos recuperados o producidos por usuarios que los envían a sus conocidos y amigos entre quienes, por lo general, no hay ánimo o información suficientes para corregirles errores o apreciaciones falsas.

Los medios abiertos y semi abiertos se equilibran unos a otros. La prensa puede verificar y aclarar informaciones engañosas, o imprecisas, que circulan en redes como Twitter o YouTube. Y por otra parte, tanto en la pandemia como en otras circunstancias, en las redes sociodigitales hay usuarios que corrigen errores de los medios profesionales. En el transcurso del metaevento se ha fortalecido un funcional e informal sistema de contrapesos entre medios concentrados y descentrados. Por muy absurdas que parezcan, hay personas dispuestas a creer que las antenas para 5G aumentan el riesgo de contraer Covid-19. Ante esas versiones siempre surgen especialistas que publican aclaraciones en las mismas redes sociodigitales y medios profesionales que también desmienten tales falsedades (Lee, 2020).

Las informaciones sobre la pandemia pasan de un espacio a otro, se complementan recíprocamente y a menudo se reconfiguran en ese tránsito. En tales procesos, como se insistirá más adelante, las personas eligen y toman decisiones sobre la credibilidad que confieren a cada información.

2) *Al metaevento se le observa desde emplazamientos múltiples.* Los acontecimientos noticiosos son difundidos, especialmente por los medios concentrados, con ostensibles despliegues periodísticos y técnicos. En una guerra, por ejemplo, los corresponsales son observadores directos de las batallas, en ocasiones con riesgo de sus vidas. Cuando desarrollan un estilo propio, o sus indagaciones develan asuntos muy relevantes, los periodistas pueden alcanzar tanta notoriedad que se convierten en celebridades. Robert Fisk, Ryszard Kapuscinski o Christiane Amanpour, entre tantos otros, han sido personajes mediáticos porque han comunicado conflictos bélicos con una mirada peculiar, distinta a la de otros enviados.

El metaevento, en cambio, no tiene narradores esenciales. Hay quienes en la pandemia hacen trabajos de investigación o de crónica periodísticas con muchos méritos, pero ninguna voz reemplaza al coro de copiosas expresiones

que constantemente describe algunos de sus inagotables aspectos. Al metaevento se le narra con múltiples voces, entre las cuales están las de todos nosotros.

3) *El tiempo es líquido en los relatos del metaevento.* A los acontecimientos por lo general se les describe en narraciones que van de principio a fin. Incluso las noticias de hechos que no han concluido pueden ser actualizadas, y completadas, en el periódico o el telediario del día siguiente. El metaevento en cambio, como señalamos antes, no tiene una temporalidad precisa. No comenzó en un día y una hora específicos, no habrá una fecha exacta en la que terminará.

Las narraciones del metaevento son casi todas en presente. El pasado del metaevento es demasiado reciente y el futuro está cargado de incertidumbres. Los ejes cronológicos en tales relatos, sobre todo los de carácter noticioso, se mantienen abiertos. Por eso podemos emplear la conocida fórmula de Zygmunt Bauman (2007) y reconocer el carácter líquido del tiempo en el metaevento y por lo tanto en sus narraciones. En el metaevento la realidad es volátil y el tiempo –igual que la propagación del virus– transcurre sin pausas ni treguas.

Las sociedades y las personas estamos acostumbradas a tener fechas en las que conmemoramos episodios significativos. Esas fechas (para *con-memorar*) son asideros del recuerdo y nos permiten hacer balances e interpretaciones de lo que ha sucedido. Para fijar aunque sea de manera simbólica al metaevento que es la pandemia, los medios y las instituciones establecen fechas emblemáticas: el día que se supo de la primera persona infectada en un país, o las semanas cuando la curva estadística de enfermos o fallecidos llegó a niveles determinados. Esas fechas hacen las veces de boyas en el mar: marcan espacios, o momentos, que es preciso reconocer pero son diferentes de un lugar a otro, de un país a otro.

La liquidez del tiempo en el metaevento es parte de la ausencia de certezas. Bauman escribió una gran cantidad de libros sobre la liquidez en la que se diluyen las seguridades de la modernidad, pero el que se titula *Tiempos Líquidos* (Bauman, 2007) está dedicado a las incertidumbres de la época contemporánea.

4) *El metaevento nos circunda y condiciona a la realidad.* La pandemia disloca nuestras realidades cotidianas, las pone en insoslayable pausa y ocasiona cambios que llegan a ser drásticos. Por lo general los acontecimientos relevantes, por mucho que nos conmuevan, no alteran sustancialmente nuestras vidas. La pandemia, en cambio, sí. Las noticias son parte de una realidad que experimentamos fundamentalmente como espectadores.

Los medios de comunicación, como recordamos antes, enmarcan a los acontecimientos con los formatos, criterios y agendas que utilizan y ponen en práctica. El ya citado Verón (1983) insistía: “Los medios informativos son el lugar en donde las sociedades industriales producen nuestra realidad” (p. II). En la pandemia nos encontramos ante una realidad que, antes que nada, excede

las capacidades de los medios para rehuirla o magnificarla. Por supuesto cada medio impone énfasis variados, de acuerdo con sus cánones profesionales y mercantiles. Pero la del metaevento es una realidad que los medios no producen, aunque la reproduzcan de tan diversas maneras. La imposibilidad de los medios para producir a sus anchas esa realidad se debe también a la capacidad de propagación de las redes sociodigitales.

Verón (1983) se refería a la sociedad industrial, en donde la hegemonía en el espacio público la tenían los medios de comunicación concentrados. Cuatro décadas más tarde tenemos una sociedad digital (más allá de las brechas tecnológicas que la limitan) en donde la capacidad de los medios para moldear las versiones de los acontecimientos se encuentra limitada por espacios fluidos, abiertos y envolventes como las redes sociodigitales. Esa interacción entre medios concentrados y descentrados se advierte con mayor énfasis en el metaevento.

5) *Tratamientos noticiosos cargados de subjetividad.* Uno de los valores cardinales en el periodismo –de acuerdo con una apreciación muy generalizada aunque discutible– es la objetividad. El periodismo anglosajón, y por extensión el que se ha practicado en América Latina, hizo de la objetividad una de sus divisas más importantes. La noticia, se ha insistido, hay que comunicarla de la manera más objetiva posible, sin sesgos ni intencionalidades. El periodismo objetivo se postula como el que permite que las sociedades se enteren sin matices de los acontecimientos para que, entonces, cada ciudadano defina sus opiniones ante ellos.

Por supuesto es deseable que los sesgos que imponen las preferencias y los intereses, tanto de los periodistas como de las empresas noticiosas, no desplacen ni condicionen a la información y que se den a conocer los distintos ángulos que hay en cada noticia. Pero a menudo se olvida que la objetividad absoluta no existe. Cada medio de información, o cada reportero o editor, le imponen a la noticia un tratamiento que privilegia algunos aspectos y soslaya otros.

En el metaevento se intensifica la subjetividad inherente a las noticias. Ese acontecimiento nos afecta con tanta fuerza a todos nosotros que, al relatar algunas de sus facetas, es inevitable –o casi– que los periodistas impregnen sus relatos de una carga de subjetividad. Inclusive para interesar a sus audiencias que ya tienen una apreciación subjetiva sobre el metaevento –que les afecta de muchas maneras– los medios acuden a los relatos personalizados que muestran las consecuencias de ese hecho, en este caso la pandemia, en personas concretas.

6) *En el metaevento se acentúa la confusión entre información falsa y verdadera.* Las noticias falsas siempre han existido. En los años recientes se han propalado con más velocidad en las redes sociodigitales y alcanzan verosimilitud cuando concuerdan con la idea que las personas tienen de un acontecimiento. La posverdad ha sido descrita como una expresión que “denota circunstancias en

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las cuales los hechos objetivos tienen menos influencia en la conformación de la opinión pública que los llamados a la emoción y las creencias personales” (Flood, 2016). Tal definición, que el Diccionario Oxford consagró cuando se comenzaba a hablar de ese término, se queda corta porque la posverdad es una plaga suscitada por el empleo desprevenido que mucha gente hace de las redes sociodigitales. La posverdad es el reemplazo de hechos objetivos por versiones falsas que adquieren credibilidad entre personas que, en redes sociodigitales, atienden a mensajes que coinciden con sus prejuicios.

En los acontecimientos unidimensionales hay hechos ciertos que se confunden con rumores y suposiciones. Por lo general los medios de comunicación concentrados, en donde trabajan periodistas profesionales, atestiguan o indagan esos hechos para aclararlos o corroborarlos. Después de que en 1969 llegaron los primeros astronautas a la Luna hubo quienes dijeron que aquel viaje espacial había sido un engaño de la NASA. En la tripulación de la Apollo 11 no viajaban periodistas pero sí los hubo en el despegue en Florida, en el Centro Espacial en Houston y en la cobertura de aquel acontecimiento. Siempre habrá personas que quieran creer que aquel alunizaje no ocurrió pero abundan los relatos científicos y sólidamente documentados de esa travesía espacial.

En el metaevento que ha sido la pandemia los medios de comunicación han tenido un desempeño fundamental, primero para dar a conocer el brote y la expansión del virus y luego, durante las oleadas de contagios, para publicar explicaciones y avisos de las autoridades, avances en la investigación científica sobre el Covid-19, el estado de la infraestructura médica y muchas de las vicisitudes en nuestras sociedades. Hemos conocido una gran cantidad de hechos reportados y legitimados por los medios. Pero junto a ellos, también se ha difundido una gran cantidad de mentiras.

Muchas personas buscan explicaciones no científicas ante la pandemia. El fanatismo, las supercherías y los deseos de creer en soluciones mágicas a una tragedia que en algunos momentos desbordó a nuestras instituciones y sociedades conduce mucha gente a propagar noticias de remedios providenciales, conspiraciones infames o de catástrofes sanitarias mayores a las que han ocurrido. Una gran cantidad de esas versiones circulan en redes como WhatsApp y, como señalamos antes, no siempre son aclaradas por las instituciones estatales o por los medios de comunicación.

Hay versiones falsas, incluso con tintes de seudociencia o en ocasiones abiertamente enfrentadas con la ciencia, que son difundidas por personajes que tienen responsabilidades públicas e institucionales. Nos referimos a gobernantes de varios países que han elogiado las capacidades curativas de

supuestos remedios para el Covid-19, o se han expresado en contra de medidas sanitarias indispensables.

Los presidentes Donald Trump en Estados Unidos, Jair Bolsonaro en Brasil y Andrés Manuel López Obrador en México, fueron algunos de los gobernantes que desorientaron a sus sociedades con un discurso que mentía en al menos tres aspectos. En primer lugar desdeñaron la gravedad de la pandemia: durante meses se negaron a reconocer que era una crisis global y que afectaría intensamente a sus países. Todavía en los momentos de más contagios, intentaban restarle importancia. En segundo término, esos y otros gobernantes promovieron el uso de medicamentos de eficacia no demostrada o incluso de remedios mágicos (Trump y Bolsonaro recomendaron sustancias que contienen cloro y López Obrador dijo que la pandemia podría enfrentarse con estampitas religiosas). En tercer lugar, se negaron a promover acciones necesarias como el empleo del cubrebocas. Milán y Treré (2020) consideran que tanto López Obrador como Bolsonaro se aprovecharon de “narrativas distorsionadas movilizadas al servicio de agendas populistas” (p. 2).

La coincidencia de esos y otros gobernantes que de manera intencional o no engañaron a sus sociedades amerita análisis más amplios que discutan, entre otras cosas, el carácter populista de tales personajes más allá de sus ideologías. Aquí lo señalamos porque actitudes como esas contribuyen a la desorientación de sociedades de por sí atemorizadas y turbadas ante la pandemia. Los medios de comunicación profesionales tienen una marcada responsabilidad para esclarecer toda clase de mentiras, incluso las que son propaladas por gobernantes.

Desde el inicio de la pandemia la Organización Mundial de la Salud (World Health Organization) reconoció que, de manera paralela a la expansión del coronavirus, se extendía una *infodemia*: una oleada de noticias falsas que dificultarían las acciones para contrarrestar la enfermedad.

Una infodemia, en pocas palabras, es una sobreabundancia de información, buena y mala. Juntos, forman un tsunami virtual de datos y consejos que dificulta que personas de todos los ámbitos encuentren mensajes claros, fuentes fidedignas y orientación confiable cuando los necesitan. Parte de ella es solamente confusa, pero otra parte de la información errónea puede ser muy dañina para la vida. Abordar una infodemia como esta constituye un desafío nuevo, pero de importancia central, para responder a todos los brotes de enfermedades. (World Health Organization, 2020, p. 1)

7) *En el metaevento se reconfiguran las habilidades de los usuarios para buscar y aceptar información.* Los públicos de los medios están agobiados por las enormes cantidades de información que, en ocasión de la pandemia, ha circulado

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con mayor intensidad; las noticias se repiten y con frecuencia se contradicen de una fuente a otra, nos apabullan y confunden. Sin embargo, lejos de refugiarse en la perplejidad, las audiencias de los medios concentrados, que son además usuarios de los medios descentrados, ejercen su capacidad para preferir a unas fuentes de información por encima de otras.

Una investigación coordinada por la profesora Ingrid Volkmer de la Universidad de Melbourne y apoyada por la Organización Mundial de la Salud y la empresa Wunderman Thompson (2021, p. 3) recabó las opiniones sobre hábitos de información en la pandemia de 23 mil 500 personas, de 18 a 40 años, en 24 países. Los resultados contradicen la suposición de que los jóvenes dependen fundamentalmente de las redes sociodigitales para conocer noticias. El 43.6% dijo que para informarse acerca del Covid-19 prefiere consultar periódicos nacionales, televisión o radio. El 36.2% hace búsquedas en línea y el 35.25% revisa medios de comunicación internacionales (cada entrevistado ofreció más de una respuesta). El 34.2% mira información de los medios establecidos difundida en redes sociodigitales.

Esos datos sugieren que aun cuando se encuentran conectados de manera casi permanente al ininterrumpido flujo de contenidos que ofrecen las redes sociodigitales los usuarios –específicamente los adultos jóvenes– prestan atención a los medios de comunicación profesionales para enterarse de la pandemia. Ello no significa que en el metaevento la preferencia por las redes sociodigitales haya retrocedido frente a los medios convencionales sino, simplemente, que las personas distinguen entre unas fuentes y otras y saben que en espacios como Facebook o Instagram hay contenidos de autenticidad discutible. Por eso, cuando miran información sobre el Covid-19 en redes sociodigitales, esos usuarios lo hacen en muros, cuentas o *timelines* de medios de comunicación tradicionales.

Solamente el 16% de los entrevistados dijo que, para informarse de la pandemia, acude a contenidos colocados por amigos en redes sociodigitales y apenas el 11.6% manifestó que busca contenidos difundidos por *influencers* o celebridades. Este dato es significativo porque algunas de las noticias falsas más conocidas (por ejemplo, las bobas pero muy publicitadas arengas en contra de las vacunas) han sido difundidas por personajes famosos, entre ellos cantantes o actores, que como tienen centenares de miles de seguidores pueden hacer más daño al propalar esas mentiras. Para completar el circuito de la desinformación y debido a que son publicadas por individuos de gran notoriedad, muchos medios de comunicación difunden esos mensajes aunque sea para mostrar las extravagancias de tales personajes. El estudio antes mencionado indica que, más allá de la fama que alcanzan dentro y fuera de las redes digitales, a esos

*influencers* los usuarios de las redes, por lo general, no les reconocen autoridad en asuntos relacionados con la salud o la ciencia.

Los medios de comunicación concentrados tampoco tienen una confianza absoluta. El 58.3% de los encuestados se quejó de la gran cantidad de información, que los abruma. El 51.9% manifestó que ha dejado de poner atención a las noticias sobre el Covid-19. El 59.3% –casi seis de cada diez personas– considera que los medios no les están diciendo toda la verdad (Wunderman Thompson, 2021, p. 9).

Es necesario profundizar y mantener el estudio de las audiencias –que son a su vez ciudadanos con agendas, contextos y preferencias– en la pandemia. A partir de datos como los antes citados podemos considerar que en el metaevento las personas, en amplios porcentajes, diversifican en fuentes variadas su consumo y búsqueda de noticias acerca de la epidemia, prefieren a los medios concentrados independientemente del formato o la plataforma en donde los consulten (de manera directa o en línea) pero, aún así, no invierten toda su credibilidad en tales medios.

Los ciudadanos del ecosistema mediático-digital son escépticos, obtienen su información en varias fuentes y cotejan en unas y otras. Esa actitud crítica puede significar un dique para la expansión de noticias falsas pero, también, para la credibilidad de los gobiernos y de las autoridades en materia de salud cuyas indicaciones, cuando están sustentadas en hechos científicos, son indispensables para superar la epidemia.

8. *El metaevento trastoca prácticas y jerarquías en los medios.* Los medios de comunicación relatan novedades y circunstancias. Su rutina es el sobresalto permanente. Los comunicadores, y especialmente los periodistas, viven en y para registrar noticias que no tienen horarios ni escenarios fijos. La hora del cierre, en los medios concentrados, era el horizonte cotidiano antes del cual las noticias tenían que llegar a la redacción y ser preparadas para la edición. Ese lindero ha desaparecido con las ediciones digitales que se renuevan constantemente, aunque su avidez de novedades con frecuencia es satisfecha con notas triviales o repetitivas.

Los ritmos de trabajo en las redacciones, de por sí trastornados con la intensidad de los formatos digitales, son apabullados en el metaevento. Quedó alterada la circunstancia misma de los medios y de los trabajadores de la información. Nadie puede tomar distancia de la epidemia que, de variadas maneras, nos afecta a todos. Las noticias de los contagios y sus efectos en muchos casos han sido autobiográficas, relatadas incluso en primera persona. Para dar cobertura periodística al metaevento, que por definición es inabarcable, los medios y los periodistas se esfuerzan para buscar ángulos originales y mostrar las vastas dimensiones sanitarias, económicas o políticas de la tragedia, entre



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otros ámbitos, sin perder de vista a las personas. Ya nos hemos referido, entre tantos otros ejemplos posibles, a las portadas de *The New York Times* y *Folha de S.Paulo*.

Durante este metaevento los medios se quedaron sin su centro de gravedad que son las redacciones. Las salas de redacción tradicionalmente han sido espacios de encuentro –e incluso conflicto– personales y profesionales de los periodistas. Allí se redactan y editan, pero a menudo también se discuten, las notas que aparecerán en el telediario de esa noche o en el periódico de la mañana siguiente. En esos medios la urgencia que siempre acicatea al trabajo periodístico y la estructura jerárquica, en donde los directores o jefes de redacción toman decisiones inapelables, impiden que haya deliberaciones amplias sobre los criterios editoriales. Por eso, entre otras cosas, se trata de medios concentrados. Sin embargo el poco o mucho intercambio que hay entre periodistas y editores ocurre en la sala de redacción.

La pandemia difuminó la centralidad de las redacciones y las reemplazó, aunque fuese de manera parcial y temporal, por el trabajo a distancia y los encuentros en plataformas digitales como Zoom. Reporteros, pero también correctores y redactores, formadores de planas, diseñadores, ingenieros de sonido y otros especialistas en cada paso de la confección del producto informativo trabajaron desde sus casas. Muchas publicaciones y medios en línea ya funcionaban con trabajo a distancia de sus reporteros y redactores, pero en este caso las grandes redacciones de los medios concentrados quedaron parcial o totalmente vacías durante semanas o meses. Están por aquilatarse las consecuencias que tendrá en el trabajo periodístico esa traslación de la centralidad de la redacción al descentramiento del trabajo periodístico en línea.

9) *El metaevento hace más vulnerables a los trabajadores de la información.* La tarea de los periodistas, especialmente de los reporteros que acuden a donde se producen los hechos para registrarlos y convertirlos en noticia publicable, con frecuencia experimenta fuertes riesgos. Gobiernos autoritarios tanto a nivel nacional como local y municipal, así como bandas de delincuentes y personajes autoritarios instalados en todo tipo de poderes fácticos, amenazan y agreden a periodistas que han publicado informaciones que les disgustan, o lo hacen para impedir que las publiquen. La desprotección de los reporteros es una de las grandes limitaciones que encuentra el ejercicio de la democracia en distintos países, entre otras zonas en América Latina.

La pandemia intensificó la vulnerabilidad de los periodistas. Además de caciques y bandoleros, ahora ha sido el virus el que ha amenazado y atacado a millares de trabajadores de la información. Muchos de ellos enferman al cubrir noticias en hospitales o en sitios en donde pescan la infección. En una encuesta

entre periodistas de varios países latinoamericanos la investigadora Lizy Navarro (2021, p. 234) encontró que, en abril de 2020, sólo el 7% de esos trabajadores de la información tenía equipos de protección contra el virus como mascarillas y anteojos. Dos meses más tarde, en junio, los periodistas que disponían de ese elemental equipo habían ascendido al 52%. Es decir, en una de las fases de más contagios en nuestros países casi la mitad de los periodistas carecía de cubrebocas.

A los bajos salarios que padecen los periodistas en casi todos los medios y países latinoamericanos, se añade la inermidad en la epidemia. Desde marzo de 2020 la organización Press Emblem Campaign (2021), con oficinas en Ginebra, Suiza, levantó un registro de periodistas fallecidos a consecuencia del Covid-19. Hasta junio de 2021 el inventario ascendía a 1521 periodistas muertos por esa enfermedad, en 77 países.

Más de la mitad de los informadores fallecidos por Covid-19 en el mundo, 803 periodistas, vivían en Latinoamérica. El país con más periodistas muertos por esa causa era India con 255, pero después se encontraban Brasil con 243, Perú con 163, México con 112 y Colombia con 67 periodistas fallecidos a causa del virus. En la mayor parte de nuestros países a los periodistas no se les reconoce como trabajadores esenciales y han carecido de protección, primero para no contagiarse y más tarde en la administración de vacunas contra el Covid-19.

10) *El metaevento requiere coberturas periodísticas multidimensionales.* La pandemia es, y de allí su nombre, global. La epidemia que creció en 2020 se expandió con más velocidad que ninguna otra en la historia porque las personas se trasladan más que nunca antes. La facilidad para viajar y las migraciones enlazan a las economías y las culturas, pero también transportan a los virus.

Al informar acerca de las dimensiones globales y nacionales de la pandemia, o de lo que ha sucedido en grandes ciudades, los medios concentrados en muchas ocasiones han descuidado el relato de sus efectos en localidades medianas y pequeñas. En los telediaris y en la prensa de México, por ejemplo, nos enteramos paso a paso del desarrollo de la epidemia en la Ciudad de México pero supimos poco de la situación en los pequeños y empobrecidos poblados de Oaxaca o Chiapas. Los medios de Colombia mostraron las secuelas del virus entre la gente que vive en Bogotá o Cali, pero se asomaron menos a Puerto Carreño, a un costado del Orinoco, o a Leticia que se encuentra en el Amazonas.

Uno de los factores que limita considerablemente la información de y para las comunidades alejadas de las grandes metrópolis es la creciente desaparición de los periódicos locales. En todo el mundo, pero sobre todo en países con menos tradición de lectura de diarios y sin apoyos del Estado para la publicación de periodismo local y/o de calidad, esa prensa se ha reducido hasta casi extinguirse. Incluso en los países más desarrollados la pandemia afectó al periodismo: “Ningún

periódico, grande o pequeño, lo mismo diarios nacionales que semanarios locales, fue inmune a los efectos del contagio” (Greenslade, 2020, p. 8), reseñó un periodista británico.

La proliferación de publicaciones en línea ha sido, a la vez, una de las causas de la crisis de la prensa local y una de sus posibilidades para sobrevivir. La disponibilidad de sitios digitales hace prescindibles, para muchos lectores, la adquisición de diarios impresos, o de sus versiones en línea. Por otra parte, es en internet en donde se refugian muchas publicaciones que dejaron de aparecer impresas. En todo caso el periodismo local se ha empobrecido y en no pocas poblaciones prácticamente ha desaparecido.

En la pandemia ha faltado la voz y la mirada de los periodistas locales. Se trata de un problema global, como el metaevento mismo, que el historiador Timothy Snyder (2020) deplora de esta manera:

El coronavirus fue una noticia local que no pudo cubrirse adecuadamente porque carecemos de reporteros locales. La mayoría de los condados estadounidenses ya no tienen un periódico adecuado... En aquellos sitios en donde las redes sociales han extinguido al periodismo local, imperan la desconfianza y la ignorancia. No es simplemente que los hechos estén ausentes; es que las redes sociales difunden descabelladas falsedades, incluso sobre la pandemia, que nunca habrían sido aprobadas para aparecer en un periódico. (p. 104)

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Esta no será la única pandemia que padezca la humanidad, ni el único metaevento que tengan que reseñar los medios. Cualesquiera que sean sus mensajes y circunstancias, la comunicación en las siguientes etapas requerirá de coberturas noticiosas por parte de los medios concentrados, incluirá el empleo de redes sociodigitales y los ciudadanos se enterarán, elegirán contenidos y se expresarán para subrayar su condición de individuos independientemente de las colectividades de las que formen parte. El reconocimiento y estudio de las tendencias y los usos de la información desplegados en ocasión de esta crisis permitiría prever la comunicación ante otros metaeventos. El cambio climático se perfila como próximo desastre global. “Cubrir la pandemia es un momento clave para volver a articular lo que significan ‘naciones’ y ‘estados’ en la era de crisis sistémicas y globales. En este sentido, la cobertura de Covid-19 está labrando el suelo para una futura cobertura climática” (Kunelius, 2020, p. 3).

El 16 de junio de 2021, mientras en otros países se mantenían altos niveles de contagios de Covid-19 con todas sus consecuencias, en Estados Unidos

había un enorme motivo de luto y nuevos atisbos de esperanza. Ese día, aquel país llegaba a los 600 mil muertos por el coronavirus y, al mismo tiempo, los estados de Nueva York y California anunciaban el levantamiento de casi todas las restricciones por Covid-19, tanto en instalaciones comerciales y oficinas como en reuniones sociales. El gobernador de Nueva York, Mario Cuomo, declaró “Este es un día memorable (*momentous day*)”. *The New York Times* anunció en su encabezado principal ‘*Momentous: New York and California Open* (Memorable: Nueva York y California Abiertos) pero en su siguiente titular añadió “La nación se aproxima a las 600 mil muertes a pesar del avance”. En el metaevento cada colectividad, como cada persona, tiene sus hitos memorables.

Cuando terminaba el primer semestre de 2021 y cumplíamos año y medio enfrentándonos a las noticias de la pandemia, yo había dejado de buscar a diario en internet las estadísticas de la expansión del virus y me conformaba con el resumen que seguía ofreciendo el telediario que miro todas las noches. En mi cuenta de Twitter he configurado una lista con especialistas que comentan las opciones de vacunas, la necesidad de ventilar espacios cerrados, las amenazadoras nuevas cepas del virus o las políticas de sanidad en varios países. Cada día hay novedades en esos temas y, por mucho que llevamos largos meses encadenados a él, ese carrusel informativo no deja de asombrar. También me aflijo, y espero que esa capacidad de emoción no desaparezca, cada vez que me entero de algún amigo o conocido que nos abandona por culpa del coronavirus. El metaevento es todo ese mosaico de hechos, reacciones y emociones entremezclados, interiorizados y jerarquizados de acuerdo con la circunstancia de cada uno de nosotros. Este es el tiempo que nos tocó vivir. Hay que esforzarnos para entenderlo. ■

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Artículo recibido el 22 de junio de 2021 y aprobado el 15 de julio de 2021.

# Lucrecia's step back: Discursive disputes between films and TV series

## *O passo atrás de Lucrecia: Disputas discursivas entre filmes e séries*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper intends to analyze the discursive disputes that permeate the comparative debate between films and TV series in the contemporary cultural criticism. We take from the arguments of Argentinean filmmaker Lucrecia Martel against TV series in order to understand, diachronically, the historical tensions between cinema and television and its perpetuity in the current scenario. To do so, we come up here with three dominant axis in the comparative evaluation: espectral experience, style and narrative. With this, we aim to discuss the arguments of an aprioristic superiority of film over TV series, without forgetting the distinctive nature of this ongoing symbolic dispute.

**Keywords:** Serial fiction, film, cinema and television, discursive disputes, cultural criticism

### RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar as disputas discursivas que permeiam o debate comparativo entre filmes e séries no contexto da crítica cultural contemporânea. Partimos dos argumentos da diretora Lucrecia Martel contra as séries televisivas para compreender, diacronicamente, as tensões históricas entre cinema e televisão e a sua perenidade no cenário atual. Para isso, proporemos aqui três eixos dominantes na avaliação comparativa: experiência espectral, estilo e narrativa. Com isso, vamos problematizar os argumentos da superioridade apriorística do filme em relação às séries, sem perder do horizonte a natureza distintiva da disputa simbólica em curso.

**Palavras-chave:** Ficção seriada, filme, cinema e televisão, disputas discursivas, crítica cultural

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## INTRODUCTION

THE 44TH ISSUE of the French magazine *CinémAction*, published by Hennebelle e René Prédal, brings an extensive dossier entitled “The Influence of Television on Cinema” (1987). That was a singular moment of the presence of cinema in the European television, especially in French television, because of the growing drop in ticket sales in commercial theaters, in addition to the need for regulation of distribution for cinema and television, reflecting in a now paradigmatic legislation concerning the timing of exhibition outlets. The imbroglio between the Cannes Film Festival and Netflix, which occurred in the 2017 edition, about the programming of films from the platform on the festival's screens is quite symptomatic of the complexity of political and economic relations regarding film distribution on the European scene (Fresco, 2019; Lobato, 2019).

Back to the 1980s France, the country had just approved the Law 86-1067, dated September 30, 1986, which aimed to ensure freedom of the press and regulating audiovisual production and distribution, to ensure the economic balance among industry agents, which would be monitored by the National Cinema Council (CNC). One of the main questions, largely debated on the *CinémAction* issue was the need to preserve the economic exploration of films in the different available outlets at the time (theaters, VHS, cable TV, network television). There was also the matter of inserting the actors who had an interest in the distribution of these films within the very process of promotion, through the contribution of the television companies to the production funds. Gilbert Gregorie (1987), chair of the National Federation of Film Distributors, writes in one of the magazine's articles that, at the time, “the audience of a French filme was 96% from television and only 4% from the theater” (p. 41). In this sense, beyond the aesthetical and cultural matters present in the debate, Gregorie explains that the cinema business model, as shaped from the 1980s onwards, could only exist because of television.

This economic centrality in the relationship between television and cinema, beyond the very own intermedia nature of the audiovisual means, has never actually been, a well-resolved issue. Film critics, filmmakers, festivals and academia, in their own ways, to this day contribute to emphasize, between cinema and television, more the fissures separating than the bridges connecting them. One interesting example to Picture, in the Brazilian context, the separation of research between cinema and television is the meeting promoted by the Brazilian Society of Cinema and Audiovisual Studies (SOCINE). SOCINE (s.d.) had as their main objective, according to its Statute, article 2, “a) aggregate, systematize, and disclose experiences related to the study of image in motion, in its



different media, and correlated areas”. However, their meetings are occupied, for the largest proportion, by cinema research *tout court*, for which the audiovisual – and television, above all – is a circumstantial appendix, a safeguard to the inconstancies of exclusivism.

Through a research in the summary notes from the past four meetings<sup>1</sup>, we find that the word “television” appears as follows in titles of works and abstracts: in 2016, the word appears fourteen times; in 2017, ten times; in 2018, eight times; and, lastly, only three times in 2019. For comparison, the word “cinema” appears 730 times in 2016, 664 times in 2017, 647 in 2018, and 694 times in 2019<sup>2</sup>.

In this work, it is not for us to determine the reasons, of political, cultural and, above all, epistemological natures that account for such gap. Nor is it our purpose to require any kind of determined attention, as if the research in television lacked a screen quota in SOCINE’s meetings – there are other forums, in different bodies and research societies, which fruitfully survive in their singularities. Hence, what interests us is to understand, in today’s terms, the discursive nature of the disputes between films and series, and between cinema and television, in the contemporary debate. Thus, a critique of the audiovisual can also have on its horizon the complexity of the relationship between the media, their connections and mismatches, without falling only into their cultural distinctions.

The starting point, which appears in the title of this work, came from the headline of an article presenting an interview by the Argentine director Lucrecia Martel, for the Buenos Aires newspaper *Perfil*, on the occasion of the release of *Zama*, her latest film. “Series are a step backwards” (Domínguez, 2018), prints the article, in a clear desire for a polemical statement from the renowned director, to get the famous clicks. However, when researching other interviews by Lucrecia Martel, her diatribes against television, video-on-demand services, and especially television series, remained a constant. They made evident her interest in throwing light in a debate that many thought was outdated. TV series, so prominent as a socio-historical phenomenon of contemporaneity, with its logic of domestic viewing, highly serialized, worldwide distribution, and suggestions often defined by algorithms and stimulating excessive consumption, would be, in the words of the director, a “step backwards in the audiovisual language”. We are, after all, in a *series culture* (Silva, 2014), a singular and highly globalized moment of production, circulation, and consumption of serialized audiovisual works. The statements by Martel, therefore, served to bring once again to the forefront of the debate the symbolic disputes between cinema and television that, at least since the post-war period, illustrate the complex cultural, economic, and political tension that crosses the fields.

<sup>1</sup> Given the Covid-19 pandemic, the SOCINE Annual Meeting was cancelled in 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Information sourced from the SOCINE website: <https://bit.ly/3paFZrO>.

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When analyzing the literature on the interface between cinema and television, two perspectives have imposed themselves as dominant: we have a large tradition of research with a socio-historical bias, which investigates the relations between media based on the articulations between institutional agents (channels, studios, and producers), creative instances (playwrights, directors, directors), and the public spheres of circulation and reception. Works such as those by Hannah Andrews (2014), on the convergences and divergences between cinema and television in England since the 1990s, and Lucy Mazdon (1999), who investigates the presence of cinema in British television, invest in this approach to emphasize the *unquestionable close relationship* among media, often viewed with demerit by critics. This depreciation usually interdicts, as the author argues, “both close analysis of this interconnection and an understanding of the processes of exchange and transformation which occur as films move between the two media” (p. 72).

From a national point of view, an inescapable matrix to understand the articulations between cinema and television is Renato Ortiz (1995). This is because of his interest in investigating the cultural formation of the country, observing how both cinema and television historically tensioned the subsumed positions of popular culture, erudite culture and mass culture, creating specific crossings and rearrangements for the construction of ideas of national identity and Brazilian culture. This tension is evident in the very formation of industrial conditions for film production in comparison with the particular dynamics of infrastructural and economic consolidation of television during the first decades of this media in the country. Along this line, an important reference are the works that analyze the history of tensions between cinema and television in Brazil (Bahia, 2014; Bahia & Amancio, 2010), further deepening the need for a less biased understanding of the comparative disputes between the media.

On the other hand, we have the perspective that is interested in the study of language, investigating the expressive possibilities of the media, its strategies for addressing signs, its framings, its sonorities, and the sensitive texture of the images themselves. Here, approaches can vary from specific interests ranging from narrative and fictional constructions (Balogh, 2002; Butler, 2018; Machado, 2014; Smith, 2018), the ontology of film and video images (Caldwell, 1995; Hart, 2004; Machado, 1997), and conformations in genres and formats (Edgerton & Rose, 2005; Mittell, 2004).

However, beyond an attempt to exhaust the references in a retrospective synthesis, what interests us here is to understand the distinctive nature of this debate (Bourdieu, 1996, 2007; Newman & Levine, 2012); observing how,

transversely, the tensions between cinema and television unveil in the crossing of different analytical dimensions. Thus, for the purpose of this article, we will systematize three axes that underlie the historically most used arguments to depreciate series in comparison with films: spectatorial experience, style, and narrative.

These three categories do not exclude the presence of other discursive logics. For instance, the issues of production and reception practices. These, when thought of in an articulated way, can deepen our view of the conflicts that cross cultural criticism, especially at a time when large streaming services native to the Internet reconfigure the global market, in the face of the urgencies of social isolation and closing of movie theaters caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, beyond historical raids and economic disputes, understanding the inseparability of the ties that unite television and cinema seems, as we intend to point out here, an inescapable path for the understanding of audiovisual culture in contemporaneity.

### **SPECTATORIAL EXPERIENCE: GAZE, GLANCE, AND THE TECHNOLOGIES OF IMMERSION**

During the release of *Bacurau* (Mendonça Filho & Dorneles, 2019), the film's team circulated a curious piece of information on social networks: the theaters in which the work would be released should turn the volume up by one point (+1), so that the sensation caused by the shooting in the film could immerse the viewer in the scene. This technical determination, which aimed to heighten the audience's experience of the film's sensory engagement, is very reminiscent of the inevitable imbrication between the discursive/narrative nature of film and its public viewing model. Authors such as Jacques Aumont (2011) and Fernão Ramos (2016) endorse this link, highlighting the ways in which expanded/instant cinema, by reconfiguring the viewer's relationship with moving images/sounds, no longer circumscribes the conceptual field that has been called cinema from the beginning.

It is not about establishing a value chain between different forms of artistic expression with moving images and sounds. Neither cinema is equal to the universe of arts that deal with moving images, nor is the universe of arts with moving images and sounds restricted to it. Some developments around the concept of "expanded cinema" make cinema and the set of moving images on different devices equivalent, with prejudice to both sides. (Ramos, 2016, p. 39)

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In this way, the device of uninterrupted immersion of the spectator inside a room architecture that guides attentive gaze and ears towards the projected film, standard to cinema, constitutes one of the marks – if not the most recognized – of its spectatorial experience. The social, economic and political aspects related to this activity have always been at the core of its valuation as a cultural practice, thus structuring an entire productive chain that thinks of the movie theater as the first (and main) window for commercial film exhibition. Moreover, the emphasis on the spectatorial experience as distinction marker in relation to the TV, with its exhibition in domestic devices, open to distractions and dispersion, represents a value attribute to exclusive attention that, many times, speaks more of the aesthetic horizon in which the criticism is within than of the perceptive experience in the relationship with images and sounds.

As if this were not enough, the critique for seriality sharpens the logic of distinction among media. As early as in the 1980s, Omar Calabrese (1984) drew attention to the set of assumptions that, historically, cut the interest of the aesthetic debate to single, closed works of immersive experience. To go a step beyond this – and thus better understand the serialized dynamics of audiovisual production, circulation, and consumption within mass culture – he directly criticizes these assumptions and proposes, in the end, the idea of an aesthetics of repetition:

The negative judgment on repetitiveness is the fruit of ideology, that is, of a negative judgment on the first sense, that of serial production, which also falls on the serial product. Because this product also holds the characteristics of its peculiar internal structure and a structure of enjoyment, the negative judgment automatically turns to them. This is inadequate, after all, because the preconceived idea of a unitary aesthetic value prevents one from recognizing in some contemporary products the birth of a new aesthetic (or the rebirth of an old aesthetic, similar to it); precisely, an aesthetic of repetition<sup>3</sup>. (Calabrese, 1984, p. 72)

As this was not enough, Milly Buonanno (2008) reminds us of an important historical fact: in its genesis, television was not configured as an ontologically domestic medium, having its first exhibitions occurred in public spaces (bars, churches, shopping centers, squares, museums, etc.), where TV sets remain to this day. However, television was gradually *domesticated*, from a cultural process mobilized, during the 1950s, by the growing organization of broadcast companies, by the technical development of transmission and reception structures, and, finally, by the interest of consumer goods industries in expanding advertising and, consequently, the consumption of their products.

<sup>3</sup> In the original: “El juicio negativo sobre la repetitividad es fruto de la ideología, es decir, de un juicio negativo sobre la primera acepción, la de la producción de serie, que recae también sobre el producto de serie. Y como del producto de serie forman también parte las características de su peculiar estructura interna y de una estructura de la fruición, el juicio negativo se traslada automáticamente también a éstas. Inadecuada, en fin, porque la idea preconcebida de valor impide reconocer en algunos productos contemporáneos el nacimiento de una nueva estética (o el renacimiento de una vieja estética, igual da); precisamente, una estética de la repetición”.

In reality, television has never become a completely domesticated medium, or a totally domesticated and domestic material object, however much an affirmation of this kind clashes with common sense (including the common sense that is scientifically credited). Not merely because its presence, even though it has become part of the geography of inhabited space, continues to cause alarm, suspicion and the surveillance kept for things that one knows cannot entirely be trusted (and again, nothing like that happens with fridges or dishwashers); but also because television sets and screens have never in fact abandoned the public spaces that they originally occupied; rather, they have continued to spread exponentially in areas outside the home during and after the phase of domestication. (Buonanno, 2008, pp. 16-17)

Domesticating television, in this sense, implied not only taking the television set into the home, but also organizing the programming in terms of specific family habits – in a grid, therefore – and formatting its contents according to the political, economic, and cultural determinants that this domestication presupposed. This included, of course, the domestication of the films themselves, which started, at first, to occupy the programming grids through agreements between broadcast services and movie studios, and then to be produced and distributed by the channels themselves, through the telefilm format. This process would be completed with the emergence of home video, then the segmented cable television channels, until reaching the video on demand services that are so central to audiovisual culture today. Television, therefore, due to its domestic, daily, trivial, and serialized character, would forever be detained within the narrow limits of a dispersive spectatorial fruition, even though films, resized for the small screen, have entered the home ordinary life and put down deep roots of circulation and consumption.

For this reason, it has always been important for film criticism, even though it has never lost from its horizon the matrix of popular spectacle that marks its origin, to reaffirm its distinction as a medium with its own language and artistic ambitions, linked to a perceptual origin, to a genesis from which all other audiovisual forms unfold. Defining itself within a device structured for immersion and contemplation, without the possibility of external dispersion, in a public session aimed exclusively at this purpose, undoubtedly contributed to this process.

As John Ellis (1982) explains, cinema's emphasis on the "attentive gaze" (which he calls gaze) was crucial for the production of specific aesthetic effects, as well as for the creation of consequent technical developments. This "attentive gaze" implies its own uses of image and sound, capable of triggering relationships – of addition, collision, fuzziness, etc. – highly multisensorial. Television,

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on the other hand, did not need this “attentive gaze”, but rather a “glance”, given its domestic spectatorial structure, its serialized language in flux, its redundant use of image and sound to avoid dispersion.

Cinema offers a large-scale, highly detailed and photographic image to a spectator who is engaged in an activity of intense and relatively sustained attention to it. Broadcast TV offers a small image of low definition, to which sound is crucial in holding the spectator's attention. The spectator glances rather than gazes at the screen; attention is sporadic rather than sustained. These forms of attention enable different modes of narration to develop in each medium. (Ellis, 1982, pp. 24-25)

The conflict between gaze and glance has become deeply rooted in the debate between cinema and television, being recurrent in much of the criticism of television series, like *Lucrecia Martel's*, for example. Many demand from television and fictional series an aesthetic emphasis on gaze, disregarding the very technical nature of the production modes, distribution, and consumption of television. In spite of it, recent technical changes in production (sophisticated cameras, audio capturers and digital editing tables), distribution (inside and outside the traditional television flow), and consumption (giant flat screen televisions, with very high quality sound and image) have allowed television directors to explore even more the expressive use of the audiovisual form, sophisticating the potentialities of its language.

In this sense, the end-to-end technological development in the production of television images, which is now part of the everyday viewing experience, offers material conditions for the enhancement of television's stylistic possibilities in a scenario of intense global competition for serialized content. The same question extends, for example, to sound, but in other terms. It is curious to notice how Ellis' book (1982), from the early 1980s, when the forms of television transmission and reception were still precarious and, to a large extent, composed only of over-the-air television, already pointed out the differences between cinema and television without relying on an a priori hierarchy. It was mainly based on technical and narrative aspects that supposed a superiority of film in relation to serialized fiction. To continue in the example of television sound, it is important to see how recent research, from different approaches, has addressed the material specificities of television production, circulation, and reception with regard to the treatment of audiovisual material (Baade & Deaville, 2016; Carreiro, 2019; Edgar, 2017). These works emphasize how the soundtrack has specific functions in the dispersive medium and, from them, may experience new aesthetic and sensory unfoldings.

Sound can be heard where the screen cannot be seen. So sound is used to ensure a certain level of attention, to drag viewers back to looking at the set. Hence the importance of programme announcements and signature tunes and, to some extent, of music in various kinds of series. Sound holds attention more consistently than image, and provides a continuity that holds across momentary lapses of attention. The result is a slightly different balance between sound and image from that which is characteristic of cinema. Cinema is guaranteed a centered viewer by the physical arrangement of cinema seats and customs of film viewing. Sound therefore follows the image or diverges from it. The image is the central reference in cinema. But for TV, sound has a more centrally defining role. (Ellis, 1982, pp. 128-129)

Observing, therefore, these differences in the spectatorial experience between films and series without considering the nature of the media, the history of their distinctions and, above all, the contemporary state of audiovisual forms, only reinforces the divergent gap in which cinema and television are entrenched. In the case of television series, there are plenty of recent works that maintain the appealing role of sound, its imagery reiteration and even the dominance of dialogue in the equalization of tracks, as to also build atmospheres – the French *L'Enffondrement* (Desjardins et al., 2019) and the Icelandic *Ófærð* (Kjartansson, 2015-present) are great examples; dissociative and experimental tracks – the German *Dark* (Müsch et al, 2017-2020), the American *The Leftovers* (Lindelof et al., 2014-2017), and the third *Twin Peaks* season (Frost et al., 1990-1991, 2017) –; and subjective listening points, in primary hearing – from *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan et al., 2008-2013) to *Atlanta* (Glover et al., 2016-present). The quality of television sets, the narrative invitation to the attentive viewer, and the creative logic behind contemporary serialized production are all indications that point to the development of television works that, rather than the distinctive retreat, seem to point with strides toward the artistic constitution of a field of inevitable approximations.

## STYLE AND NARRATIVE: CROSSINGS AND DISTENSIONS BETWEEN FILM AND SERIES

In the aforementioned interview for *Perfil* magazine, Lucrecia Martel deepens her critique of contemporary series through the comparison of the narrative forms of television and cinema:

There are possibilities [narratives] to which cinema was getting to, and the series occupied the consumption of auteur cinema, in addition to what that meant in

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<sup>4</sup>In the original: "Hay unas posibilidades a las que estaba llegando el cine, que las series han ocupado el consumo del cine de autor y lo que eso significaba en la cultura, en términos de intercambio. Son narrativas muy conservadoras, y con una dinámica de televisión, de los diálogos cargados de información, mucho mejor hecha".

the culture, in terms of exchanges. These are very conservative narratives, with television dynamic, information-laden dialogues, no matter how good they are<sup>4</sup>. (Domínguez, 2018, para. 5)

We return, here, to the core of a intrinsically ontological distinction: an immersive medium (cinema) and a dispersive medium (television), if compared, will inevitably resort to different narrative procedures to cater the capture of spectatorial engagement, attention to information flow, and, of course, the sequential articulation of narrated events in their unitary (in films) and serialized (in series) enunciation logics.

Expository dialogues, often addressed directly to the viewer – like the ones Martel criticizes – are actually fundamental to the understanding of narrative events in dispersive devices. Even series usually celebrated for the sophistication of their narrative models resort to repetitive, reiterative, recapitulative, and redundant strategies (Zanetti, 2009) to engage viewers in the stories. About this, it is worth recalling the analyses of *The Wire* (Simon et al., 2002-2008) and *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan et al., 2008-2013), especially in their emphasis for the investigation of serialization logics and their relations with the generic matrices of television melodrama (Araújo, 2015; Williams, 2014).

Thus, it is important to realize how the serialized narrative forms relate to the possibilities of accessing the story available to the spectator, who is now highly connected and able to handle the audiovisual work in a number of digital devices. If cinema can waive overlaps between image and dialog, working with a more sensorial immersion in the narrative, within a unitary and uninterrupted dramaturgy, television needs to constantly call the spectators' attention, ask them to immerse in the story, and even allow mobile situations of multiscreen consumption not to represent suspension of narrative engagement. In other words, television series need to constantly address the viewer, recovering them from the inexorable dispersion, and finally leading them back to the narrative thread from where they may have eventually derailed. To do so, they resort to countless strategies of style and narrative. Some are already consolidated in the common language of the television flow – such as the opening calls or the recapitulative excerpts (in the *previously on* model). Others, however, are used with ingenuity and inventiveness, many times breaking with the transparent logic of classical television narration (Thompson, 2003) and demanding, therefore, a more attentive look at the proposed narrative dynamics so that one can, in the end, discern the traditions and ruptures in the televisual language.

Hence, it is not surprising how Lucrecia Martel, later in her interview, makes comparisons about the field of television series and then between this and



cinema, in order to problematize the narrative possibilities used. Thus she goes: “You can’t compare *House of Cards* [Fincher et al., 2013-2018] against *CHiPs* [Rosner, 1977-1983]. But if you compare them against to the possibilities that cinema was reaching, the narrative-audiovisual complexity, [the series] are a step backwards” (Domínguez, 2018, para. 5)<sup>5</sup>. It is crucial to establish here the assumptions of the presumed comparison.

First, Martel establishes a focus within the field of television series, operating a hierarchy between works of different genres, formats, distribution models, and times to indicate an evolutionary hierarchy in progress. The aforementioned *CHiPs* was a police drama, procedural in nature, centered on a pair of highway cops who, on motorcycles, tried to solve the crimes that presented, developed and solved themselves in each episode. The series aired on NBC between 1977 and 1983, at a time when the serialized models of American television were in transition, both by the entry of independent production companies in the creation of original content, and by regulatory changes in thematic and social terms (Feuer et al., 1985; McCabe & Akass, 2007; Thompson, 1997).

*House of Cards* (Fincher et al., 2013-2018), on the other hand, is a drama series produced in 2013 by Netflix, a video on demand (VoD) service that started producing and offering original content by streaming, still in the early 2010s. By doing that, Netflix pointed the way to the creative economy of the contemporary audiovisual that, as of 2019, counted with the entry of major players of the entertainment market in this digital logic of serial consumption (Bianchini, 2018; Jenner, 2018). Developed by Beau Willimon, a renowned playwright<sup>6</sup>, from a British series of the same name, *House of Cards* quickly became a success. It was largely guaranteed by the quality of the dramaturgy that staged the interstices of American politics, and by the strength of the performances, both of its protagonists – Kevin Spacey as Frank Underwood and Robin Wright as Claire Underwood; and supporting actors – the highlight is certainly Mahershala Ali, playing Remy Danton.

This association between a Shakespearean representation of the political dynamics of the USA, and a topicality of the crisis of democracy around the world, which found in *House of Cards* a mirror for its institutional fractures, help to explain the importance of the series as a cultural phenomenon of the 2010s (Jones & Soderlund, 2017; Palmen et al., 2018; Reichman, 2017). Even with the downfall of its lead actor, removed from the series after accusations of sexual abuse on younger actors, the relevance of *House of Cards* as a milestone of the productive turn towards VoD services and as a serial work whose narrative must be warped, considering the new dynamics of sequential consumption (so-called binge watching), remains well determined.

<sup>5</sup> In the original: “No podés comparar *House of Cards* con *CHiPs*, ponele. Pero si comparás con las posibilidades a las que estaba llegando el cine, la complejidad narrativa-audiovisual, es un paso para atrás”.

<sup>6</sup> His play *Farragut North* was adapted to a film in 2011, then called *2 The Ides of March* (Clooney, 2011), which earned Willimon, Grant Heslov and George Clooney (who is also the director) an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay.

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However, the Netflix series seems to be a turning point within a rather unique trajectory of sophistication of narrative form and audiovisual style of serialized fiction. A number of studies point, in the last twenty years, to a profound transformation in the narrative logic of television series, breaking away from the excessive standardization of serialized formats (unitary, anthology, or serial) and thus producing recognizable innovations in the tradition of television narrative (Bucaria & Barra, 2016; Harlap, 2017; Nahs & Wheleham, 2017; Ryan & Thon, 2014; Weinstock & Spooner, 2016). When we consider narrative form, the concepts of narrative complexity (Mittell, 2006, 2015) and contemporary serialized drama (Silva, 2014, 2016) help to understand how television storytelling has become a vast field of aesthetic experimentation, introducing forms of storytelling, to this point, circumstantial in the television tradition. With such purpose, it is worth looking diachronically at the very notion of narrative complexity, understood as “a new model of storytelling has emerged as an alternative to the conventional episodic and serial forms that have typified most American television since its inception” (Mittell, 2015, p. 17).

In poetic terms, the narrative complexity accounts for a tense construction between the unitary nature of the episode and the long arc of the serialized narrative, so that the very spectatorial engagement with the stories tends to change, thus requiring a deeper dive into the fictional universes, now themselves inhabited by ambiguous characters and interwoven narrative threads. The narrative concatenation does not necessarily progress in a linear fashion, and with this, the internal coherence of the story is often only completed with more than one assistance. In this regard, it is curious how Mittell himself (2015) will resort to a comparison with American cinema to highlight the qualities that complex series possess and for which they will be recognized in the future.

Yet just as 1970s Hollywood is remembered far more for the innovative work of Altman, Scorsese, and Coppola than for the more commonplace (and often more popular) conventional disaster films, romances, and comedies that filled theaters, I believe that American television of the past 20 years will be remembered as an era of narrative experimentation and innovation, challenging the norms of what the medium can do. (Mittell, 2015, p. 31)

A list of complex works would inevitably be robust and exclusionary, given the quantity of productions, and even haughty, as if aiming to counter Martel's arguments by attributing, per se, other logics of distinction and critical validation. It is not our goal to reinforce a distinctive thesis that narrative complexity operates an epistemic split in the tradition of television narratives. However,

it is worth pointing out that much of the distinctive prejudice between films and series is due to the articulation between the aesthetic assumptions of the classical unitary work and an only superficial knowledge of the possibilities and traditions of fictional television narrative.

The same happens with the question of audiovisual style. Although they have long established as central creative instance the figure of the writer/producer, also known as showrunner, television series have found material possibilities and productive logics that allow the exploration of the hearing-imagery texture of television by directors, in order to build expressive possibilities beyond the classical transparency and redundancy between text and image. In the case of material possibilities, we are talking about the aforementioned sophistication of equipment for capturing, editing, and digital transmission, in high definition, of television information. This allowed television directors to invest in new expressive possibilities for the sounds and images of television series, which now, in a scenario where production logics deal with the intense commercial dispute between over-the-air and cable channels and VoD services, need to dedicate themselves to the creation of unique works both in narrative and style.

This even involves renowned television directors at the creative core of series, in a tradition that goes back to celebrated film directors who worked on miniseries and television specials – such as Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Krzysztof Kieslowski – now having as its epitome David Lynch's role in *Twin Peaks* (Frost et al, 1990-1991, 2017). Nevertheless, this also includes names like Martin Scorsese, *Boardwalk Empire* (Winter et al., 2010-2014), *Vinyl* (Scorsese et al, 2016), David Fincher, *House of Cards* (Fincher et al., 2013-2018), *Mindhunter* (Kono et al., 2017-2019), Jane Campion, *Top of the Lake* (Sherman et al., 2013-2017), *Steven Soderbergh*, *The Knick* (Jacobs et al., 2014-2015), *Mosaic* (Silver, 2018). These are accompanied by Ava DuVernay, *Queen Sugar* (DuVernay et al, 2016-present), *When They See Us* (Skoll et al., 2019), Woody Allen, *Crisis in Six Scenes* (Aronson, 2016), Bruno Dumont, *P'tit Quinquin* (Dumont, 2014), Sussane Bier, *The Night Manager* (Farr et al., 2016), and Spike Lee, *She's Gotta Have It* (Lee, 2017-2019).

Again, the list of possible references is only circumstantial and points, ultimately, to a yet-to-be-explored horizon, in analytical terms, of audiovisual works whose style needs to be understood beyond poorly justified hierarchical comparisons. Not only that, but we also believe that the creation of television styles is not solely the result of the incorporation of renowned authors from the cinematographic field for the televisual making, in the sense of a value dependence of one field in relation to another. What interest us here, precisely, are these interconnections, which put into perspective the usual distinctive

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discourse in face of quite unique experiences and experimentations in the history of television.

In theoretical terms, two concepts really helped us to understand the specificities of the television audiovisual: one, the exploration of the very concept of style for television (Butler, 2010) and, second, the return to the concept of televisuality as an operator for the analysis of serialized fiction. John Caldwell (1995), in a seminal work, argues that televisuality is the specific form through which television – from the most popular to the most erudite – produces and performs style, understood here more in its decorative and appealing dimension, than in the logic of historical patterns and authorial schemes.

With increasing frequency, style itself became the subject, the signified, if you will, of television. In fact, this self-consciousness of style became so great that it can more accurately be described as an activity, as a performance of style, rather than as a particular look. . . . In short, style, long seen as a mere signifier and vessel for content, issues, and ideas, has now itself become one of television's most privileged and showcased signifiers. (Caldwell, 1995, p. 5)

To ensure, therefore, the maintenance of the viewer in the program, inside a technical device of zapping or dispersive digital socialization, television resorts to serialized forms, with narratives and styles, whose historical matrices precede it; yet in it, they seem to have found a determining means for their continued perpetuation. Serialization, therefore, is not a mere commercial imperative, based on hidden purposes of exhaustive proliferation, but a technical-aesthetic way of organizing contents, as well as a way of sensorial and affective engagement of audiences. Therefore, the exploration of narrative and stylistic aspects are part of the creative routine of authors and directors, who increasingly seem to find in serialized works a vast field of experimentation to be explored.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Beyond spectatorial, stylistic, and narrative comparisons, the relationship between cinema and television is also intertwined in the business models peculiar to each medium, but that, especially since the second half of the post-war period, have become increasingly mixed. By business model, we mean the different ways in which the media organize themselves to enable the structure of production, distribution, and consumption of their products. Here, cinema and television often differ, only to meet again soon afterwards. Within a multi-screen scenario that demands the circulation of works in different windows, the experience of

the exhibition outlets does not limit cinema to this dominant space, but rather establishes itself as an initial window of appreciation. As if this were not enough, both the big studios – today strengthened in media conglomerates – and the independent production companies need to increasingly produce for television and streaming services too. This is either because of screen quota laws (such as Law no. 12.485/11, in Brazil), or because of the high demand for content from different exhibitors, bringing to the horizon of economic disputes the tensions between cinema and television.

To get an idea – and here we bring data made available by the Brazilian Film Agency (ANCINE, 2018) – between 2011 and 2016, 701 films were commercially released in Brazil with theaters as their priority exhibition outlet. Of those, only 64 were not later released in other segments. The rest had over-the-air TV (15), cable TV (241), VoD services (163), and home video (218) as their second exhibition outlet. In addition, of these 637 films, 515 had a third outlet, 266 a fourth, and finally 101 had even a fifth outlet.

To think, thus, of cinema and television as disparate media, hierarchically distinct, is not consistent with what it is to produce audiovisuals in Brazil and in the world today. Their strategies, languages, and devices can always point to different uses of the audiovisual text – and it is good thing that they do. However, and this is the argument we are defending here, understanding the complex dynamics that bring together – aesthetically, economically and culturally – television and cinema should be an important discursive – and even political – matrix of what it is and will be to produce and reflect about audiovisual today. Epistemologically, it seems determinant to insert the debate about contemporary television series precisely in this nebulous intersection of the fields of cinema and television studies, in which some see the evidence of a cultural elitism, but others see the dynamics of the media interweaving of contemporary audiovisualities.

In methodological terms, it is also important to point out paths that untie the knots of these biases, to understand the particular cases in the historicity of their manifestations and, from this, to weave the eventual generalizations that define the processes more broadly. This articulation between induction and deduction constitutes an indispensable step for the rupture with the solipsisms of the most biased cultural criticism, so that the place of television series in the tradition of audiovisual forms may be understood within its own complexity.

Newman and Levine (2012) remind us that the legitimization process of television, whether in academia or in cultural criticism, is an endless movement that always needs to be reinforced, debated, disputed. It is not just a distinctive delimitation of a field that needs to be appreciated to its satisfaction, but an effort to understand the cultural history of the media, the poetic and aesthetic

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transformations of the works, and, finally, the authorial dynamics that configure the singularity of serialized production and its acute incidence in the contemporary cultural scene. Serialization, therefore, cannot represent a *step backwards* – as if, in the end, the development of the language were a rectilinear evolution led, of course, by authorial cinema –, but it is certainly a *step further*, a path of expressive possibilities grounded on an increasingly common road of intermedia approaches.

By analyzing diachronically the discursive processes of distinction between films and series, we established in this article three central axes that grounded the debate: spectoriality, stylistics, and narrative. As we argued, these axes do not exhaust the issue, since other elements, within the historical conditions of production, circulation and consumption of each specific medium may be recovered to picture the issue. When revisiting the literature on the subject, however, it seems clear that this distinction crosses not only the points of view of production instances, as is the case with filmmaker Lucrecia Martel, but also those of cultural criticism, consumption, and academia itself. This presents a discursive dynamic that presents its own specificities in each country, but that, in Brazil, manifests itself in a perennial difficulty in thinking of the fields of television studies and film studies as much more transversally articulated areas than our research agendas presuppose.

What we advocate here, in the end, is that this distinctive effort be criticized based on the questionable effects it imposes on the effective understanding of contemporary forms of audiovisual production, circulation, and consumption. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the shutting down of film sets, studios, theaters, and film festivals, in addition to the strengthening of streaming services in the production of original content and the distribution of diverse, domestic, and technologically accessible programming, thinking about the audiovisual field in this articulation among cinema, television, internet, and interactive media seems an inescapable path to understanding a present in profound transformation and a future that is radically anticipated. ■

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Article received on March 12, 2021 and approved on June 1st, 2021.



# Towards a transnational approach to Latin American television: Journeys, borders, and centers and peripheries

## *Rumo a uma abordagem transnacional da televisão latino-americana: Trajetórias, fronteiras e centros e periferias*

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper proposes a historical transnational approach with the aim of grasping the main patterns and challenges in the production and consumption of television contents in the region. Instead of focusing on national cases, as most studies on the field do, I would like to focus here on the transnational circulation of Latin American television through the journeys and passages of producers, entrepreneurs, contents, and technologies across the region from the 1950s to the present. The resulting remapping of Latin American television prompts us to consider the linguistic and cultural obstacles and barriers affecting the circulation of television contents produced in the region as well as the established power asymmetries and hierarchies among Latin American countries.

**Keywords:** Transnational television, Latin American history, fragmented unity, streaming platforms, multiple centers and peripheries

### RESUMO

O presente artigo propõe uma abordagem transnacional histórica com o objetivo de compreender os principais padrões e desafios na produção e consumo de conteúdos televisivos na região latino-americana. Em vez de focar em casos nacionais, como fazem a maioria dos estudos sobre o campo, gostaria de destacar aqui a circulação transnacional da televisão latino-americana por meio das trajetórias e passagens de produtores, empreendedores, conteúdos e tecnologias em toda a região, dos anos 1950 até os dias atuais. O resultante remapeamento da televisão latino-americana nos leva a considerar que os obstáculos e barreiras linguísticas e culturais afetam a circulação de conteúdos televisivos produzidos na região, bem como as consagradas assimetrias e hierarquias de poder entre os países da região.

**Palavras-chave:** Televisão transnacional, história latino-americana, unidade fragmentada, plataformas de streaming, centros e periferias múltiplos

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REVISITING QUESTIONS ABOUT the defining traits of Latin American television at a time when the stability of technological, geo-cultural, and economic borders is undergoing radical transformations may not seem at first sight to be the most suitable approach for understanding the present media landscape in the region. While the intersection of worldwide economic, cultural, and political processes has contributed to the erosion of national and regional identities, technological changes in the production and consumption of audio-visual contents have disrupted the boundaries of well-established cultural practices. Not only viewers, but also, we, scholars, may find ourselves uncomfortable when asked how we define what television or cinema are, today. Despite the challenges that this conjuncture poses for making solid theoretical claims, I would like to argue in this paper that revisiting the history of television in Latin America can provide us with some tools for grasping the main patterns and challenges in the production and consumption of television content in this region. Instead of focusing on national cases, as most studies on the field do, I would like to focus here on the transnational circulation of Latin American television through the journeys and passages of producers, entrepreneurs, contents, and technologies across the region from the 1950s to the present. To that end, I propose in this paper to weave together the micro-histories of pioneering TV producers, technicians, and creators with the political and economic history of the region and the world since the second half of the twentieth century.

### **ON THE VOYAGES OF ENTREPRENEURS, TECHNOLOGIES, AND CONTENT PRODUCERS**

Instead of framing the present audiovisual consumption via cable TV and streaming platforms as a break with the past, I would like to argue here that several defining features that characterize the new entertainment media ecosystem were already present from the beginnings of television in the region. Let's begin our story with the voyages of pioneering media entrepreneurs to import television technology and know-how from the United States. Several national histories of television emphasize the far-sighted vision of local entrepreneurs and investors, the creativity of radio managers and artists who moved to television, and how the self-taught technicians learned their trade on the move. However, the international and transnational contexts of the transplantation of television to the region remain on the margins of that narrative. Critical scholars writing during the 1960s and 1970s emphasized the interventionist aspects of such transplantation; however, it should be noted that their critique

was framed within a more general and all-encompassing argument about how Latin America's modernization process was unfolding within a capitalist system (Beltrán & Fox, 1980; Mattelart, 1973; Melo, 1987). Despite its convincing claims, this critique of media imperialism did not address the contradictory and complex nature of the media landscape in the region. Presenting a dichotomic narrative about the impact of the U.S. on the Latin American mediascape was a very effective pedagogical political tool, but it fostered the neglect of shifting power imbalances between centers and peripheries within and outside the region.

Recovering a micro-history of the arrival of television to Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina in the early 1950s may give us fuller perspective on the internal dynamics involving the television industry within the region. Those dynamics created a Latin American media system that is also, but not exclusively, shaped by its asymmetrical relationship with the United States. Encouraged by the local political establishment and embracing an overtly nationalistic rhetoric, regional entrepreneurs embarked on a region-wide competition to be the first to bring television and modernity to their nations (Castro, 2000, p. 20; González de Bustamante, 2012, pp. 1-26; Sinclair, 1998, p. 14; Varela, 2005, pp. 13-44). Numerous questions were raised by the popular press during the 1950s, such as "which Latin American country would be the first to launch TV broadcasting?" "what does the fact that we were left behind in the race for national television broadcasting say about us?" The regional competition among Latin American entrepreneurs went against the advice of U.S. corporation managers, who were reluctant about the prospects of importing such an expensive media system to nations with small consumer markets (Machado de Assis, 2000, p. 20).

Returning to the main inquiry about how a transnational approach can help us understand the region's current media, cultural, and political landscape, we should ask what we can learn from this embryonic story? While it is undeniable that contemporary media technologies have disrupted the patterns of audiovisual production and distribution in the region, I would like to argue that the arrival of Netflix to the region, presents us with similar attitudes and approaches to those mentioned earlier. Netflix is an online streaming service based in the U.S. that arrived at Latin America in 2011, at a very early stage of its global expansion. Just as U.S. television managers had done in the 1950s, at the beginning of the second decade of the second millennium, experts warned about the lack of proper internet infrastructure in Latin American countries and the fact that a large number of households in the region lacked access to a broadband connection (Cornelio-Marí, 2020, pp. 1-17; Fraga, 2011; Muñoz, 2011). Much like television half a century earlier, Netflix was seen as a proof of modernity and development which was, and perhaps still is, measured through

quantified metrics such as the number of subscribers per country, the number of original productions per country made available by global streaming platforms and the reach and the quality of broadband services in each country across the region (Andro4ll, 2019; Sanchez, 2019).

While the arrival of the technology and commercial know-how required for television could be explained mainly through the region's political, economic, and cultural links with the U.S, the development of the more distinctive Latin American genres and contents, such as the Telenovela and the Variety Shows genre, should mainly be understood in terms of its internal political, economic, and cultural dynamics. The volatile political and economic situation of the region during the 1960s and 1970s prompted (or forced, if you will) the journey of television producers, creators, and technicians who brought know-how, practices, and ideas that were disseminated across the region. Despite the impact of these movements and circulation (sometimes as exiles) on the development of a local television industry, these are insufficiently researched. Would Latin American television have had the same trajectory without the impact of revolutions, military coups, and economic and political crises that have affected the region ever since the 1950s?

Despite some references in the literature to Latin American television managers and professional who worked in Brazil and Argentina, the story of Cuban diaspora and its role in the development of the local television before and after the Cuban revolution has yet to be written. In Brazil, references to Glória Magadan, the Cuban telenovela writer that worked for Globo during its first years, are often mentioned as a minor anecdote which precludes a deeper analysis about the transplantation of know-how about television production. Looking at this from our present-day awareness of gendered dynamics, we could argue that being a (foreign) woman and working in what was considered as a minor genre probably affected the perception of her role in the adaptation of Cuban soap operas for the Brazilian context. Perhaps the fact that former (male) Brazilian Television producers were and still are involved in the writing of histories and memoirs regarding that period contributed to that omission (Clark & Priolli, 1991, p. 37; "Glória, Ditadora das Novelas", 1969, p. 62; Oliveira, 2011, pp. 138-144). In Argentina, there is a relatively short and scarcely documented biography on Cuban media mogul Goar Mestre (Sirvén, 1996). We still don't know much about the group of technicians and TV professionals who helped in the creation and formation of Buenos Aires-based Canal 13 and whose mark on Argentinean television that endures to this day. The arrival of the Cuban television diaspora to the Southern Cone occurred due to agreements that were more or less open and partnerships between local media owners and broadcasters



and American media concerns that were searching for opportunities to expand their business worldwide (Herz, 1987; Sinclair, 2005). This example may prompt the question of whether it is possible at all to compartmentalize the national, the regional, and the global when analyzing the history of television in the region since its early days.

But beyond the Cuban revolution, we also have clear indications of other crucial movements and travels of television workers that took place as a result of the political and economic turmoil that most of the countries across the region experienced during the last seventy years. This was the case of David Stivel, an Argentine theater and television producer who escaped from Argentina shortly before the 1976 right-wing military coup and led a fruitful career in Colombian television as a director of telenovelas and TV shows (Coronado, 1992, pp. 290-291; Gutierrez, 2007). From the opposite ideological position, Joaquin Blaya, the Chilean media executive who brought Chilean Variety show host Don Francisco to U.S Hispanic television, left Chile in the early 1970s out of fear of the Chilean democratically elected left-wing president Salvador Allende (Kreutzberger, 2001, pp. 17-19; Owens, 1988, p. 1). Despite or because of the current media ecosystem – where media technologies, audiovisual professionals, and contents travel across the globe faster than in previous periods, – Latin American and global politics are likely to continue to have a significant role in the production of television contents across the subcontinent. The transformation of Colombia into a regional center for international film and television productions offers us a contemporary example of how local, national, and regional and international politics alter and shape the region's film and television industries. The rise of Colombia was facilitated by the national government's policies granting incentives toward media industries, but also (and perhaps mainly) by the peace process that began in 2012. Paradoxically, *Narcos* (Brancato et al., 2015-2017), a Netflix's TV series about Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar, represents the opportunities that were opened for local producers by the ongoing peace process, and at the same time the transformation of that painful national story into an entertainment fiction series that reinforces stereotypes to attract international audiences (Ribke, 2020b, pp. 103-106).

### **ON THE LINGUISTIC, ECONOMIC, AND HISTORICAL BORDERS OF LATIN AMERICAN TELEVISION SYSTEM**

If in the previous section we have argued for the existence of a Latin American television landscape, we should now inquire about its borders and frontiers. Which countries are included within that system? Which are left behind?

# D

Just as the idea of Latin America as a distinctive cultural and political entity has been bolstered and promoted by the works of intellectuals, writers, and politicians since the nineteenth century, mass media and television function as catalysts in the production of a shared Latin American identity through the transnational circulation of television contents and television personalities across the region. In a moment of extreme euphoria, Chilean TV host Don Francisco declared, that his variety show, broadcasted by U.S Hispanic network Univision and made available by cable networks across the continent, “materialized through the small screen Simón Bolívar’s dream of unifying the American continent” (“Diez Años”, 1996, p. 4). Although some readers may be scandalized by how the host puts on the same level Simón Bolívar and José Martí together with Don Francisco and *El Chavo del Ocho*, I think that we should take seriously the idea that television has played and continues to play a role in the formation of a transnational Latin American identity and of a shared regional popular culture repertoire that exists side by side with the national identities. That transnational Latin American identity is spurred by media producers and advertisers who are interested in creating larger markets for their (mostly foreign) products, but also by audiences across the region who feel interpellated by those popular contents.

Following the flows of contents produced and consumed locally could provide a more accurate map of the region. In this sense, OBITEL’s yearly reports on Ibero-American television fiction offer us significant clues for a transnational study of television in the region because they include contents and audiences that are located beyond the *official* borders of the region such the United States, Spain, and Portugal. But here I want to focus on the internal borders of the Latin American mediascape, because those hidden frontiers may reveal more about the region than its external limits do. In this section I want to reflect on the borders, barriers, and passageways that television contents produced in the region encounter when traveling across the region.

The first thing we should take into account is that some genres typically travel across the region, while other genres and contents remain restricted to the national television sphere. The telenovela genre tends to be regarded as a frequent traveler. Other television contents such as news, comedy shows and current affairs programs target national audiences. Variety shows (“programas de auditório” in Brazil and “programas ómnibus” in Argentina) were, and perhaps still are, an extremely popular Latin American genre almost always omitted from research on television. Despite their often-bizarre aesthetics and controversial hosts, variety show programs across the region were an extremely

effective platform for the creation of a Latin American Popular/Pop music star system and the dissemination of local musical rhythms and genres. Perhaps this omission can be explained by the fact that variety shows weren't exported beyond the region and that they were conceived as low-budget live entertainment to be consumed in the moment. Attitudes towards the values and the social classes represented in those programs may have also contributed to lack of interest on the part of media scholars in the genre (Ribke, 2013).

Despite the frequent characterization of Latin America as a distinctive region with a common language and a shared colonial past, we should be aware that language can constitute an obstacle for the circulation of audiovisual contents in the region. Language barriers can affect the circulation of national television programs across the region, due to conjunctural historical, political, and economic reasons. The region's richest and biggest markets have a vibrant and powerful local media industry that over the years has provided national audiences with local contents, creating viewing habits that discouraged the consumption of foreign contents. According to John Sinclair (1998, p. 16), the status of Mexican Spanish in the region is comparable to that of U.S English in the anglophone geo-linguistic region. While Mexican audiences are resistant toward other Spanish-language productions, Latin American audiences are receptive of Mexican productions because they have been exposed for several decades to Mexican TV shows that circulated across the region. In addition to the size of its market and its powerful economy, Brazil's national language has also functioned as a *natural barrier* to the flow of non-domestic television contents.

But the language barriers that prevented the importing of television contents from the region did not prevent Brazilian telenovelas from becoming huge hits among Latin American audiences. Much like the worldwide impact of the U.S audiovisual industry, Brazilian productions are attractive to audiences in the Spanish-speaking neighboring countries because of their high-budget production values. The scheduling of Brazilian telenovelas on Uruguayan television at the expense of Argentinean productions is an example of the prevalence of production values over cultural proximity. In some cases, countries aspiring to develop their own audiovisual industries may tend to over-emphasize the differences between their own style of Spanish and that of their neighbors' in order to protect their incipient film and television industries. The case of the Argentinean telenovela *Esperanza Mía* (Suar, 2015-2016), produced by Polka and distributed by Dori Media Productions, offer us a thrilling example of how linguistic barriers may be artificially created for economic and/or political

reasons. Chilean broadcasters who bought the Argentinean show decided to dub it into *Chilean Spanish*, in a decision that enraged Chilean viewers who complained about the unnecessary intervention of the local broadcasters and the harmful effects of the dubbing on their viewing experience (“CHV Explica”, 2016). Despite the scarcity of research on this topic, there is some evidence that internal rivalries and competition among Latin American countries may affect the distribution and consumption of audiovisual contents produced in the region. That *internal rivalry* or competition could be induced by present-day market strategies or, for instance, by the long-term political and military history of the region’s ability to shape attitudes and fears among neighboring countries within the region. Chile and Argentina had long-standing border disputes that almost caused a war among the neighboring countries during the late 1970s (Garret, 1985; Villar Gertner, 2014). Do past conflicts and rivalries over geographical borders affect the consumption of intra-regional audiovisual contents and, if so, how? How do international geopolitical alignments of Latin American countries affect the intra-regional circulation and consumption of audiovisual contents?

If *internal rivalry* may present barriers to the internal circulation of regional contents, the common cultural, social, and political traits of Latin American countries are often cited as explanations for the regional consumption patterns of media entertainment contents from outside the region. The case of the *Turkish telenovelas*, the Turkish television drama (dizi) series that have *invaded* Latin American small screens since 2014, are an example of regional audiovisual consumption patterns and cultural trends that are often overlooked. Turkish drama series landed in the region at a relatively later stage, almost a decade after they enjoyed global success. The predominance of Latin American telenovelas across the region and the cultural distance between Latin American countries and Turkey could explain the reluctance of Latin American television managers when offered to purchase Turkish TV series. Patricio Hernandez, the newly arrived CEO of the Chilean Mega Network, who took the reins in the middle of a huge economic and audience crisis, decided to buy the Turkish series *Binbir Gece* (Avci, 2006-2009) (circulated as *Las Mil y Una Noches*) as temporary emergency measure to gain time while the network prepared a new programming schedule (Chamy, 2014; PRODU, 2016). The astounding commercial and audience success of *Binbir Gece* in Chile provoked a *contagion effect* across the region and national networks began to purchase Turkish television drama series and scheduling them in prime time, mostly at the expense of local and regional fiction series. The success of Turkish dramas in Argentina affected TV staff,

actors, directors, and screen writers who complained about the negative effects of an unregulated media market on the local audiovisual industry (Cruz, 2015). Paradoxically, *dizis'* success in Argentina, a country known for its demanding audiences, encouraged other Latin American television networks to purchase Turkish dramas, at the expense of local productions and intra-regional TV fiction exports (Joacogarau, 2015). Unsurprisingly, Mexico and Brazil, the region's leading economies and media producers were less affected by the *Turkish wave* precisely because they are less inclined to consume contents produced by their neighboring countries (Vassallo de Lopes & Greco, 2016). Mexico and Brazil are able to maintain high production standards even during periods of economic crisis because of the relative strength of their economies and the size of their markets. In addition, their audiences had developed deeply rooted viewing habits oriented towards national television contents.

What can we learn about the region from our discussion of the borders of the Latin American television system? If there is a Latin American television system, that system may be characterized as a *fragmented unity* or an *ambivalent integration*. While each nation and each audiovisual industry defines its identity and its goals vis-à-vis neighboring country, the consumption of audiovisual contents from outside the region could be defined in regional terms. In other words, Latin American broadcasters seem to be more prone to follow their neighboring countries' pattern of purchasing extra-regional contents, while at times they are more reluctant to buy products from those neighbors who share similar tastes with their audiences.

## ON THE MULTIPLE CENTERS AND PERIPHERIES OF LATIN AMERICAN TELEVISION SYSTEM

If the previous section focused on different degrees of obstacles encountered by audiovisual contents produced in the region when travelling across its internal borders, the present section will reflect on the multiple centers and peripheries shaping the production and consumption of television in the region. While in the first four decades of television, it was possible to describe national audiences and national audiovisual industries in substantial structural terms, despite significant methodological flaws and inaccuracies, today that move seems much more problematic. According to Straubhaar (1991, 1997), the emerging mediascape reflects a dynamic asymmetrical interdependence that exceeds the nation-state as the exclusive relevant unit of analysis – a still accurate definition

when reflecting upon the contemporary Latin American system. However, we still have to explain how that asymmetrical interdependence materializes through complex networks composed of centers and peripheries that are located across and beyond the formal limits of the region.

Many of the *national* entertainment television contents produced today consist in formats bought from producers from within and outside the region that are adapted for national audiences. Richer countries and TV producers in the region – such as Mexico, Brazil, and U.S Hispanic television – are more prone to purchasing and adapting TV formats from less powerful Latin American audiovisual producers such as Argentina and Colombia. In addition to adding higher production values than the original versions, as they are the first purchasers of TV formats, the most powerful media companies in the region manage to turn themselves into the format's property owners making most of the profits from the international sales. The case of the Colombian *super-format* *Yo Soy Bety, la Fea*, is illustrative of the asymmetrical relation between the Colombian creators and the Mexican producers and distributors (Rivero, 2012; Sinclair, 2014).

Latin American countries with smaller markets and smaller audiovisual industries tend to buy *canned* programs from their richer Latin American fellow countries to fill their daily schedules. This is not a totally new trend in the Latin American television system, but the contemporary media ecosystem, constituted by global cable and streaming networks that offer an immense number of media outlets, tends to discourage the investment of smaller and middle countries in local productions. Establishing partnerships with international media companies and foreign investors is a viable alternative for the less affluent audio-visual industries in the region, but that choice comes at a cost. Although international partnerships help increasing production capacities and technical skills of local media workers, the projects are approved for funding according to their potential appeal to international audiences. The production of fiction series with an *excess* of (manufactured) local flavor narrating histories of crime, corruption, and poverty may look to local and international producers and investors as an appealing means of attracting global audiences. Fiction series that are distributed and/or produced by global media companies and streaming platforms and portray famous Latin American drug lords, popular musicians, and charismatic football players are examples of this evolving formula (Ribke, 2020b, chapter 7).

If critical thinkers of 1960s and 1970s pointed to the dependency patterns of Latin American countries vis-à-vis global powers such as the United States

and European former colonial powers, the analysis of the Latin American television system points to intra-regional hierarchies and power relations among media-producing centers and countries that import media content. Within the Latin American media landscape, there are two main media-producing countries, some mid-sized producers, and many peripheral countries. While Brazil and Mexico's place as central producers is quite constant since the 1970s, other media industries within the region suffered more seriously the impact of economic and political volatility. The case of Venezuela, once a leading regional exporter that stopped producing telenovelas even for its domestic market and the rise of US Hispanic market as a regional consumer and producer of television contents are illustrative of the changing dynamics of the Latin American mediascape (Acosta-Alzuru, 2021; Allen, 2020).

The regional leadership of Brazil and Mexico in the production of media contents has geo-cultural economic ramifications that call for the reformulation of traditional approaches to centers and peripheries. The expansion of Brazilian media Globo conglomerate in Europe in the mid-1980s may provide some interesting insights on the opportunities and limits for the *reversal* of the patterns of media flows between center and periphery. Despite its heavy investment in expanding into the Italian market and then to continental Europe through Telemontecarlo Television, Globo's project suffered heavy economic losses that put the whole media conglomerate at serious risk. In opposition to its failure in the more affluent Italian television market, Globo Network found a much more welcoming environment for their international expansion efforts in Portugal, its former colonial metropolis, but nowadays a small and much less lucrative market (Ribke, 2020a; Sousa, 1997).

The involvement of Mexican media moguls, TV professionals, and artists in the U.S television market points to a dislocation or relocation of producing capabilities, partnerships, and investments that could not be restricted to the national sphere. The involvement of Mexican media corporations and producers in Hispanic U.S television deterred the expansion of Brazilian Network Rede Globo into the U.S, compelling the South American concern to attempt a riskier operation on European soil (Ribke, 2020a; Wallach, 2011). At the same time, the overwhelming production capacities and economic resources of Mexican broadcasters stemmed the emergence of Latino media broadcasters and Latino media contents in U.S television market. According to media scholars who study U.S Hispanic television, economic calculations regarding the need to create larger audiences and the availability of a large stock of television contents

worked against the emergence of local television contents capable of reflecting the complex and heterogeneous cultural and ethnic identity of the Spanish-speaking populations living in the U.S (Dávila, 2012; Mora, 2011; Turow, 1997). Could we characterize the Mexican involvement in the US Hispanic television market as a form of cultural imperialism?

A similar pattern of asymmetrical relationships between centers and peripheries occurs within nation states. Media production companies and broadcasters, television, and advertising professionals are mostly located in the political, cultural, and economic capital cities. Likewise, the television contents produced by them reflect a more cosmopolitan and modern consumer culture and values that distort, disrupt, and even clash with the values and lifestyle of peripheral populations living across Latin American countries. Instead of seeing peripheral audiences as passive consumers and reproducers of the cultural patterns and values promoted from the national political and economic centers, several studies are pointing to a more active role of audiences who might engage on a search for compatible TV contents beyond the national cultural and linguistic boundaries. The preference of Brazilian viewers located in rural communities and peripheral cities of Brazil for Mexican telenovelas and/or Turkish drama series is a thrilling example of the reconfiguration and fragmentation of audiences (Ferreira, 2017; La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite, or because of the radical changes in the ways we watch and discuss television, some of those new trends became even more drastic after two years of a global pandemic; this paper proposed to revisit the history of television in Latin America to question and reflect upon the contemporary mediascape in the region. I have suggested that we discuss television production and consumption in Latin America as a transnational television system that has been and continues to be shaped by regional and global politics, by linguistic and cultural differences affecting the circulation of television contents in the region, and by market asymmetries among Latin American nations.

The discussion of regional and global politics in the formation of a transnational Latin American television system has two main goals. The first goal is to call for a deeper and serious understanding of the impact of economic and political processes on the development of regional cultural industries. Revolutions, conflicts, military interventions in politics, and economic instability operated



as centrifugal forces in the formation of regional television industry. Although the relocation of political and economic exiles of television professionals lacks the romantic and/or heroic aura of persecuted political activists or renowned cultural figures of the region, those movements and displacements had an enormous impact on the development of Latin American popular culture/mass culture repertoire. The second aim of connecting Latin American television with regional and global politics to call upon history scholars to include the analysis of television as an extremely important field in the history of the second half of the twentieth century.

Linguistic, cultural, and economic borders and obstacles restricting or facilitating the circulation of television contents may lead us to reflect on structural characteristics that define Latin America in general and the Latin American television system in particular. Despite the often cited linguistic, religious, and cultural homogeneity of the region, the circulation and consumption of television contents produced in the region is constrained by real and sometimes fabricated cultural, economic, and historical barriers among Latin American countries. The more powerful media industries in the region face less obstacles when traversing national borders because of the higher production value of their products. At the same time, they face less competition in their internal markets because their audiences developed deeply rooted habits of watching local television. Yet, historical conflicts, local rivalries, and the willingness to develop their own media industries may hamper a wider circulation of audiovisual contents produced by neighboring countries in the region. Paradoxically, audiovisual products from outside the region benefit from the relative cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the region and television programs that are successful in one country rapidly spread across the continent. I propose in this paper and elsewhere to define the Latin American television system (and perhaps Latin America as a whole) as characterized by a *fragmented unity* or an *ambivalent integration* where intra-regional consumption is less frequent and less homogenous than the extra-regional consumption of audiovisual contents.

Making generalizations about Latin American media industries and comparing them with those of other geo-cultural regions of the world could often lead to distortions and inaccuracies regarding the complex networks of production and consumption in the region and beyond it. If we want to avoid those fallacies, we need to look at the complex networks of exchanges between media producers in the more developed media markets of the region and smaller nations and markets in the region. Brazil and Mexico were and still are the

leading forces in the Latin American television system, but this picture is far from static. While intra-regional patterns of exchange among television industries reflect asymmetrical interdependencies, we should avoid looking at producers and audiences in smaller markets as passive players in the regional and global market game. Government incentives, the development of creative strategies, and the establishment of international partnerships by producers in mid-sized and small media industries could temper, if not totally overturn, economic asymmetries. From the audiences' perspectives, the new global media ecosystem offers the possibility for consumers in peripheral regions within Latin American countries to avoid television products from the country's central capitals and to look for contents that represent similar values and a parallel structure of feeling. How will the traditional media-producing centers of the region accommodate to this new global media environment and what kind of patterns of production and consumption will emerge in the region? Would we still be able to call this emerging network a *Latin American television system*? ■

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Article received on July 19, 2021 and approved on August 6, 2021.



# Archetype and catharsis in audiovisual narratives

## *Arquétipo e catarse nas narrativas audiovisuais*

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### ABSTRACT

Climax in movies and TV series is built by combining images and sounds that emotionally impact the audience, generating catharsis – an essential effect in genres like adventure, western, and horror. This paper analyzes the role of archetypes as an emotional trigger for catharsis in audiovisual narratives. By articulating theories on catharsis (Aristotle, Jaus) and archetype (Jung, Durand), the text establishes relations between both concepts and discusses how they operate using movies and TV series as examples. The analysis show the archetypal opposition hero-monster acting as an emotional trigger for catharsis and the relation between archetypal images and the historical-social context in cathartic scenes.

**Keywords:** Catharsis, archetypes, audiovisual narratives, movie, TV series

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### RESUMO

O clímax em filmes e séries televisivas é construído pela combinação de imagens e sons que impactam emocionalmente a audiência, gerando a *catarse*. O efeito catártico é peça-chave em gêneros como aventura, western e horror. Este artigo analisa o papel que o arquétipo tem na catarse em narrativas audiovisuais ao operar como acionador de emoções. Articulam-se as teorias sobre catarse (Aristóteles, Jaus) e arquétipos (Jung, Durand) para estabelecer as relações entre esses elementos e entender como operam a partir de exemplos de filmes e séries. Resultados mostram a oposição arquetípica herói-monstro como gatilho emocional nas catarses e a relação entre imagens arquetípicas e contexto sócio-histórico em cenas catárticas.

**Palavras-chave:** Catarse, arquétipo, narrativa audiovisual, filme, séries de TV

## INTRODUCTION

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE prevalent in most globally successful TV series and movie scripts rests on the construction of climactic moments during the plot, among other elements. In the narrative structure commonly used by mainstream American movies that aim to conquer large audiences, each act has its maximum tension point. McKee (2010) emphasizes that “an act is a series of sequences that reaches the pinnacle in a climactic scene that causes an important inversion of values, more powerful in its impact than any other previous scene or sequence”. For the author, climactic moments in an audiovisual narrative fall in a scale of importance and reversibility: the climax in a sequence has moderate relevance and, in an act, has great significance, both being reversible. The final climax, however, is usually the climax of the plot and the story, being of major importance and irreversible (McKee, 2010).

In TV series, climactic moments should be understood based on their position in the episodes and on the TV series format – if *procedural*, with auto conclusive and independent episodes; or *serial*, with long arcs and interdependent episodes. In serial shows, we usually have a climax in each episode and a plot climax in the final episode. Procedural TV series, in turn, have a similar structure to movies, with a climax in each act of the episode and a plot climax in the its final sequences.

But the climax has also been explored beyond these traditional bases, especially in TV series characterized by a *narrative complexity* (Mittel, 2012) based on innovations that make the plots more challenging, leading to a more significant audience engagement. Authors such as Mittel (2012) and Dunleavy (2018) identified the use of seriality and long arcs, conceptual originality, and non-conventional temporality and spatiality as some of these new narrative special effects. One such example is when climactic moments happen at the beginning of an episode or movies, in narrative structures that privilege telling the story in flashbacks. Building these climax for a sequence, an act, or a plot – in a conventional or non-conventional narrative – is usually done by combining images and sounds that seek to explore the audience’s emotions to the extreme.

In audiovisual narratives, particularly those in which predominate or there is a mix of genres of adventure, action, science fiction, horror, and fantasia, the climax is associated with *aesthetic catharsis*, as defined by Scharper (1968, p. 135): “the peculiar effect which only works of poetic art have.” *Aesthetic catharsis* that was identified initially by Aristotle in his observations about Greek arts, especially in the dramatic art, corresponds to a type of audience



emotional engagement different from that experienced in real life: “Catharsis through tragedy accounts for the transformation of what would be painful in real life to what is deeply enjoyable when embodied in the structure of a work of art” (Schaper, 1968, p. 140).

In this aesthetic realm of *feeling-in-common* established between the spectator and the protagonists from the diegetic world, one narrative component that proves essential in composing scenes to provoke aesthetic catharsis is the role played by the *archetype* – understood in its comprehensive contemporary definition established by Jung (1976/2014) and Durand (2002). In their perspective, the archetype, as a psychic phenomenon, *materializes itself* when expressed symbolically in artistic creations and narratives, such as movies and TV series.

Based on these ideas, this essay explores how the archetype, when materializing itself as specific psychic images whose latent content is interpreted by conscience, play a decisive role in producing catharsis, since it is through the set of archetypes encompassed by the protagonist that viewers identify with the protagonist’s point of view and emotions.

This implies a close connection between aesthetic catharsis and archetypes in the climactic moments of audiovisual narratives. Consequently, the archetypal characteristics of each character define the image and sound components in extremely tense scenes – sources of the audience’s catharsis.

To develop such thesis, we first present a conceptual reflection on the connection between the archetype and aesthetic catharsis theories. Subsequently, we discuss how the use of specific archetypes intensifies the emotional effect on the audience, analyzing one scene from the movie *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939) and another from the episode “The Spoils of War” from *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019).

## ARCHETYPES AS THE EMOTIONAL SOURCE IN NARRATIVES

When developing the contemporary conceptual basis of the archetype, to be used mainly in analytical psychology, Jung (1976/2014) establishes an inseparable relation between emotions and archetypal images.

For Jung, archetypes are primordial, universal, and ahistorical images situated in the undermost level of the human unconscious, which he named the *collective unconscious* (Jung, 1976/2014). When they emerge from the unconscious to the conscious level, these archetypes are *filled* with images.

In such a perspective, a first expression of archetypes and archetypal images is the creation of mythological narratives. For Durand (2002, p. 63),

myth is a narrative created from an initial rationalization that transforms archetypes into ideas and converts archetypal images into words. Since then, the expression of archetypes by human symbolical production, especially in mythologies, religions, and arts, constitutes a repertoire of characteristics and emotions associated with each archetype, which has been widely explored by contemporary audiovisual production.

But while archetypes are universal and ahistorical, the images that *fill* them – the *archetypal images* – are cultural and historical products experienced by the individual and their collectivity. The same archetype can thus be *filled* with different images depending on the culture and the historical moment. An excellent example of a specific archetypal image is that of the typical US *hero*: the *vigilante*, characterized as a type of hero that acts only according to their own moral code, without answering to authorities, laws or legal processes that do not align with their values. In the past two centuries, the archetypal *vigilante hero* has been represented by different images: from the cowboy and Old West pioneer – period in which the absence of laws and authorities encouraged its existence – to contemporary characters like Rorschach, from the graphic novel *Watchmen*, created by Alan Moore and David Gibbons (1988-1989) – where the existing laws and authorities can be an obstacle to satisfy the desire for taking justice into one's own hands and effect it as immediately as possible.

The images that emerge at the conscious level, however, are only archetypal if imbued with either positive or negative emotions. According to Jung (1976/2014), an archetype is manifested when the image gains *numinosity* or psychic energy and becomes dynamic and meaningful enough to impact the individual. Back to our example, the archetypal images of the *vigilante hero* emotionally affect the viewers by the broad characteristics that define a hero, of any kind, and by the particularities of the *vigilante* type.

On a broader dimension, the audience connects with the general characteristics that define the fictional *hero*: self-sacrifice<sup>1</sup>, the journey of transformation (of oneself and/or the surrounding world) and, according to Coogan (2009, p. 77), an altruistic and pro-society mission. The hero's struggle against evil, therefore, is not for their own benefit, but rather to serve the moral codes of the society they live in. In a more specific dimension, the *vigilante hero* also causes empathy due to their main particular characteristics: ignoring legal limits or authorities and punishing criminals immediately, without waiting for judicial proceedings.

This connection between archetypes and emotions suggested by Jung<sup>2</sup> can also be investigated based on advances in neuroscience and psychology,

<sup>1</sup>In this sense, the hero comes to resemble divinity, even in the contemporary sense, for they practice unrestricted abnegation: "This is the case of the sacrifice of the god, for the god who sacrifices himself gives himself irrevocably" (Mauss & Hubert, 2005, pp. 106-107).

<sup>2</sup>Jung's concept of the archetype was tested in studies on symbolic production led by researchers like Joseph Campbell (1997) and Gilbert Durand (2002), among others, that show the existence of narrative patterns – from archaic mythologies to contemporary fictions – and the redundancy of symbolical images and their meanings, which support the Jungian thesis of archetypes.

particularly by studies on human feelings and emotions, adding essential contributions to understanding the phenomenon.

Ekman (2011) states that the most basic and vital motive for generating emotions occurs “when we feel, justifiably or mistakenly, that something that seriously affects our well-being, for better or worse, is happening or about to happen” (p. 36). Based on empirical studies with neurological patients, Damásio (2012) argues that reason and emotion operate together in the cognitive process; that emotion helps and engages with reason and also conveys cognitive information:

the reasoning system evolved as an extension of the automatic emotional system, with emotion playing various roles in the reasoning process... The obligatory presence of emotion in the reasoning process can be either advantageous or harmful, depending on the circumstances of the decision and the past history of the decision-maker. (Damásio, Retorno ao erro de Descartes, paras. 5-6)

Viewers interpret the archetypal image based on rational reflections about the image and its meanings, and on the emotional responses they have to it. Durand (2002) thesis of the *anthropological route* posits that the archetypal image is fruit of the *imaginary*<sup>3</sup> and a product of imagination that operates between contradictory forces: in one direction, the drives (internal to the individual) and, on the opposite direction, the coercions (external to the individual) imposed by the cultural and natural worlds, and also pointing out the simultaneous operation of rational and emotional elements in the process.

Damásio (2012, Emoções, para. 7) emphasizes that “emotions are triggered only after a mental process of evaluation that is voluntary and not automatic.” After all, as Durand (2013, p. 23) states, what distinguishes the behavior of *Homo sapiens sapiens* from that of other animals is that almost all human psychic activity is indirect, reflexive, lacks immediacy, and has certainty and univocity of instinct, with reason in *sapiens* resulting from this neuropsychological mediation. For Damásio, emotions are the result of a *mental evaluative process* that affects the human body – changes in skin color (blushing), body posture, facial expression, and in the brain itself (mental alterations) – and that we operate cognitively as an *evaluation and reflexive filter*, which controls the variations in the intensity of emotions (Damásio, 2012)<sup>4</sup>.

In the enjoyment of the narrative, an archetype would be rationally and emotionally identified almost simultaneously; the cognitive process,

<sup>3</sup>Durand (2002) understands the imaginary as a *process* from which emerge the symbolical elements (archetypes, archetypal images, stereotypes, and myths) created by *Homo sapiens* to give meaning to the world.

<sup>4</sup>Such control stems from the fact that the emotions associated with the archetypal image – and therefore with the manifestation of the archetype – are not constant throughout the narrative. Fear or anger associated with the *monster* archetype, for example, varies with the stimulus and situations presented by the narrative and according to the audience's interpretations.

in turn, activates elements from memory, product of the individual's knowledge and experience – information that leads them to conceptually identify the hero or the *monster*, for example. This process provokes an impulsive reaction, with the archetypal manifestation acting as a trigger for the audience's emotional response.

The hero archetype, for example, regardless of the archetypal images created by the human imagination to express it (Gilgamesh, Hercules, Mahyra, Chibinda Ilunga, Batman, etc.), is felt and identified by the individual's mental projection of the primordial, universal, and ahistorical image of the hero in the world. Thus, although the same archetype can be represented by different images, it is identified and felt as an atemporal and universal figure, transcending cultural, religious, ethnic, and historical borders and triggering the same emotions collectively. *Subjectivity* also factors in this process, since specific narrative elements are associated with the individual's knowledge and particular world experience and perspective, thus recognizing their personal traits in the archetypal hero images – be they true or not – and *feeling* specific emotions triggered by this archetype.

Take, for example, the archetypal opposition *hero-monster*, part of Durand's (2002) *archetypology*. In the author's proposed classification, resulting from extensive research of symbolic images produced by several cultures in history and based on the assumption that symbolic production is a means to face the anguishes of finitude and becoming, the archetypal hero-monster opposition fits into the logic of overcoming death and time – what Durand called the *regime of daytime images*. In such regime, the ideas of opposition, combat, and separation/distinction prevail, in which archetypes operate as two sides of the same coin, for one only exists because of the other, as seen in the great archetypes *high-low*, *bright-dark*, and *pure-sullied*<sup>5</sup>. In this perspective, the hero archetype always emerges in opposition to the *monster* archetype, with the first being valued positively and the second negatively, usually. To this end, the process of narrative building leads to these valuations that negatively or positively impact the emotions felt by the audience.

Based on a more pragmatic perspective on the creative process and evaluation of screenwriting for movies and TV series, Vogler (2005) pointed out the importance of body reactions in the fruition of narratives, arguing that body reactions are quality indicators of what is being watched or read. Regardless of the quality of the images created to fill the archetypes, however, these in themselves generate certain emotions and their manifestation in the narrative triggers certain sensations in the audience.

<sup>5</sup> Besides the daytime regime of images, Durand also establishes the *nocturnal regime of images*, in which the symbolic images seek to *euphemize* death and time, making them acceptable. This regime accounts for the logics of harmonization of opposites and the dialogue between them.

According to Damásio (2012), we must distinguish between emotion and feeling because not all feelings come from emotions. While an *emotion* corresponds to “a set of changes in the body’s state associated with certain mental images that triggered a specific brain system,” a *feeling* that comes from an emotion is the experience of these bodily changes in juxtaposition with the mental images that started the cycle (Sentimentos, para. 3).

For Damásio, humans experience two groups of feelings: *background feeling* and *emotional feeling*. The first, and the most present throughout life, concerns the *feeling of existing* and is neither too positive nor too negative, as it occurs between emotions. On the other hand, *emotional feeling*, which interests us here, is that which we feel in response to bodily states corresponding to emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, etc.) (Damásio, 2012). *Emotional feelings* emerge when neural and chemical signals act on the body in response to instinctive or conscious stimuli, or in response to mental states that simulate emotions, that is, that draw on “neural mechanisms that help us feel ‘as if’ we are experiencing and emotional state, as if the body is being activated and changed” (O corpo como teatro das emoções, para. 1).

Resuming the connection archetypes-emotions proposed by Jung, Neumann (1999) argues that the archetype constitutes an energetic process in the psyche that results in positive and negative emotions, which move and animate the individual: “its dynamics exerts irresistible pressure and determine human behavior (unconsciously), according to laws, and independently of each individual’s experiences” (p. 20). The archetype leads to a state of biopsychic commotion, influencing the individual’s willingness, tendencies, opinions, intentions, and interests, as well as the conscious and intellect (p. 20). Relating this perspective to and Damásio’s (2012), we argue that archetypes would operate by triggering *emotional feelings*. Antunes (2016) talks about “archetypal emotional triggers” activated by audiovisual narratives, which would lead audiences to feel empathy for the characters. In narratives, due to the intrinsic association between archetypal images and emotions, the materialization of archetypes in fictional creations would operate as a positive or negative *emotional catalyst* to the audience, having bodily impacts, or as simulation in the mental level. Having empathy for the hero and feeling repulsion towards the *monster* are classic (albeit simplistic) examples of this process.

In audiovisual narrative, the emotion-triggering archetypal image is built by the *mise-en-scène* and the soundtrack. Based on these sources of iconic, sound, musical and verbal images, we create *mental images*, which are archetypal insofar as they fill certain archetypes projected in the real or imagined world and

which trigger an emotional feeling in the individual, as well as in a collectivity. Usually, in scenes or sequences of scenes at the end of each act, and especially in the resolution of the final act, the emotional impact becomes increasingly significant to the point of producing *catharsis* in the audience. To better understand such process, we need to reflect on how archetypes contribute to the cathartic process in narratives.

### CATHARSIS AS EMOTION TRIGGERED BY ARCHETYPES

The enjoyment of audiovisual narratives occurs with emotional variations determined by the contribution that the visual, musical and textual elements of the film or TV series episode make to constructing images in the audience's mind. *Archetypal images* – those that fill specific archetypes actualized by the narrative and projected into each individual's consciousness – are the ones capable of generating emotions that impact the individual, making them feel these images in the body and mind or, in a simulated way, only in the mind.

We assume, therefore, that the archetypal image can emerge immediately, as an *epiphany*, in the fruition process, or be the product of a *construction* fed by the elements of several scenes and sequences. As an *immediate revelation*, the archetypal image emerges from a single symbolism in a scene – whose source can be the image of a character or a place, a soundtrack, a word, or a combination of these elements – and immediately reveals the archetype it is filling. This occurs because one scene is enough for the audience to identify the archetypal image as a manifestation or perception of the nature or essential meaning of the archetype, intuitively grasp its symbolic meaning, and experience the corresponding emotional feelings. As a *construction*, the archetypal image is developed gradually in the audience's mind from a set of scenes that present information, which make up the viewer's emotional feelings in relation to the actualized archetype.

Compelling examples of both possibilities appear in the TV series *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019). The narrative centers on the political-military dispute for the Seven Kingdoms' Iron Throne, showing intricate power games, alliances, betrayals, and conflicts between dynasties vying for the throne. One main narrative strategy of the show is the multiplicity of points of view that leads to multiple *windows* being opened for the audience, allowing viewers to identify with more than one protagonist who displays archetypal hero characteristics. Such is the case of Eddard “Ned” Stark

(Sean Bean), leader of the Stark dynasty, whose archetypal image as a hero is built in the first nine episodes until his death. Gradually, values such as loyalty, honor, kindness and justice, and characteristics such as courage, cunning and self-sacrifice, are associated with his image. As a result, after six episodes, Ned Stark becomes one of the archetypal images of the hero archetype in *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019). Stark's appearances emotionally impact the audience, who generally feel *satisfaction* at his actions of justice, loyalty, and courage; and *sadness*, *anger* and *surprise* when he is unfairly convicted and killed.

While one of the hero images is *built* over several episodes, one of the archetypal images of the monster is given *immediately*, presented in a single scene at the beginning of the first episode. In its opening shot, we see the appearance of undead supernatural creatures attacking guard's from the Night's Watch, men tasked with protecting a giant ice wall used to prevent the Seven Kingdoms from invasion by these creatures and other threats. The emotional feelings generated by this archetypal image of the monster are usually those of *fear* and *disgust*<sup>6</sup>.

Archetypal images generate different degrees of positive and negative emotional impact. Successful fictional audiovisual narratives are filled with scenes and sequences that fulfill certain viewer expectations, generating a cathartic emotional effect in the audience.

The concept of catharsis – meaning *purgation*, when used in a neutral or medical sense, and *purification*, when used in a moral or religious sense – as related to artistic works<sup>7</sup> is adopted by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (350 BC), while developing his analysis of tragedy:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (Aristotle, 350 BC/2018, pp. 47-48)

According to Santoro (2007), by considering catharsis as the finality of tragedy, Aristotle understands that “provoking and transforming human emotions in poetical works is something as or even more important than expressing values and moral content” (p. 10).

For Aristotle (350 b. C./2018), catharsis is a constitutive element of tragedy, and it is tragedy's ability to lead to catharsis that defines its quality:

<sup>6</sup>For Paul Ekman (2011), there are at least seven universal emotions: *satisfaction*, *sadness*, *fear*, *anger*, *contempt*, *disgust*, and *surprise*.

<sup>7</sup>The concept of catharsis emerges in Greek culture in the works of Democritus, Plato, and Pythagoras, who precede Aristotle, with the meanings of purification and purgation aimed at medicine, the arts and morals (Freire, 1979, p. 1).

# D

## Archetype and catharsis in audiovisual narratives

Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place. This is the impression we should receive from hearing the story of the Oedipus. But to produce this effect by the mere spectacle is a less artistic method, and dependent on extraneous aids. Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense not of the terrible but only of the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy; for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it. And since the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity or fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents. (pp. 63-64)

For Schaper (1968), Aristotelian catharsis refers to an aesthetic concept, to the peculiar effect that only art provokes in people: catharsis “accounts for emotional involvement of a different kind from that experienced in the emotional impact of real events... Enjoyment derived from works of art of any kind exhibits a shift of levels, from the ordinary to the aesthetic” (p. 140).

Paskow (1983) agrees with Schaper and sees Aristotelian catharsis as a phenomenon in the scope of aesthetic experience:

Aesthetic catharsis is a purification in the spectator of the tragedy of his capacities to experience pity and fear; it is also a pleasurable experience... It is an emotional response appropriate at once to a sequence of dramatic events and the spectator’s most significant individual and human possibilities. The term “catharsis”, therefore, is meant to have an internal and external reference; perhaps that is why Aristotle chose just that word, which has both medical, moral, and religious significations. (pp. 61-64)

For Aristotle, the emotions felt while enjoying a narrative are created. Schaper (1968) states that for the Greek philosopher, “we do not simply take over or copy the emotions which are fictionally presented to us; we respond to the total structure of fictional events with emotions of our own, not with emotions caught by ‘infection’” (p. 142). In this perspective, the cathartic emotional experience relates to the enjoyment of the narrative, when the audience empathetically puts themselves in the protagonist’s place to *feel* what they imagine the character is *feeling*.

According to Janus (1974), such emotional experience “occurs when the spectator of tragedy can place himself so completely in the position of



undeservedly suffering hero that he fears for that hero what he would otherwise only fear for himself” (pp. 287-288).

The German thinker understands that the spectator’s experience of catharsis corresponds to two moments: first, the audience’s liberation from its ordinary world – the negation of daily life – and the immersion into the fictional universe of the narrative, which is only possible by the spectator’s identification with the protagonist hero; the second moment, when the audience must also free themselves from the fictional world – although they feel the protagonist’s actual feelings, the audience’s reaction must be within acceptable limits, in a state of desirable composure (Jauss, 1974, p. 288).

The emotional response of catharsis seems to be proportional to the imaginary situation experienced by the protagonist with whom the viewer identifies, usually a character with hero archetype characteristics. Paskow (1983) states that the “the protagonist as psychological competitor helps us, the spectators, to explore in our emotions and imagination (as well as with intellects) a part of ourselves that we ordinarily avoid or altogether repress” (p. 66). The consequences of such exploration can be dire, still according to Paskow, “but it is often liberating, even exhilarating” (p. 66).

Within these assumptions, the manifestation of the hero archetype seems to be the main *emotional trigger* of the cathartic effect that emerges in situations that generate extreme emotions. In audiovisual narratives, the cathartic emotional experience triggered by the archetypal images of the hero has its sources, as discussed above, in a combination of elements, mainly the *mise-en-scène* and the soundtrack.

Scenes in which the archetypal image of the hero appears in confrontation with antagonistic forces – which oppose not only the character, but also the moral principles and values it represents – are usually cathartic and often the high point of audiovisual narrative catharsis. Note that the same archetypes always trigger the same emotions, regardless of the archetypal image used or the social and historical context in which the narrative is produced. To better understand this phenomenon, let us compare some cathartic scenes in two renowned audiovisual productions.

*Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939), considered one of the most famous westerns, features a sequence of cathartic scenes in its final 30 minutes: a birth, an Apache attack, an arrest, a shootout led by the main hero, and a romantic escape to Mexico. The use of climax after climax is one of the peculiarities of John Ford’s films, which also appears in *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956), for example.

One of the cathartic sequences in *Stagecoach*’s (Ford, 1939) final act, shows the native Apache in a prolonged chase and attack on the stagecoach of a group

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## Archetype and catharsis in audiovisual narratives

consisting of establishment and marginal figures such as a prostitute, a sheriff, a banker, an alcoholic doctor, and a prison fugitive, among others, who are heading toward the Old West and end up ambushed. The sequence culminates in the last-minute arrival of the US army cavalry to save the travelers and chase away the Apache.

The sequence establishes the typical archetypal hero-monster opposition. The hero archetype is filled by the travelers' images, especially by the character Ringo Kid (John Wayne) and the cavalry. The Apache fill the archetypal image of the monster, the *other* in the traveler's perspective, seen as savage and cruel, to the point that the travelers would rather be dead than captured by them. Some of the constructed representations are stereotyped, especially those of the Apache, whose characters are superficial and identified as a threat for being out of their reserves and are led by Geronimo, one of the most important indigenous military leaders in North America, who was against the agreements to confine the native populations to reservations.

Showing the travelers in danger before the Apache attack (Figure 1) – the hero threatened by the monster –, starts the process of catharsis: by identifying themselves with the travelers, the audience *suffers* and, prompted by the fictional world, feels the fear and anger themselves. To overcome fear and satisfy anger, thus achieving catharsis, the audience expects the hero to survive and overtake or kill the monster. And this is what the sequence of scenes in *Stagecoach* shows, especially when everything seems lost (Figures 2 and 3) and the cavalry appears (Figure 4) to save the travelers, thus triggering a feeling of satisfaction in the audience. The catharsis is thus completed as a pleasurable and liberating experience for the audience, who sees the heroes, with whom they identify and show empathy for, overcome the monster, for whom they feel aversion.

**Figure 1***Scene from Stagecoach 1*

*Note.* Beginning of the cathartic sequence shows the Apache, led by Geronimo, waiting in an ambush to attack the stagecoach. Movie frame.

**Figure 2***Scene from Stagecoach 2*

*Note.* Apache attack on the stagecoach. The cathartic process reaches a high point of tension with the imminent threat to the heroes imposed by the monsters. Movie frame.

**Figure 3***Scene of Stagecoach 3*

*Note.* Heroes in action – in this case, the sheriff, on the left, and the fugitive Ringo Kid (John Wayne) on top of the stagecoach. Despite the heroes' appearance, the scene does not lead to the spectator's relief and maintains the tension: despite the heroic action, the stakes increase as they run out of ammunition. Movie frame.

**Figure 4***Scene of Stagecoach 4*

*Note.* The cavalry arrives; the cathartic process is concluded as the soldiers scare off the Apache. Movie frame.

Importantly, the social-cultural context since *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939) was released changed significantly and the roles of hero and monster assigned

in that narrative are objectionable. But even if the roles are reversed, the archetypes and emotions triggered by them remain. The following analyzed cathartic sequence shows exactly this inversion of the archetypal images seen in *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939).

In the *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019), one of the key cathartic sequences happens in the episode “The Spoils of War” (Benioff et al. 2017). The scene shows a confrontation between the Lannister’s army and its allies and the armies led by Daenerys Targaryen, which include Dothraki nomadic warriors and dragons. Again, the archetypal hero-monster opposition works as the main emotional trigger. Daenerys and her allies represent the archetypal image of the hero, while the Lannisters and their allies represent the monster. Here, we consider that the narrative presents archetypal and not stereotyped characters, since the authors have developed in-depth sociological and psychological profiles for the protagonists over the previous 63 episodes, showing their virtues and vices, as well as their contradictions, bringing them closer to the human complexity.

The sequence of scenes (Figures 5 to 10) shows the armies led by James Lannister not only having to face the human forces led by Daenerys, but mainly being surprised by the attack of the dragons, who decimate hundreds of Lannister soldiers with their fire. The emotions triggered by the archetypes throughout the battle are of anger – the scene characterizes a possible moment of revenge –, fear – as Daenerys and her dragon are in danger during the confrontation –, and satisfaction – for the victory achieved by the hero.

Two points are of note here: (i) the satisfaction of the audience that identifies and empathizes with Daenerys while disliking the Lannisters and their allies happens mainly when the dragon burns alive hundreds of human beings associated with the archetypal image of the *monster*; (ii) the representation of the hero archetype by images traditionally associated with the *monster*, such as that of the *barbarians* (Dothraki) and the dragon – this inversion, however, is only on the image level, since in essence it maintains the opposition between *good* and *evil*, in which the audience tends to predominantly have empathy and identify with the former, regardless of their images (outsiders, renegades, savages, others, etc.).

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**Figure 5**

*Scene from Game of Thrones 1*



*Note.* The Lannister army and their allies. Frame from the TV series.

**Figure 6**

*Scene from Game of Thrones 2*



*Note.* Attack of the Dothraki, starting the cathartic process as they *fill* the hero archetype. Frame from the TV series.

**Figure 7**

Scene from Game of Thrones 3



*Note.* James Lannister (right) amazed at seeing something. The scene signals that the hero has resources that surprise the monster. Frame from the TV series.

**Figure 8**

Scene from Game of Thrones 4



*Note.* The surprise is revealed: the dragon's attack shows that the hero has a disproportional (superhuman) strength. Frame from the TV series.



**Figure 9***Scene from Game of Thrones 5*

*Note.* Daenerys leading the attack on her dragon; this moment is one of the highlights of the cathartic process as it is the first appearance of one of the main heroes. Frame from the TV series.

**Figure 10***Scene from Game of Thrones 6*

*Note.* The dragon attacks the Lannisters and their allies; climax of the cathartic process by providing the audience, who identifies with the heroes, with feelings of satisfaction; in this case, the cruelty represented by the burning of living human beings would be *morally justified*. Frame from the TV series.

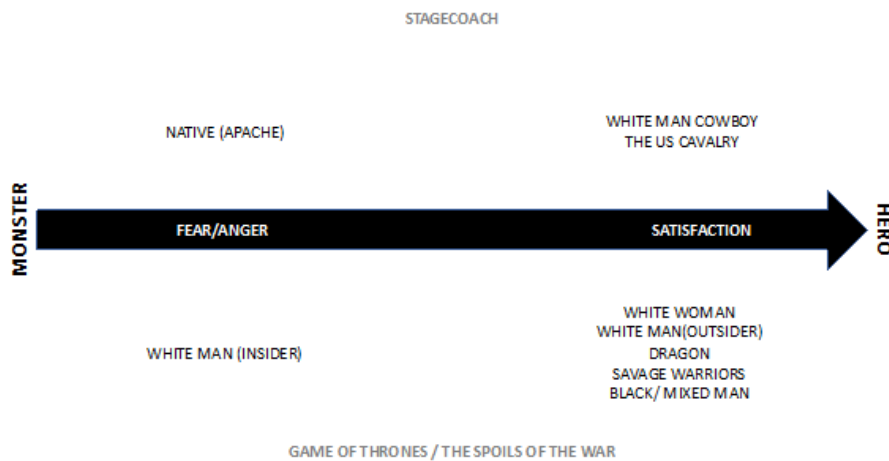
Both examples analyzed here develop the same cathartic process – from fear/anger emulation to satisfaction with the relief provided by the hero's triumph – and involve the same main archetypes – in the analyzed sequences, the archetypes of hero and monster predominate in the protagonists, as summarized in Figure 11. The scheme helps us visualize how the archetypal images vary, even being



opposites: while the image of the savage (Apache) fills the monster archetype in *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939), in *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019) the savage Dothraki fill the image of the hero, showing the impact that social and historical context has on archetypal images.

**Figure 11**

*Relations between catharsis, archetypes and archetypal images*



*Note.* Elaborated by the author.

It is important to highlight that a TV series with several episodes and seasons, such as *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019), can develop its protagonists psychologically and sociologically in a much more in-depth way than a 95-minute movie like *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939). Nevertheless, the relation between archetypes and the emotions they trigger shows convergences in both types of narratives.

## CONCLUSIONS

The examples analyzed here show that the archetypal hero-monster opposition – one of the *good* versus *evil* variations – plays a significant role in aesthetic catharsis. The spectator's empathy and identification with the image used to fill the hero archetype and their aversion to the image used to fill the monster archetype constitute the basic element of the cathartic process in the sequences analyzed.

The feelings generated during the cathartic sequences – such as anger, fear, and satisfaction – are thus connected to the archetypes at work in the scenes that compose them. As the comparison highlighted, it is the archetypes that operate as emotional triggers in catharsis, and not the characters, their images, or the social-historical context. When mentally filling an archetype with a specific character, image, and/or element, the spectator establishes the potential feelings that may be triggered in key scenes in the narrative. As observed, the social-historical context can reverse the characters' role, but the archetypes and feelings they produce remain the same.

Finally, this initial study signals that it may be promising to analyze cathartic scenes in films and TV series from different genres to verify, with greater scope, the hypothesis developed here: that the archetype – especially the hero archetype (or the archetypal hero-monster opposition) –, given its universality and timelessness and for being a repository of potential emotions, plays a central role in generating feelings in the audience during the process of aesthetic catharsis in audiovisual narratives, regardless of the images associated with it or the social-historical context in which the archetype is inserted.

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Article received on November 11, 2020 and approved on April 17, 2021.



# Teorías de rango medio en comunicación: Elementos constitutivos para un enfoque de comunicación como cultura

## *Middle range theory in communication: Constitutive elements for a communication approach as culture*

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### RESUMEN

Este artículo examina y discute los supuestos metateóricos que deben tomarse en cuenta a la hora de enseñar una Teoría de Rango Medio (TRM) en Comunicación. En primer término, examina los enfoques y modelos teóricos más amplios para destacar la funcionalidad de los supuestos metateóricos de carácter ontológico y epistemológico. En un segundo momento, debate críticamente las implicaciones de construcción de una TRM en Comunicación para centrarse en la integración descriptiva del Enfoque de Comunicación como Cultura (ECC). Se concluye que el modelo está acorde con las sensibilidades epistemológicas contemporáneas que reclama un campo de estudio inherentemente interdisciplinar e innovador como el de la comunicación.

**Palabras clave:** Comunicación, investigación aplicada, teoría, modelos, enseñanza

### ABSTRACT

This article examines and discusses the meta-theoretical assumptions that must be taken into account when teaching a Middle Range Theory (MRT) in Communication. First, it examines the broader theoretical approaches and models to highlight the functionality of ontological and epistemological meta-theoretical assumptions. In a second moment, it critically discusses the implications of the construction of a MRT in Communication to focus on the descriptive integration of the Approach to Communication as Culture (ACC). It is concluded that the model is in accordance with contemporary epistemological sensitivities that call for an inherently interdisciplinary and innovative field of study such as communication.

**Keywords:** Communication, applied research, theory, models, teaching

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## INTRODUCCIÓN

EN EL CONTEXTO de la pandemia originada por el coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, revisé varios textos escritos anteriormente. Ello me permitió encontrar nuevas percepciones que fueron borrosas hace años con respecto a determinados elementos y cuestiones teóricas básicas que deben de tomarse en cuenta a la hora de enseñar teorías de comunicación en cursos de pre y posgrado. Lo mismo ocurrió en el curso de la implementación de alguna investigación pasada. Si bien esto no se ha desvanecido del todo, o no ha sido completamente absorbida por este pensamiento posterior, queda claro que debemos seguir dedicando más tiempo al trabajo de los clásicos de la teoría de la comunicación con el fin de abonar a nuestra estrecha familiaridad ontológica y epistemológica sobre la disciplina. Estimo que una buena motivación reside en poder diferenciar entre características simbólicas representativas de la historia de la teoría de la comunicación y el desarrollo sistemático prospectivo que se manifiesta de manera potencial a partir de la fragmentación productiva del campo de estudios de la comunicación a nivel mundial (Craig, 2013). Así, el conocimiento y el reencuentro con los clásicos ofrecería una variedad de circunstancias teóricas potenciales para el docente de la comunicación. Destacaría aquí la versión analítica más convincente de no abstraerse en ideas propias y la satisfacción, por tanto, de la confirmación independiente por generar nuevas ideas y el desarrollo de altos estándares analíticos para (re)pensar el campo de la teoría y la investigación de la comunicación.

## TEORÍAS DE LA COMUNICACIÓN: MOVIMIENTOS, ENFOQUES, INFLUENCIAS (INTER)DISCIPLINARES

Queda claro que el papel de la comunicación como disciplina social se ha forjado históricamente de una manera muy vigorosa y cambiante desde principios del siglo pasado (León-Duarte, 2010). Al igual que ha sucedido con otras disciplinas de las ciencias sociales, la comunicación, en tanto un campo de estudios inherentemente interdisciplinar, se vio fuertemente influenciada desde la Segunda Guerra Mundial por tres movimientos y enfoques que, de acuerdo con Calhoun (2017), le han venido dando forma y ejemplo de trabajo intelectual de carácter innovador e interdisciplinar dentro de las ciencias sociales: los estudios específicos del área y su integración con otros núcleos (inter)disciplinares; los métodos cuantitativos; y la investigación empírica orientada a la resolución de problemas. De acuerdo con esta posición, las tres tendencias han venido siendo influenciadas por la financiación, por el cambio social y por el deseo de hacer que el conocimiento disciplinar sea socialmente útil (pp. 117-130). Todo parece indicar que este *espíritu* de interdisciplinarietàad que refiere Calhoun todavía nos acompaña y merece ser cultivado como una de las

cualidades más meritorias del campo pese a la gran cantidad de teorías y enfoques disciplinarios diferentes que le han nutrido. En este sentido, el Profesor Robert T. Craig (2018) indica que la comunicación como disciplina social se ha venido configurando como una especie de “cámara de compresión interdisciplinaria” para todos los enfoques sociales disciplinares. Así, la comunicación es hoy tanto un campo disciplinar como interdisciplinar. La fragmentación intelectual de la disciplina es un problema, pero también su principal fuente potencial de adaptación (pp. 289-297).

El propio profesor Craig (1999) ha señalado que los cursos universitarios de teoría de la comunicación en Norteamérica se ofrecen cada vez más y en todos los niveles de pre y posgrado. Una consecuencia de ello ha sido el gran volumen de libros de texto especializados en teorías de la comunicación. Sin embargo, afirma Craig, aunque existen demasiadas teorías de la comunicación para enseñar de manera efectiva en cualquier curso, no existe consenso sobre una teoría de la comunicación como campo disciplinar. Efectivamente, Craig trae a colación el estudio de Anderson (1996, citado por Craig, 1999, p. 120), quien analizó el contenido de siete libros de teorías de la comunicación e identificó 249 teorías distintas, de las cuales 195 aparecieron en solo uno de los siete libros bajo estudio. Solo 18 de las 249 teorías (7%) se incluyeron en más de tres libros. Es decir, los textos introductorios sobre teoría de la comunicación estarían de acuerdo en algo más del 7% de los contenidos teóricos esenciales del campo.

Por tanto, considero que es válido que cualquier docente universitario, de cualquier país, se cuestione sobre las consecuencias del acto formativo al momento de iniciar un curso de teoría de la comunicación. Independientemente de la actualización del dato que ofrece Anderson (1996) a dos décadas de distancia, queda claro que, dependiendo de cómo son concebidas por parte del docente, tanto las teorías como los enfoques de comunicación pueden tener mayor o menor éxito en el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje. Parto de la reflexión, pero también del principio intelectual, de centrar el análisis didáctico en las estructuras de las suposiciones y explicaciones que usamos a la hora de interpretar nuestras experiencias; de exponer los valores y los criterios teóricos, las funciones, los enfoques y los marcos referenciales de las teorías de comunicación para percibir y predecir determinadas realidades y, en general, para generar sentido y significado hacia nuestra propia realidad comunicativa.

## OBJETIVOS DE ESTUDIO

Un primer autocuestionamiento es necesario: ¿en qué términos tendría que exponerse, enseñarse e implementarse una teoría de investigación científica en el campo de estudios de la comunicación? ¿Qué función explicativa tendría la teoría y cómo se representaría el fenómeno bajo estudio? ¿La teoría debería incluir algún enfoque, perspectiva o modelo de representación? ¿Tendría, por tanto, la teoría

una forma conceptual que pudiera ser modelada? Si es así, ¿el modelo teórico de la comunicación está fielmente representado por una pregunta y/o hipótesis de investigación? ¿Por qué el enfoque interpretativo acentúa la función heurística de la teoría y por qué facilita la interpretación empírica? ¿Por qué la organización teórica a través de un esquema conceptual progresivo por categorías de análisis, dimensiones, propiedades e indicadores caracteriza y define de mejor manera el ordenamiento conceptual del fenómeno social estudiado? ¿Existe alguna ventaja al momento de volver operativa la teoría? ¿El modelo incrementaría el entendimiento teórico de las causas del fenómeno? Si el objetivo de la función es expresar teóricamente la regularidad del fenómeno empírico estudiado, ¿qué variaciones y singularidades de aplicabilidad hallamos entre los datos y resultados con la teoría inicial? ¿Qué garantiza que tanto el académico como el estudiante del área de la comunicación logren efectuar pruebas empíricas para ordenar teóricamente alguna proposición conceptual de algún enfoque teórico discutido en clase?

Evidentemente, las preguntas son entendidas aquí como planteamientos de apoyo a las guías de contenido del presente estudio. Se trata de líneas generales que sintetizan los nudos y las matrices de conocimiento donde la enseñanza de la comunicación centra su atención a la hora de instruir una determinada teoría de la comunicación: la percepción y análisis de los objetos; la especificidad de los objetivos y las estrategias, procedimientos y técnicas metodológicas utilizadas; las deconstrucciones realizadas y el examinar o analizar en detalle los patrones, recursos y el establecimiento de relaciones semánticas entre la teoría y los fenómenos u objetos bajo estudio. En todo caso, el conocimiento comunicativo es visto aquí como un medio que produce y reproduce un sentido que reinterpreta interpretando, explicando y considerando que un fenómeno social y su comprensión aproximada son en la mayoría de los casos inseparables (León-Duarte, 2002; 2015a; 2019). El objetivo del presente texto es examinar y discutir los supuestos metateóricos básicos de una Teoría de Rango Medio (TRM) en comunicación, particularmente para guiar la práctica de la docencia en educación superior. En este marco, se aspira a exponer y debatir críticamente las implicaciones ontológicas y epistémicas de la construcción de una TRM para centrarse, a manera de contraste y prueba de postulados, en la propuesta teórica del Profesor estadounidense James W. Carey (2009): el Enfoque de Comunicación como Cultura (ECC).

### **ESTRATEGIA METODOLÓGICA: TÉCNICAS, PROCEDIMIENTOS, CONTRASTES EPISTEMOLÓGICOS**

Es probable que, para muchos lectores de este texto, el enfoque ritual de comunicación como cultura de Carey (2009) no pudiera ser considerado, en sentido



estricto, una TRM en los términos expresados por Merton (1968). Sin embargo, dado que las TRM se describen como productos terminados, tal y como se verá más adelante, el docente especializado en teorías de la comunicación tiende, por lo general, a reconocer una negociación de adecuación más activa y situada en el proceso de enseñanza; en el reconocimiento de las tensiones potenciales entre relatos teóricos adecuados en los que puede apoyarse; en la intervención en el debate y en cómo ciertos relatos retratan el compromiso o no con los datos fieles a la experiencia vivida.

Por estas razones, el procedimiento metodológico aquí utilizado tiene mucho que ver con el espíritu de las súplicas de Merton, más adelante comentadas. Por ejemplo, la metodología de la teoría práctica fundamentada (Craig & Tracey, 1995; Corbin & Strauss, 2014), así como la etnografía multisitio de Marcus (1998), personifican tradiciones metodológicas que están abiertas a la autocrítica y, sobre todo, comprometidas con la fundamentación de la construcción de un nivel de teorización media adecuada basada en la evidencia empírica, tal cual fue la aspiración y el compromiso que expresó RK Merton (1968). Considerando ambas tradiciones epistemológicas, mi posición al respecto es que, en lugar de aspirar a considerarlo (o no) como una TRM, el ECC es más acorde con las sensibilidades epistemológicas contemporáneas de adoptar una metodología que abrace las tensiones de las TRM y mantenga viva la pregunta de si el estudio de la comunicación como un acto ritual de la cultura es adecuado para abordar determinados problemas comunicacionales, diversos públicos y objetos de cultura contemporáneos.

En un primer momento, este estudio demandó de una profunda revisión bibliográfica y documental. Una vez seleccionados los materiales de revisión, se procedió a aplicar el método de comparación constante que sugiere la Teoría Fundamentada de Corbin y Strauss (2014) para desplegar dos acciones intelectuales básicas: por un lado, formular un conjunto de autocuestionamientos para contrastar y ampliar la duda sistemática como el entendimiento teórico sobre el tema. El propósito central fue lograr una proximidad inductiva con la evidencia histórica recabada para establecer una guía de relación y orientación teórica entorno a la enseñanza de una TRM en el campo de la comunicación. Por otro lado, cotejar, entre la experiencia académica e investigativa propia, con las experiencias y contextos históricos de otros teóricos clásicos y no tan clásicos, para lograr una generalización en la descripción y explicación de las ideas teóricas e ir trazando el tratamiento de contenidos temáticos con fines pedagógicos, más allá de la prueba misma de una TRM en Comunicación.

Las técnicas y procedimientos apoyaron el establecimiento de nuevas relaciones y conexiones conceptuales para organizarlos en un esquema explicativo que exprese el ordenamiento conceptual del Enfoque de Comunicación como Cultura de Carey (2009). Tanto la teoría como el análisis e integración de un número

determinado de variables que representan las dimensiones y las propiedades que formula el ECC, más adelante tratado, implicaron una interpretación intensa y compleja. Metodológicamente, se ejecutaron aquí dos operaciones instrumentales específicas para examinar similitudes y diferencias epistemológicas de aplicación entre una TRM en comunicación y la integración del ECC.

Primeramente, apoyándonos en la recomendación puntual que expone Belgrave y Seide (2019), en tanto afirman que el uso del método de comparación es útil para las siguientes situaciones relacionadas con el análisis de enfoques y modelos teóricos, particularmente cuando se aspira a analizar una TRM: 1) la metodología es útil para analizar propuestas teóricas producto de la preocupación contemporánea por producir relatos que sean a la vez fieles con el mundo de vida analizado y en función de las experiencias que experimentan los académicos e investigadores; 2) es adecuada para examinar, explicar e intervenir en los problemas del día a día, “preocupación expresada por Merton como necesidad *sine qua non* para accionar una TRM” (p. 304).

Por otro lado, se observó y aplicó, en la medida de nuestros límites, la sugerencia señalada por Jorgensen (2001), quien sostiene que la potencia de la teoría fundamentada radica en la posibilidad de articular: 1) los pasos lógicos para manejar la recolección y análisis de datos; 2) la corrección de errores y omisiones para fundamentar las ideas analíticas; 3) la implementación de herramientas para estudiar los procesos psicológicos y sociales básicos en entornos naturales; y 4) la definición de estrategias para el entendimiento, explicación y creación de una TRM. Finalmente, siguiendo a Argyris (1995), se realizó una búsqueda para identificar posibles constructos, factores, propiedades e indicadores susceptibles a ser incorporados en proposiciones que permitieran pruebas empíricas, y que devienen del ECC de James Carey (2009).

Así, se elaboró un esquema conceptual progresivo (Tabla 1), el cual inicia con una categoría teórica de primer orden que puede derivar hipótesis en tanto el significado del ECC posibilita ser asociado a una serie de problemas socioculturales de comunicación y la vida diaria. Siguiendo a León-Duarte (2015b; 2019), el procedimiento metodológico consistió en la identificación puntual de un concepto que compartía características de actuación práctica en el conjunto del núcleo teórico disciplinar revisado (ECC) para asignarle un código de identificación y clasificación. Seguidamente, se obtuvo una base para medir y comparar un conjunto selectivo y específico de propiedades teóricas conceptuales mediante un listado inicial de corte general. A partir de dicho ordenamiento, se procedió a contrastar con los postulados epistemológicos que, de acuerdo con Merton (1968, pp. 51-69), deben tener una TRM para avanzar significativamente sobre dos planos interconectados: 1) desarrollando categorías teóricas especiales que permitan derivar hipótesis susceptibles de ser investigadas empíricamente; y 2) desarrollando un esquema conceptual progresivo más general que sea adecuado para consolidar grupos de teorías especiales.

**Tabla 1***Enfoque de Comunicación como Cultura*

Categoría de primer orden	Dimensiones de segundo orden	Propiedades de tercer orden
1. Enfoque de la comunicación como cultura		3.1. Criterios relacionados con el sistema de envío de información, transmisión y distribución para el control de otros. 3.2. Criterios del sistema de relaciones vinculado con la experiencia, interacción, resignificación, emociones e ideas, con la intención consciente para participar y compartir. 3.3. Definir el sentido de la comunión: definida para mantener creencias compartidas.
	2.1. La comunicación como sistema de información y control	3.4. Identificar y definir la visión particular del individuo o grupo: objetivos, aspiraciones, conocimiento, comprensión común. 3.5. Describir y explicar la representación de fuerzas y las acciones dramáticas del individuo o grupo en un tiempo histórico preciso.
	2.2. La comunicación como cultura	3.6. Identificar el consentimiento de acciones mutuas que lleva a cabo el individuo o grupo. 3.7. Identificar el rol social del individuo o grupo. 3.8. Identificar los criterios simbólicos en/de la constitución del sentido: ¿qué produce?, ¿qué mantiene?, ¿qué repara? y ¿qué transforma la comunicación?
	2.3. Sentido, significado y dirección de la comunicación	3.9. Identificar evidencias del proceso productor que define el comportamiento simbólico de la comunicación. 3.10. Identificar el sentido y significado de las experiencias del individuo o grupo, enfatizando las que se tienen en común.
	2.4. Orientación y toma de posición frente a los problemas de la vida diaria	3.11. Identificar el conjunto de objetivos, creencias, aspiraciones, conocimientos, comprensiones y posiciones que comparten. 3.12. Identificar el criterio de exigencia al logro: cómo se construye y cómo se preserva el consenso de la comunicación en el individuo o grupo social.
	2.5. Fundamentos de la producción de sentido	3.13. Identificar las características de las conversaciones, instrucciones, ideas significativas y búsqueda de información. 3.14. Identificar la problemática. Problematizar y documentar el conjunto de percepciones sobre esta realidad. 3.15. Representar simbólicamente la problemática comunicativa. Creación de mapas, modelos, plantillas. Representación de y para la realidad.
	2.6. Producción simbólica de la realidad comunicativa	3.16. Pensar y reexaminar el proceso comunicativo para identificar dónde se crea, dónde se enseña y cómo se habilitaron las formas simbólicas de la comunicación. 3.17. Reexaminar las creaciones, expresiones y transmisiones de conocimiento, así como la actitud del individuo o grupo en la realidad. 3.18. Identificar y reexaminar el comportamiento simbólico de la comunicación: ¿qué evidencia y qué produce el comportamiento simbólico de la comunicación? 3.19. Identificar el conjunto de experiencias que caracterizan la realidad comunicativa: en términos de producción, mantenimiento, reparación y transformación de la comunicación.

Nota. Elaboración propia en base a datos de: León-Duarte (2015b, pp. 363-38; 2019, pp. 41-59); Craig (2013, pp. 39-57); y Carey (2009, pp. 7-234).

Finalmente, el procedimiento metodológico cierra con una presentación analítica descriptiva del ECC (Tabla 1) que aspira a integrar tanto los postulados de una teoría fundamentada como los postulados antes señalados de rango medio: al contrario de los enfoques deductivos de construcción y prueba de teorías, la metodología fundamentada construye la teoría a partir de la comprensión empírica de una manera abductiva, es decir, indicándole al estudiante que postule un razonamiento a partir de la descripción de un hecho para plantear la elaboración de una hipótesis que aspire a explicar posibles motivos del hecho mediante las premisas obtenidas.

Por estas razones, el procedimiento de clasificación y comparación de una TRM en comunicación aplicada a la propuesta de Carey mediante el ECC expresa relaciones argumentativas constituyentes en un marco conceptual integrado susceptible de ser utilizado para explicar o predecir situaciones, prácticas y fenómenos hoy presentes en el campo de la enseñanza y la investigación de la comunicación. La Tabla 1 concentra la síntesis de una categoría de análisis que expresa el ordenamiento teórico para determinar y medir conceptos y variables que influyen en, 1) la categoría de análisis de primer orden titulada enfoque de la comunicación como cultura; 2) en seis dimensiones teóricas de segundo orden para observar, describir y explicar la comunicación como un modelo de transmisión de información; la comunicación como cultura; los significados y sentidos de la dirección que comporta la comunicación; la comunicación y su relación experiencial con los problemas de la vida diaria; la comunicación como proceso restaurador de la cultura común; la producción simbólica de la realidad comunicativa; 3) en la tercera y última columna, se establecen y describen las diecinueve propiedades de carácter descriptivo que aspirarían a medir integralmente el ECC y que pudieran ampliarse o disminuir dependiendo de los objetivos, objetos, sujetos y problemas de comunicación y de la cultura bajo estudio.

### **ESTADO ONTOLÓGICO Y EPISTEMOLÓGICO DE LA TEORÍA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN**

La teoría científica de la comunicación puede ser entendida como el conjunto de afirmaciones abstractas conectadas lógicamente y a partir de las cuales pueden derivarse hipótesis y explicaciones empíricamente comprobables del acto y/o fenómeno comunicativo (Craig, 2013). Por los objetivos marcados en este artículo, deseamos distinguir y enfatizar la diferencia ontológica que existe entre teorías y modelos teóricos de la comunicación. La distinción fundamentalmente oscila entre dos polos: a) la teoría expuesta como un modelo para la transmisión de la información y la comunicación; b) la teoría expuesta como un modelo constitutivo

de comunicación. En el primero, el papel principal de la teoría es explicar las causas y los efectos del intercambio de mensajes, a menudo por referencia a mecanismos psicológicos que influyen en el comportamiento. De acuerdo con Craig (2013, pp. 39-57), en una visión constitutiva, el papel de la teoría es conceptualizar y ordenar teóricamente modelos simbólicos que no solo describen el proceso de la comunicación, sino que también operan dentro del proceso de comunicación para producir la realidad de la comunicación en sí misma. Así, la comunicación existe en diversas formas socioculturales, las cuales se constituyen por modelos de comunicación que las propias teorías de la comunicación pueden explicar, desarrollar, criticar y potencialmente transformar.

Los supuestos metateóricos que sostienen a todo enfoque teórico se distinguen fundamentalmente por sus aportes desde la configuración: a) epistemológica (es decir, la base de las afirmaciones sobre la verdad o validez de una teoría), b) ontológica (características fundamentales de los objetos que se teorizan), c) axiológica (sobre los valores que determinan el valor de una teoría) y d) la praxeológica (prácticas normativas para generar, presentar y utilizar las teorías). En este sentido, Craig (2013), afirma que dicha configuración es central en la definición de los supuestos metateóricos en el ámbito específico de la enseñanza y la investigación en comunicación, pues permiten diferenciar su funcionalidad y ser integrados de manera más clara para resaltar los problemas que articulan y valoran las suposiciones subyacentes a las teorías específicas.

De esta forma, por convenir a los objetivos ya marcados en el presente estudio, aquí se enfatizan dos supuestos metateóricos específicos: 1) por un lado, el que se refiere al estado ontológico de la comunicación, es decir, los supuestos que caracterizan a los objetos teorizados, como “un proceso de transmisión de información o como la constitución social del significado” (Craig, 2013, p. 40); 2) por otro, la cuestión refiere directamente al estatus epistemológico de las teorías de la comunicación, es decir, a la base de las afirmaciones de validez teórica en el sentido de poder expresar principios universales de aplicación o, por el contrario, teorías específicas de aplicación a determinada cultura. Respecto del primer supuesto, considero que el Profesor Robert T. Craig (2013, p. 41) va directamente a ubicar la distinción principal que define el estatuto de estudio de la comunicación misma y, consecuentemente, a la definición particular del enfoque y tratamiento del fenómeno comunicativo.

Esto es así, entiendo, porque Craig (2013, pp. 41-42) sostiene que la diferencia ontológica entre transmisión de información y los modelos constitutivos de la producción de sentido comunicativo es trascendental para definir el papel que juega la construcción de la teoría. Coincidiendo con esta postura, para el Profesor estadounidense James Carey (2009), los modelos de comunicación no son simples representaciones de la comunicación sino representaciones para la comunicación:

plantillas que guían, inútilmente o no, procesos concretos de interacción humana, masiva e interpersonal. Bajo esta posición, estudiar comunicación implicaría examinar la construcción, aprehensión y uso de modelos de comunicación en sí mismos, de modo tal que existirían en ellos, afuera y dentro del proceso, modelos de contacto e interacción humana: la construcción de sentido común, arte y ciencia, y la creación históricamente específica de su uso diario.

Existiría aquí, según lo refiere Carey (2009), una buena motivación para acercarnos al estudio de los encuentros entre padres e hijos, anunciante y consumidor, trabajador social y suplicante, profesor y alumno. Por lo tanto, según Carey, “los modelos de comunicación crean lo que falsamente pretenden describir: un rincón particular de la cultura: cultura que determina, en parte, el tipo de mundo comunicativo que habitamos”. (pp. 25-26). Por ejemplo, al construir el metamodelo constitutivo de la comunicación, Craig (2015, pp. 356-374) señala que una teoría debe ante todo ejecutar un cuerpo sustancial de pensamiento caracterizado por el desarrollo histórico y la complejidad interna, y deberá enfocarse en una concepción fundamental de la comunicación que es claramente distinta de las demás tradiciones teóricas. De acuerdo con Craig (2019), el meta modelo constitutivo se ha utilizado como un símbolo de la existencia del campo, como una representación del campo, y para enseñar en el campo de la comunicación.

### **LA PRÁCTICA SOCIAL DE LA COMUNICACIÓN: ORDENAMIENTOS TEÓRICOS Y PROBLEMAS PRÁCTICOS**

La contribución del metamodelo constitutivo desarrollado por Craig (1999) considera el campo de la comunicación principalmente como un marco del construccionismo social y como un metadiscurso orientado a la resolución de los problemas sobre la comunicación, y en el cual participan las siete tradiciones de la teoría de la comunicación. Así, Craig (1999, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019) ordena la teoría en base a dos principios: el modelo constitutivo de comunicación como metamodelo y la teoría de la comunicación como práctica meta discursiva. Respecto al metamodelo constitutivo de la comunicación, Craig (2016) ha sostenido, por más de dos décadas, que está diseñado explícitamente para conceptualizar el campo de la teoría de la comunicación y para concebir a la comunicación fundamentalmente como una disciplina práctica (p. 120). Es decir, Craig sostiene que para cultivar la práctica social de la comunicación mediante la ordenación de los recursos teóricos del campo es necesario abordar los problemas prácticos de comunicación en el mundo de la vida y en la vida diaria. Justamente este es el propósito pedagógico al que aspira llegar el presente texto al plantear, a manera de ejemplo, el enfoque ritual de comunicación como cultura.

No muy alejada a esta posición se encuentra James W. Carey. Para Carey (2009), la comunicación como la vida social es algo más que poder y comercio. Afirma, primeramente, que la comunicación no es un fenómeno puro que podemos descubrir ya que siempre está ahí; entiende a la comunicación en la medida en que se puedan construir modelos o representaciones de este proceso. Pero los modelos de comunicación, señala, como todos los modelos, tienen este doble aspecto: un aspecto *de* y un aspecto *para*. En cierto modo, argumenta, los modelos de comunicación nos dicen qué es el proceso; en su segundo modo, para qué producen el comportamiento que tienen descrito en el modelo. Al diferenciar así el sentido del modelo de la comunicación, Carey cree que la comunicación siempre es posible modelarla empíricamente y desde varias maneras, con sus consecuentes implicaciones éticas dado que posibilitan la producción de diferentes formas de construir sentidos y relaciones sociales:

Los modelos de comunicación no son simples representaciones de la comunicación sino representaciones para la comunicación y la cultura. El objeto, entonces, es reformular nuestros estudios de comunicación en términos de un modelo constitutivo no es solo para comprender más firmemente la esencia de este “maravilloso” proceso, sino para dar forma y sentido de reconstruir un modelo de comunicación que contenga o produzca algún valor restaurador en la remodelación de nuestra cultura común. (Carey, 2009, pp. 26-27)

Por su parte, Craig (2015) ha venido argumentado que el metamodelo no asimila todas las teorías en el campo de la comunicación y reconoce, en cambio, la existencia de otras tradiciones teóricas con diferentes puntos de vista sobre problemas prácticos que pueden tener algo útil para contribuir. Por lo mismo, Craig exige lo que ha llamado el “cosmopolitismo teórico”, la actitud, capacidad y disposición de todo especialista en el campo para participar en más de una conversación teórica. Por otro lado, Craig sostiene que el uso de determinados criterios, más adelante tratados, para juzgar el estado de una determinada tradición teórica se establecen con el propósito heurístico de reflexionar sobre el cómo desarrollar un cuerpo de pensamiento relacionado con otros enfoques en todo el campo, y las consecuencias que podría tener para la práctica de la comunicación tal como se concibe en otras tradiciones teóricas (pp. 367-369).

### **TRM EN COMUNICACIÓN: MODELOS, FUNCIONES Y CRITERIOS**

Otro elemento fundamental a considerar en la enseñanza de una teoría de la Comunicación son las funciones de la teoría científica y las formas de aplicación en

el campo de estudios de la comunicación: la función de la descripción, la predicción, la explicación y el control. Considerando que las teorías científicas no son descriptivas sino explicativas, la función descriptiva implica la definición y comprensión del fenómeno. También, la definición de sus características y componentes, así como las condiciones y formas en las que se manifiesta. La función de predicción se asocia a la posibilidad de pronosticar eventos o hechos sociales que aún no ocurren pero que pudieran ser explicados antes de que sucedan. Esta capacidad múltiple de descripción y predicción es lo que constituye el verdadero poder de una de las funciones más importantes que pueden hacer uso los académicos, investigadores y teóricos de la comunicación: la explicación. Esta función significaría incrementar el entendimiento teórico de las causas del fenómeno y/o hecho social para realizar la prueba empírica de las proposiciones que la sustentan. De acuerdo con Craig (2013), el objetivo de la función explicativa de la teoría de la comunicación es expresar teóricamente la regularidad del fenómeno empírico estudiado, máxime cuando se delimitan los procesos funcionales o causales que los producen. Así, para Craig, una explicación teórica científica es exitosa cuando ocurren dos escenarios: 1) cuando los conceptos y las afirmaciones abstractas de la teoría son explicados con suficiente claridad operativa al grado que permitan la prueba empírica de las hipótesis derivadas; 2) cuando el investigador comprende, predice estadísticamente y llega a controlar potencialmente la ocurrencia de los eventos empíricos que estudia (p. 45). Es importante señalar que, para el caso del presente estudio, quizás el primer escenario de explicación teórica sería su límite en el sentido didáctico.

Consecuentemente, Craig (2013) sostiene que el investigador del campo de estudios de la comunicación debe asumir una posición cuidadosa a la hora de explicar los conceptos teóricos pues es un paso clave en la construcción de la teoría científica y se esperaría que dicho conocimiento crezca a medida que la investigación revele vacíos y errores y se estimule, así, la invención de nuevas y mejores ideas. Por lo general, la función de la explicación teórica se apoya en lo que Pavitt (2010; citado por Craig, 2013, p. 46) denomina el enfoque realista para la explicación científica. Como ya se mencionó, en una buena explicación científica fundamentalmente se definen los patrones teóricos de los eventos como comprensibles, y además se esperaría demostrar que dichos eventos se ajustan a un principio general que potencialmente explicaría toda una amplia gama de eventos adicionales. Así, de acuerdo con Craig (2013), la explicación realista va más allá de la descripción y análisis de las variables del proceso real que producen los eventos estudiados. Por ello, señala, la explicación realista reconoce dos tipos principales de explicaciones: la causal, en tanto define cómo los eventos son producidos por microestructuras y procesos subyacentes; y, por otro, la funcional, en tanto permite definir qué eventos y patrones cumplen, y en qué eventos y contextos ocurren (p. 46).



Una vez que hemos introducido el papel de las funciones de la teoría, un segundo autocuestionamiento es necesario: ¿En qué medida una hipótesis predictiva derivada de la teoría ha sido confirmada por una investigación empírica y metodológicamente sólida? De acuerdo con Craig (2013), pueden tomarse varios criterios para evaluar la calidad de una teoría empírico-científica. Si bien el apoyo empírico es esencial, este debe estar amparado por criterios adicionales tales como el alcance, es decir, el rango de fenómenos que la teoría aspira explicar y, por otro lado, la precisión o la exactitud de la predicción de la teoría (p. 46). Un criterio fundamental que aquí interesa particularmente enfatizar es el valor heurístico de la teoría empírico-científica de la comunicación. Siguiendo a Craig (2013), los modelos teóricos conceptuales en el campo de estudios de la comunicación a menudo se construyen en las primeras fases de la investigación como una estrategia heurística, pues posibilitan una representación aproximada de los componentes (categorías, factores, propiedades), sus relaciones y procesos de estudio. En la medida en que una teoría debe representar el fenómeno de interés, se puede decir que cada teoría incluye un modelo o, al menos, tiene una forma conceptual que puede ser modelada (p. 47).

Como se señaló en León-Duarte (2015b; 2019), el valor heurístico corresponde esencialmente con la producción de sentido pragmático que generalmente es representado mediante un conjunto integral de categorías, factores e indicadores específicos para identificar y caracterizar, por ejemplo, las estrategias, las prácticas y, por tanto, las posiciones que académicos y profesionales del periodismo y la comunicación utilizan para generar sentido y significado en determinada arena académica y profesional (León-Duarte, 2019, pp. 41-59). Así, el valor heurístico generalmente procura estrategias, posiciones, modelos, métodos y criterios que permiten la resolución de problemas comunicacionales a través del análisis profundo de los problemas, la creatividad y el pensamiento integrador, tal y como ha venido siendo trabajado, por ejemplo, por la teoría fundamentada (Belgrave & Seide, 2019) y el imaginario multimétodo para desarrollar inductivamente una TRM con el fin de dar sentido a las acciones y experiencias de las personas en el mundo social (Hine, 2007). Estos intereses y habilidades reflexivas sin duda se extienden más allá de la típica preocupación administrativa por la creatividad, el nivel y logro de consecución de metas y objetivos y, también, de los recursos utilizados y los logros conseguidos en la planificación y operación de los programas educativos en comunicación en el espacio de educación superior (León-Duarte, 2015b, pp. 363-381). Orientar la teoría de la comunicación a la investigación empírica y a la resolución de problemas es particularmente importante porque todo enfoque y modelo teórico de la comunicación siempre debería aspirar a tener una representación de un fenómeno social y comunicacional determinado. Así, una teoría empírico-científica aspiraría, potencialmente, a otorgar una explicación detallada del fenómeno en tanto define e

insta que los patrones de comportamiento de los eventos que incorpora sean siempre comprensibles al demostrar que se ajustan a un principio general que también explica una amplia gama de eventos (Craig, 2013, p. 47).

A partir de aquí, ¿se podría afirmar que en el ámbito de la teoría de la comunicación todos los modelos son teóricos? En mi análisis no, o, al menos, no necesariamente, pues no todos los modelos proporcionan una explicación de principios para su estructura o proceso representado. Es decir, no todos los modelos describen y explican el diagrama de trayectoria estructural que modelan las relaciones entre un conjunto y número determinado de variables que representan las etapas y componentes del proceso. Por ejemplo, un modelo conceptual clásico que se desarrolló en el campo de la comunicación en década de los 40 fue el modelo teórico o *paradigma de Lasswell*. Como se recordará, el Profesor Harold Lasswell es considerado uno de los padres fundadores de la Mass Communication Research junto a Paul Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin y Carl Hovland. Lasswell se vio fuertemente influenciado por el pragmatismo de dos de sus tutores académicos, John Dewey y George Herbert Mead. A más de 80 años de la evolución del paradigma, no existe duda de que aún prueba su utilidad ya que representa un modelo de comunicación unidireccional sobre “quién, dijo qué, en qué canal, a quién y con qué efecto”. Con ello, Lasswell estableció no solamente una serie de factores empíricamente medibles del acto de comunicación sino, además, definió todo un panorama mediático significativo y cambiante para los estudiosos de la comunicación a pesar de los varios conceptos erróneos que rodean a su modelo (Sapienza et al., 2015, pp. 599-622).

### FRAGMENTACIÓN PRODUCTIVA Y TRM EN COMUNICACIÓN

Desde hace más de dos décadas, el Profesor Robert T. Craig ha venido señalando que los académicos y científicos del campo de estudios de la comunicación parecen haber abandonado la idea de modelos y paradigmas, es decir, de marcos de investigación estándar donde se incluyen un conjunto de conceptos, métodos y procedimientos de carácter disciplinar único (Craig, 1999, p. 231). Desde su posición, los teóricos de la comunicación han optado por algo que el mismo denomina como “fragmentación productiva” (Craig, 2013, p. 49). Recordemos aquí que el Craig ha sido, históricamente, un defensor del sentido práctico de la disciplina en tanto la entiende y representa como un campo de práctica social que se viene constituyendo socioculturalmente (Craig, 2007, pp. 125-145; 2018, pp. 289-297; Craig & Tracy, 1995, pp. 248-272; Cushman & Craig, 1976, pp. 35-58). Concibe por fragmentación productiva al conjunto de paradigmas, teorías y metodologías plurales de rango medio –que proceden del mismo campo o por fuera de el– y que se orientan fundamentalmente por la investigación empírica y el

compromiso compartido con el método científico. Según Craig (2013), es Robert K. Merton el primer gran teórico en definir y diseñar una TRM en el ámbito de las ciencias sociales en general y en el de la comunicación en particular. La TRM estaría diseñada de manera óptima para guiar la investigación empírica en función de que proporciona un conjunto de explicaciones lo suficientemente abstractas para cubrir una amplia gama de fenómenos comunicativos y, sin embargo, lo suficientemente claros para estructurar de manera lógica una abundancia de hipótesis empíricas para que cualquier otro investigador las pruebe (Craig, 2013, p. 45).

Desde la propia posición de Robert K. Merton (1968, p. 449), el término *teoría social* se refiere a un conjunto de proposiciones lógicamente interconectadas de donde se pueden derivar uniformidades empíricas. Particularmente se enfocó en lo que él llamó TRM: teorías que se encuentran entre las hipótesis de trabajo que evolucionan con una abundancia de evidencias durante el día a día de la investigación y los esfuerzos sistemáticos integrales para desarrollar una teoría unificada que está en posibilidades de explicar todas aquellas uniformidades observadas dentro del comportamiento social, la organización y el cambio social. Para Merton (1968), una *hipótesis de trabajo* puede ser concebida como un poco más que el sentido común utilizado por cualquier investigador todos los días: “Al encontrar ciertos hechos, se me ocurren ciertas explicaciones alternativas y procedemos a probarlos” (pp. 449-450). Por estas razones, Merton señala que una TRM implicaría abstracciones, por supuesto, pero serían abstracciones lo suficientemente cerca de los datos observados para ser incorporados en proposiciones que permiten pruebas empíricas. Así, Robert K. Merton (1968) reconoce la existencia en teoría sociológica de muchos conceptos, pero pocas teorías confirmadas; muchos puntos de vista, pero muy pocos teoremas; muchos “se acercan” pero “pocas llegadas”. Sus opciones teóricas parecieran estar entre la búsqueda de teorías confirmadas del rango medio o de esquemas conceptuales particulares “que lo incluya todo” (pp. 444-459).

En este sentido, Merton considera que la teoría sociológica en general y las TRM en particular siempre podrían avanzar significativamente sobre los planos epistémicos y ontológicos: 1) desarrollando teorías particulares que puedan derivar hipótesis susceptibles de ser investigadas empíricamente; y 2) evolucionando, no repentinamente, sino mediante un esquema conceptual progresivo general que sea, a su vez, un marco de ordenamiento adecuado para consolidar grupos de teorías particulares (p. 457). Por esta razón Merton (1968) sentenció:

Yo creo –y las creencias son por supuesto sujetas a error– que las teorías de rango medio tienen la mayor de las promesas, siempre que la búsqueda de ellas vaya acompañada de una preocupación generalizada por consolidar teorías especiales

en conjuntos de conceptos más generales y mutuamente consistentes con dichas proposiciones. (p. 458)

### ENFOQUE DE COMUNICACIÓN COMO CULTURA

Hasta aquí queda claro que entender el papel de los enfoques interpretativos es clave en la construcción de una teoría, pues aquí se enfatizan las funciones heurísticas de las teorías. Como se recordará, de acuerdo con Max Weber (1949, citado por Craig, 2013, p. 50), la acción humana no puede explicarse si se le reduce a mecanismos causales simples como las reacciones químicas; los seres humanos son seres auto interpretados (interpretan-interpretando), que actúan sobre la base de un cierto entendimiento de lo que están haciendo o harán, incluso. Más aún, estos entendimientos varían entre individuos y grupos, y cambian con el tiempo, pero definitivamente no son aleatorios: una acción particular puede ser interpretada al ver cómo determinada persona se desenvuelve en un todo modelado, como un plan específico de acción, dentro de una cultura determinada, un género artístico o un movimiento histórico (Weber, 1949, citado por Craig, 2013, p. 50). Así, se puede afirmar, que las ciencias sociales y humanísticas son extensiones formales de las prácticas interpretativas cotidianas mediante las cuales los humanos dan sentido a las palabras y acciones de los demás para coordinar sus actividades. Así, las teorías en las ciencias sociales y, particularmente, en el campo de la comunicación no siempre pueden proporcionar explicaciones generalizables y absolutas, pero sí marcos conceptuales que pueden ayudar a interpretar situaciones específicas útiles para caracterizar las formas singulares con las que opera el objeto y/o sujeto bajo estudio. Por estas razones, para algunos teóricos como Durham & Kellner (2012, p. XI), los enfoques interpretativos tienden a ver el valor de una teoría como “ópticas o formas de ver que centran la atención en los fenómenos y sus conexiones con la sociedad en general y en una amplia gama de instituciones, discursos y prácticas” (p. XI). Consecuentemente, su argumento es “multiplicar las teorías y los métodos a su disposición para ayudar a captar diversas dimensiones de un objeto, para establecer más y mejores conexiones y para proporcionar una comprensión más rica y completa de las prácticas culturales bajo escrutinio” (p. XI).

Al igual que Robert T. Craig, el Profesor James W. Carey (1934-2006) entendería la comunicación desde una perspectiva pragmática, muy vinculada con la teoría del conocimiento y a la experiencia del ser humano. James W. Carey sigue siendo hoy en día un respetado teórico de la comunicación. Realizó su Maestría y Doctorado en comunicación entre 1959 y 1963 en la University of Illinois. En esta misma universidad se incorporó como docente y logró ser decano de la Facultad de Comunicación entre 1979 y 1992. Posteriormente, se incorporó como profesor

titular en la Escuela de Periodismo de la Columbia University. Inicia sus estudios sobre teoría de la comunicación vía el fundador del pragmatismo, John Dewey. Recordemos que Dewey obtuvo en 1884 su doctorado en filosofía con una tesis sobre el pensamiento de Kant, donde se ve fuertemente influenciado por ideas evolucionistas derivadas de Darwin. Así, Dewey entendería la comunicación desde una perspectiva pragmática relacionada con la teoría del conocimiento:

La experiencia ocurre continuamente porque la interacción de la criatura viviente y las condiciones que la rodean están implicadas en el proceso mismo de la vida. En condiciones de resistencia y conflicto, determinados aspectos y elementos del yo y del mundo implicados en esta interacción recalifican la experiencia con emociones e ideas, de tal manera que surge la intención consciente. (Dewey, 1934, p. 43)

A partir de este significado, no es de extrañar que el propio Carey (2009, p. 11) cite directamente la primera impresión conceptual (y, según indica, fue un tanto enigmática) sobre cómo Dewey le otorga sentido y significado al fundamento de la comunicación: “La sociedad existe no solo por transmisión, sino que puede decirse que existe en la transmisión, por la misma comunicación” (Dewey, 1916, p. 5, citado por Carey, 2009, p. 11).

### **CATEGORÍA DE PRIMER ORDEN: COMUNICACIÓN COMO CULTURA**

Es posible que, a través de esta afirmación, Carey (2009, p. 12) consideró, con un carácter esencial y permanentemente en su obra, dos concepciones alternativas de comunicación que han estado vivas en EE. UU. desde el siglo XIX, y que se derivan de la obra y del posicionamiento ético político de John Dewey: por un lado, una perspectiva basada en la transmisión de la información y la comunicación y, por otra, una perspectiva basada en el ritual propio que genera el acto de la comunicación. En la primera perspectiva, Carey destaca la visión y función de la transmisión de la comunicación pues es la más común en nuestra cultura pasada y presente:

Se define mediante términos como impartir, enviar, transmitir o dar información a otros . . . es la idea de transmisión: la comunicación como un proceso mediante el cual se transmiten mensajes y distribuyen en el espacio para control de distancia y personas. (Carey, 2009, p. 13)

En la perspectiva y visión ritualista de la comunicación, Carey (2009) afirma que es tan antigua que los diccionarios actuales pueden clasificarla como arcaicas:

“En una definición ritual (constitutiva), la comunicación está vinculada a términos como compartir, participación, asociación, compañerismo y la posesión de una fe común” (p. 15). Así, para James Carey, la definición misma de comunicación desde una visión ritual se dirige “no hacia la extensión de mensajes en el espacio, sino hacia el mantenimiento de la sociedad en el tiempo; no al acto de impartir información sino a la representación de creencias compartidas” (p. 15).

### **DIMENSIONES DE SEGUNDO ORDEN: LA COMUNICACIÓN COMO CULTURA**

De acuerdo con Carey (2009), los especialistas estadounidenses de la comunicación no han explorado la visión ritual de la comunicación porque el pensamiento social estadounidense tiene una noción muy débil y evanescente sobre el concepto de cultura. Afirma que el concepto se disuelve en una categoría residual útil solo cuando se agotan los datos psicológicos y sociológicos (p. 16). Por tanto, puede afirmarse que, para Carey, esta visión ritual de la comunicación se centra en una gama diferente de problemas de la vida diaria y que son tan evidentes como cuando uno hojea y examina la nota diaria de un periódico. Así, indica Carey, se verá que la nota diaria es menos un envío y recepción de información y más una comunión, una situación en que no se aprende nada nuevo, pero en el que se retrata y confirma una visión particular del mundo. Es decir, para Carey, la lectura y escritura de noticias es un acto ritual y además dramático: lo observa como una presentación de la realidad que le da a la vida una forma, un orden y un tono generales: “retrata una arena de fuerzas y acciones dramáticas; existe únicamente en tiempo histórico; e invita a nuestra participación sobre la base de nuestro consentimiento, a menudo inconscientemente, a través de roles sociales dentro de él” (p. 17). El Profesor Carey resume aclarando que ninguno de estos puntos de vista contrapuestos de comunicación necesariamente niega lo que el otro afirma. Una perspectiva ritual no excluye los procesos de transmisión de información ni viceversa. Sin embargo, el problema de la comunicación determina en gran medida el camino que puede seguir el abordaje y análisis. Retoma a Dewey, para confirmar su sentido y significado del fundamento constitutivo de la comunicación:

Hay más que un vínculo verbal entre las palabras común, comunidad y comunicación. Los hombres viven en una comunidad en virtud de las cosas que tienen en común; y la comunicación es la forma en que llegan a poseer cosas en común. Lo que deben tener en común . . . son objetivos, creencias, aspiraciones, conocimiento, una comprensión común, una mentalidad similar, como dicen los sociólogos. Tales cosas no pueden

pasar físicamente de una a otra como ladrillos; no se pueden compartir ya que las personas compartirían un pastel dividiéndolo en pedazos físicos. El consenso exige comunicación. (Dewey, 1916, pp. 5-6, citado por Carey, 2009, p. 17)

## PROPIEDADES DE TERCER ORDEN: LA COMUNICACIÓN COMO CULTURA

Así, para Carey (2009), la pregunta de fondo es ¿a dónde recurrir, incluso provisionalmente, para obtener los recursos con los cuales podemos obtener una nueva perspectiva sobre la comunicación? Los recursos para identificar el verdadero sentido y significado de la comunicación en la obra de Carey provienen básicamente de la tradición social más viable del pensamiento comunicacional de principios del siglo pasado. Particularmente, de aquellas fuentes del capital científico adicional a la propia obra de Dewey y que, por lo general, se ubicaron dentro de la escuela de Chicago: desde George H. Mead, Charles Cooley, Robert Park e Erving Goffman (p. 17). A partir de tales fuentes, Carey logra elaborar una definición de comunicación que desarma toda simplicidad con un cierto poder intelectual y alcance: la comunicación es un proceso simbólico mediante el cual la realidad se produce, mantiene, repara y se transforma. Consecuentemente, Carey enfatizaría lo simbólico de la producción de la realidad porque representa uno de los principales problemas que encontramos al hablar sobre comunicación, es decir, el sustantivo remite directamente a una experiencia humana de lo más común y mundana: “Las actividades colectivas de comunicación y sus significados: tener conversaciones, dar instrucciones, impartir conocimientos, compartir ideas significativas, buscar información, entretener y estar entretenidos, son tan ordinarios y mundanos que les resulta difícil llamar nuestra atención” (p. 19).

Del mismo modo, Carey (2009) afirma que una manera de evidenciar lo acostumbrados que estamos al misterioso, pero a la vez asombroso proceso de la comunicación, es cuando visitamos intelectualmente este proceso: siempre nos centramos en lo trivial y no en lo problemático del acto y proceso. Sostiene que por lo general en las ciencias sociales se pueden tomar los hechos más obvios de la vida social y forzarlos a un primer plano de asombro. “Cuando comenta que la comunicación es la más maravillosa entre todas las cosas, a lo mejor Dewey está intentando precisamente eso: inducir en nosotros una capacidad de asombro y asombro con respecto a esto” (p. 19). Es decir, Para Carey (2009), Dewey sabía que el conocimiento efectivamente crecía cuanto más problemáticas se vuelven las cosas o situaciones. De acuerdo con Carey (2009, p. 20), tanto nuestro sentido común como el realismo científico atestiguan el hecho de que existe: 1) un mundo real de objetos, eventos y procesos que observamos;

2) consecuentemente también existe un lenguaje o símbolos que nombran estos eventos en el mundo real y crean descripciones más o menos adecuadas de ellos. Es decir, para Carey (2009, pp. 19-20), hay una realidad y luego, después del hecho, un conjunto de percepciones sobre ella. Enfatiza que implícitamente existe una distinción entre realidad y fantasía y que nuestros términos se relacionen con este mundo como sombra y sustancia. Por lo general, afirma, “se quitan capas semánticas de términos y significados para descubrir este dominio más sustancial de la existencia” (p. 20). Con esta primera cláusula teórica, Carey (2009) introduce al enfoque de comunicación (ECC) la reflexión sobre la construcción y utilización del pensamiento y su representación simbólica mediante mapas, modelos, plantillas para (re)presentar la naturaleza de la comunicación:

Este milagro particular que realizamos a diario y a cada hora, el milagro de producir realidad y luego vivir dentro y bajo el hecho de nuestras propias producciones, se basa en una cualidad particular de los símbolos: su capacidad de ser ambos representaciones “de” y “para” la realidad. (p. 23)

Como ejemplo sostiene la relación de plano arquitectónico y construcción de una casa. Un plano de una casa en un modo de representación *para* la realidad: bajo su orientación y control se produce una realidad, una casa, que expresa las relaciones de contenido en forma reducida y simplificada en el plano. Hay un segundo uso de un plano, sin embargo. Si alguien pide una descripción de una casa particular, uno puede simplemente señalar un plano y decir: “Esa es la casa”. Aquí el anteproyecto se erige como una representación o símbolo de la realidad: expresa o representa, en un medio alternativo, una formulación sinóptica de la naturaleza de una realidad particular. Si bien estas son solo dos caras de la misma moneda, apuntan a la doble capacidad de las formas simbólicas: como símbolos que presentan una realidad; como símbolos para crear la realidad misma que presentan. (Carey, 2009, p. 23). Así, Carey (2009, pp. 23-24) finaliza discutiendo dos cuestiones centrales. Por un lado, apuntando algunas características de la comunicación como proceso sociocultural y, por otro, describiendo cuáles podrían ser algunas de las preguntas básicas que deberían hacerse en el campo de estudios de la comunicación. Con respecto al primer punto, Carey (2009, pp. 25-26) sostiene que estudiar la comunicación es examinar el proceso social real donde se crean, apprehenden y utilizan formas simbólicas significativas. Cuando se describe de esta manera, argumenta, algunos estudiosos lo descartarían como un campo insuficientemente empírico de ahí que se autocuestione críticamente: ¿La pregunta es cómo hacemos esto? ¿Cuáles son las diferencias entre estas



formas? ¿Cuáles son las variaciones históricas y comparativas entre ellos? ¿Cómo influyen los cambios en la tecnología de comunicación en lo que podemos crear y aprehender concretamente? ¿Cómo luchan los grupos en la sociedad por la definición de qué es lo real? En opinión de Carey (2009), sería lo contrario, ya que afirma que es un mero intento de eliminar nuestras nociones existentes sobre la comunicación y que solo sirven para desvitalizar nuestros datos y nuestra percepción sobre la comunicación:

Nuestros intentos de construir, mantener, reparar y transformar la realidad son actividades públicamente observables que ocurren en un tiempo histórico . . . Para ello se debe crear, expresar y transmitir nuestro conocimiento y actitud hacia la realidad a través de la construcción de una variedad de sistemas de símbolos: arte, ciencia, periodismo, religión, sentido común, mitología. (p. 25)

## CONCLUSIONES

Al relacionar, integrar y definir los supuestos metateóricos básicos de una TRM en comunicación, se ha querido determinar un camino metodológico de corte pedagógico para definir, en primer término, el sentido práctico del papel que juega el(la) académico(a) para guiar su práctica en un curso de teoría de la Comunicación en el espacio de educación superior. En este marco, al exponer y debatir críticamente las implicaciones ontológicas, epistemológicas y praxeológicas de la construcción de una TRM, se ha querido mostrar, enfáticamente y de manera práctica, la integración operativa de un Enfoque de Comunicación como Cultura (ECC). Llevar la teoría a la práctica es un elemento indispensable en el fortalecimiento del conocimiento de la disciplina, tanto para potencializar las competencias propiamente (inter)disciplinarias del campo como para destacar autocriticamente las propias prácticas de explicación del fenómeno comunicativo.

El desarrollo teórico es una de las tareas más importantes que el profesional de la comunicación y la información afronta en este campo de estudios. Además, contribuye a la legitimación y autonomía del campo a la vez que proporciona bases científicas para implementar la investigación empírica y orientarla a la resolución de problemas sociales simples y complejos. Al desarrollar el ECC nos propusimos identificar un cuerpo teórico conceptual que describiera y explicara el fenómeno de la comunicación como cultura y su orientación potencial hacia una línea de identidad disciplinar propia del proceso formativo. Así, el estudio concluye que una TRM se enfoca en fenómenos específicos, y surge de las necesidades observables de la práctica y la vida diaria. La utilización de la derivación conceptual-teórica-empírica es un método práctico para proponer TRM, las cuales se integran por

conceptos y proposiciones operativas en forma sencilla y clara que permiten la aplicación en la práctica real del especialista en comunicación.

Para su manejo en entornos pedagógicos, se recomienda utilizar metodologías plurales de rango medio como pudieran ser, por ejemplo, la utilizada por la teoría práctica fundamentada (Craig & Tracy, 1995, pp. 248-277), aplicada y probada en instituciones educativas. Asimismo, se concluye que más que una TRM en comunicación, el ECC pudiera ser entendido como un modelo teórico acorde con las sensibilidades epistemológicas contemporáneas que reclama un campo inherentemente interdisciplinar e innovador como el de la comunicación y la cultura. En tanto el ECC procede del campo de estudios de la comunicación, y se orienta por la investigación empírica y el compromiso compartido por el método científico, se concluye también que puede ser entendido como una evidente expresión de la fragmentación productiva del campo de estudios de la comunicación.

Para su implementación en clase, se habrá de considerar un conjunto de elementos epistemológicos del modelo en relación al problema de la explicación y abordaje del fenómeno que se vaya a considerar. Se sugiere iniciar con aquellos aspectos teóricos que tengan mayor capacidad de generalización. También, con una mayor capacidad para resolver problemas con alto grado de interés comunicativo, con mayor sentido abductivo pero, también, con mayor parsimonia, es decir, donde tenga una mayor primacía la explicación teórica conceptual más simple y sencilla de entender. Igualmente, que aspire a desarrollar mayores niveles de conexión con problemas de la vida diaria y aquellos que, al mismo tiempo, planteen mayor sentido y aliciente en el estudiante. En el caso del ECC, sería recomendable, adicionalmente, diferenciar su funcionalidad e integrar tantos factores como propiedades sean posibles, y acordes a los problemas que articulan y valoran las suposiciones subyacentes de la vida diaria, la comunicación y la cultura, ya que son expresiones didácticas muy fructíferas para “mantener viva la preocupación generalizada por consolidar teorías especiales mediante conjuntos de conceptos más generales y proposiciones empíricas mutuamente consistentes” (Merton, 1968, p. 53). ■

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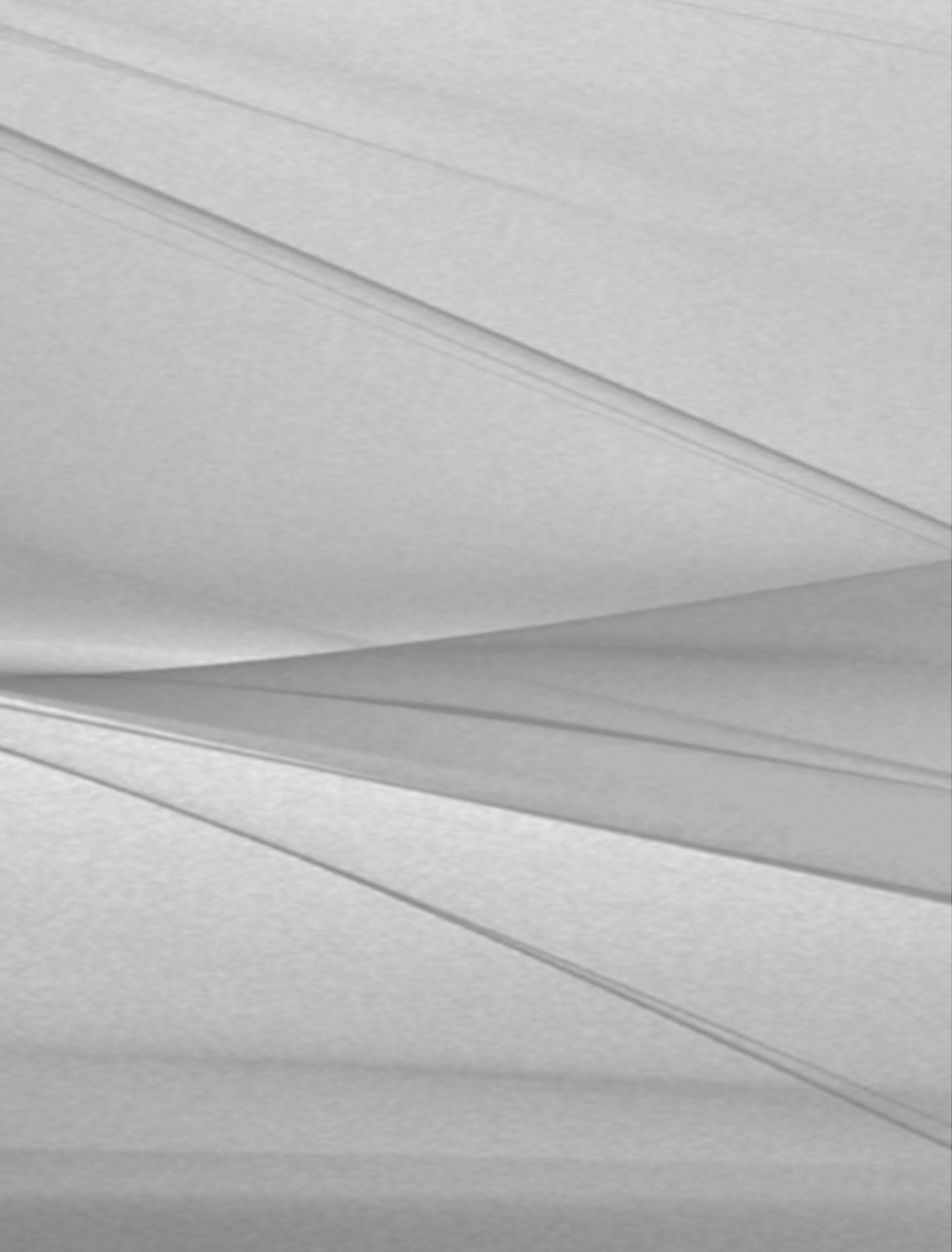
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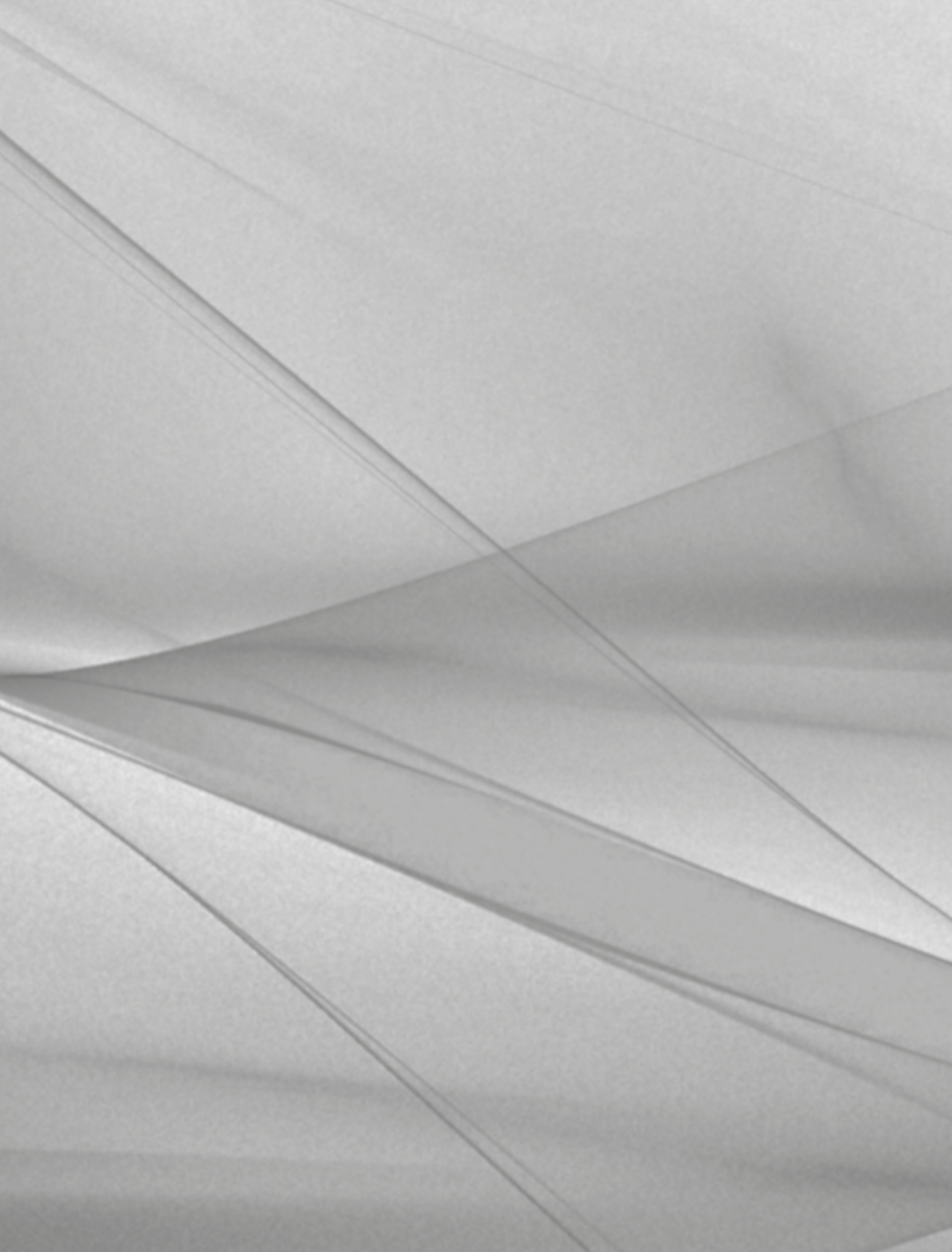
Artículo recibido el 17 de noviembre de 2020 y aprobado el 23 de mayo de 2021.



HOMENAGEM A

**JBM**





# Notes to the text by Jesús Martín-Barbero “What Latin American communication research owes to Brazil: Personal account of an intercultural experience”

*Alguns apontamentos feitos ao texto de Jesús Martín-Barbero “O que a pesquisa latino-americana de comunicação deve ao Brasil. Relato pessoal de uma experiência intercultural”*

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*A form of tribute to Master Jesús Martín-Barbero, a few months after his departure.*

WHAT FOLLOWS ARE brief notes arising from the rereading of a text by Jesús Martín-Barbero (JMB) originally presented in 1997, 21 years ago. The long-elapsed time and the present moment created a special reading of the text marked both by the emotion of the recent loss and by the theme addressed. Today, I read this text as a map, in which JMB ended up charting the most important Brazilian contributions to communication research in Latin America. And I read it as a historiography of the initial period of the field of communication, in the 80s, with the author simply pointing out the numerous innovations that Brazilian research had made in the period that are now evident and their resonances up to this day. Even more, I could then follow, in the first-person account, the Brazilian influences in his own work – recalling that only ten years separated it from the first publication of *From Media to Meditation* (1987) – such as the deepening of his study program of the communication and culture relations, the approximation of the theory of gaps with the theory of mediations; the “*tempranos*” studies on the reception competence and on new ways of looking at globalization and interculturality.

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v15i2p123-126>

V.15 - Nº2 mai./ago. 2021 São Paulo - Brasil MARIA IMMACOLATA VASSALLO DE LOPES p. 123-126

MATRIZES



Starting the cartography, the author identifies Paulo Freire's libertarian pedagogy – with his word and action program – and Gramsci's hegemony concept – with his study of domination as a communication process – as the two pillars that enabled him to *think about communication* in different way than that which prevailed in Latin American research at the time (a kind of left-wing functionalism), not only as a process of domination, but as a lived social process and as a cultural battleground. These two authors, according to him, helped him draw four maps of the original contributions of Brazilian research, condensed below.

### 1. THINKING THE MEANS IN THE HISTORICAL FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL-POPULAR

The first contribution of Brazilian research is identified from his first meeting with Brazil in September 1983. It was the discovery that, here, to think the means was to think the country, it was to think beyond their property and functions. The complex formation of a country, conflicting political and cultural mixes, starting with the ambiguities of populism, the “misplaced ideas” and, mainly, the debate on national-popular culture inaugurate the modern culture studies according to JMB. Here, he found diverse and innovative approaches to national culture and identity, with great theoretical and political intensity, also to everyday culture and to the media and the presence of the popular in them.

These are explicitly recognized sources for his concept of *popular-massive* and allowed him to approach the circuit of stratagems and cunning and tactics in a manner akin to Michel de Certeau, that is, *culture as a field of struggles*. Seeing them against the background of the conflicts and contradictions between movements by the affirmation of the national-popular identity and the movements of modernization of a mass culture in the country. They are peculiarities of a cultural industry governed by the switch between distinct logics that relate to a Brazilian kind of cultural modernity. The new idea of nation and national identity, which is born under the aegis of an ideology of national integration, will have the television as its main vehicle and the telenovela as its best speech.

It could be said that JMB, already marked by his future sensitivity mediation, could not fail to notice the absence of the “*evil eye of the intellectuals*” in Brazil, as opposed to other Latin American countries, whose insensitivity marked the relations of those countries with the media. Here, he examines the importance of the relationship of intellectuals with the massive media, their understanding and their configuration as a cultural industry, mainly through the television. Philosophers and social scientists of great weight turned to her, such as Muniz Sodré, Décio Pignatari, Sergio Miceli, Renato Ortiz, Sérgio Capparelli, Marlyse Meyer; and

writers and artists such as Dias Gomes, Doc Comparato, Walter George Durst, Aguinaldo Silva. They are authors of studies and essays, authors and directors of telenovelas and series that were decisive to birth the relations of the television with the country and the capacity for dramaturgic and audiovisual experimentation.

## 2. POPULAR CULTURE AS A SPACE OF COMMUNICATIVE COUNTER-HEGEMONY

The second strategic contribution of Brazilian communication research to Latin American research was the *early overcoming of the dualist reason*, which, in other countries, was preventing the understanding of the complexity of the relations between the popular and the massive, what the media has of culture and what people can do with them. His references are Sergio Miceli, for whom the Brazilian cultural industry occupies a nonunified symbolic and material market, in which heterogeneous products, demands and readings cross one another (the Bourdieusian study *A Noite da Madrinha*); and Roberto DaMatta, with the original temporalities and spatialities of Brazilian culture (*A Casa e a Rua*). From them, JMB identifies the advancement of two strategic lines of research in Brazil: 1) communicative counter-hegemony, with initial research linking the media to popular movements and the possibilities of counter-information and popular hegemony, in addition to themes of popular communication and counter-information praxis: Luiz Beltrão, Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva, Anamaria Fadul; the Cycles of the Brazilian Society for the Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication (INTERCOM), in 1979, 1980 and 1981; and 2) the competence of the recipient subject, with the demonstration of the communicative creativity of popular cultures and their relations with the media as a scenario of political and cultural struggles, which generated studies as those of Regina Festa and Luiz Fernando Santoro. On the other hand, this scenario also led JMB to discover *the theory of gaps* that the political contradictions themselves open in cultural industries: Muniz Sodré and the revived and even clandestinely cultivated black culture; Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes and Gil Gomes' voice of the listener that leads to the recognition of the anonymous and poor subjects of the city; the other side of the recipient: Anamaria Fadul and the work of critical reception; Mauro Wilton and the insertion of the telenovela in the lives of young workers. In the early attention paid by Brazilian researchers to the competence of the recipient and its insertion in the day-to-day world, the pioneering presence of an anthropology of the city (Ruth Cardoso, José Guilherme Magnani); of daily life (Teresa Pires Caldeira, G. Velho, Everardo Rocha); of the reception of telenovela (Ondina Fachel Leal); and of the reception of the *Jornal Nacional* (Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva) played an important role investigating

*the critical mediations* introduced by the church, the trade union movement, the political parties, the feminist movement. JMB points out the great repercussion, in Latin America, of all these Brazilian studies on the production and symbolic reelaboration that the popular classes make of media products. Another early Brazilian experience was the practice of interdisciplinarity, by putting together sociologists, psychologists, historians and communicators (Seminar *Sujeito, o lado oculto do receptor* [*Subject, the hidden side of the receptor*], 1991).

### 3. COMMUNICATION GLOBALIZATION AND MODERNITY-WORLD

Authors and seminal works are incorporated: Milton Santos and the new sense of space and time; Renato Ortiz and the new sense of worldwide; Octaviano Ianni and the new sense of globalization as an emerging paradigm of the social sciences of the 21st century. They are taken as examples of studies that surpassed the simplifying approaches of fighting off globalization found in Latin American research.

### 4. CRITICAL APPROPRIATION OF LATIN AMERICAN RESEARCH

JMB highlights the role of INTERCOM, with a clear Latin Americanist vocation and permanent dialogue with the region's studies, citing the V Cycle, 1982 – *Impasses e desafios da pesquisa em Comunicação* (*Stalemates and challenges of communication research*); *Teoria e pesquisa em comunicação: panorama latino-americano* (*Theory and research in communication: Latin American panorama*); Alaiç's 1989 reconstitution and the importance of José Marques de Melo's performance; the 1st Latin American Congress of Communication Researchers in 1992.

In the particularly fertile dialogue on theory, research and communication teaching, he cites Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, with her criticism of the functionalization of reception research and the book *Pesquisa em Comunicação*, with new objects and research proposals. However, he criticizes the view of teaching and research dictated by the needs of the market, pointed out by José Marques de Melo in texts from 1987 and 1991, which would mark a break of the author with this line of Brazilian research. In conclusion, JMB endorses the voice of fellow Latin Americans as he

recognizes the decisive presence of Brazilian research in the birth of a Latin American thought about communication that, at once, allows us a deeper understanding of the peculiarities and dynamics of our world, and is enabling us at the international level to move from the role of 'native informant' to that of true producers of thought and knowledge. ■

# What Latin American communication research owes to Brazil: Personal account of an intercultural experience<sup>1</sup>

## *O que a pesquisa latino-americana de comunicação deve ao Brasil: Relato pessoal de uma experiência intercultural*

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### ABSTRACT

In this text, Jesús Martín-Barbero describes points that brought Brazil closer to his thought, besides contributions to Latin American communication research. Some of the dimensions discussed are the following: the reflective contribution to understanding the communication *political-cultural* scenario, which allowed thinking about how the cultural industry promoted a new idea of nation; a more complex understanding, which overcomes dualistic reason, of the relations between the popular and the massive, expressed in the country in two lines of investigation, one related to communicative counterhegemony and the other to the competence of the receiver, and also the contribution of Brazilian authors' reflection to the discussion about contemporary globalization processes.

**Keywords:** Communication research, communication theory, Brazil, Latin America, Jesús Martín-Barbero

### RESUMO

Neste texto, Jesús Martín-Barbero descreve pontos que aproximaram o Brasil de seu pensamento e contribuições brasileiras à pesquisa de comunicação latino-americana. Algumas das dimensões discutidas são: o aporte reflexivo para a compreensão do cenário *político-cultural* da comunicação, que permitiu pensar como a indústria cultural promoveu uma nova ideia de nação; um entendimento mais complexo, superando a razão dualista, das relações entre o popular e o massivo, que se expressou no país em duas linhas de investigação, a da contra-hegemonia comunicativa e a da competência do sujeito receptor, e também a contribuição das reflexões de autores brasileiros para a discussão dos processos de globalização contemporâneos.

**Palavras-chave:** Pesquisa de comunicação, teoria da comunicação, Brasil, América Latina, Jesús Martín-Barbero

<sup>1</sup>Text originally published in Spanish in the book *Vinte anos de ciências da comunicação no Brasil: Avaliação e perspectivas* [Twenty Years of Communication Sciences in Brazil: Assessment and Perspectives] (Universidade Santa Cecília, 1999), edited by Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes. **MATRIZES** thanks the current Board of the Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Studies of Communication (INTERCOM), through its president, Prof. Dr. Giovandro Marcus Ferreira, for the permission to publish this text.

<sup>a</sup> One of the most important thinkers in communication in Latin America, the author was born in Spain, in 1937, and died in Colombia, where he has settled in, on June 12, 2021.

Anyone who writes about society without wanting to lose sight of social relations and their paradoxes cannot build bunkers, but huts, shacks and hovels instead. Houses made of large open spaces, destined for good food and noble beer with friends, within those conversations where you love what you say and excuse all the vehemence that accompanies an eventual discovery of some aspect of the society and culture where you live in. . . . And we already know that in the case of Brazil we have a complicated house, where apparently unique and even mutually exclusive styles seem to coexist in an intimate relationship.

–Roberto DaMatta, *A Casa e a Rua*

## INTRODUCTION

I MUST START MY presentation by telling a fact that is both at the origin of my approach to the study of communication and at the beginning of the seduction that Brazil has exerted on my thought. It is, therefore, the experience of my dialogue with that country with regard to communication research that I will expose here.

As Paul Ricoeur's student in an *action semantics* course in 1970, my final work was a small essay on how Paulo Freire's pedagogy managed to transform the phenomenological perspective into a pragmatic one that, converging on the *performative* capacity of language, in the sense understood by Austin (1970), incorporated the analysis of the *language action* into an *action program* in which adult literacy, language learning, was converted to a process of liberating the word itself.

My incipient notes interested Ricoeur – who has not read Freire yet – and formed the basis of my doctoral thesis, as the title, *La Palabra y la Acción* (Martin-Barbero, 1972), clearly attests, and also the introduction, which, between philosophical and poetic, incorporated Freire's thought in this way:

The word explains the consciousness that comes from action and, when questioned, pierces the massive thickness of the situation, breaks the spell of passivity in the face of oppression. If the word alone is powerless, the action alone is sterile. The image of the future is engendered between the two of them. The word draws the utopia that the hands build, and the piece of freed land makes the poem true. (Martin-Barbero, 1972, p. 3)

The program of Freire (1969) contained for me the first proposal for a Latin American communication theory: because it is by becoming an inquiry that the word establishes the space of communication and, reversing the process of

alienation that modifies the reified word, the *generative words* remake the social fabric of language, making it possible for men to meet their world and others'; and overcoming the inertia of language, the subject's word reveals itself loaded with meanings and history (pp. 111-133).

Today I can say that a large part of my own work program in the academic field of communication – *think communication based on culture* – was already outlined there. It contained the main clues that I developed over the 1970s and that I presented in Mexico in 1978, at what constituted the first meeting of academics and communication faculties in Latin America, organized by Hector Schmucler at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Xochimilco (UAM Xochimilco).

In this presentation, I dared to invert the meaning of the idea – almost a slogan – that dominated the critical view – “communication as a process of domination” to, mixing Freire with Gramsci, propose the study of *domination as a process of communication*. I started from the analysis by Freire (1970) of the oppression *internalized* by Latin American societies when “the oppressed find in the oppressor their model of ‘manhood’” (p. 42). And then I inserted this perspective in the Gramscian conception of *hegemony* as a “lived process” (Gramsci, 1977, p. 329), made not only of forces, but also of meaning. Understanding communication, therefore, implied investigating the dominator's tricks, and also *what in the dominated works in favor of the dominator*; this is the complicity on the part of the first and the seduction that takes place between both. Along with Gramsci, Freire was the one who taught me to think of communication as a social process and a cultural battleground.

## THINKING THE MEDIA IN THE NATIONAL-POPULAR HISTORICAL FORMATION

Thinking about the relationship between communication and society was, for Latin America, the basis from which we faced the positivist paradigm and how our own theoretical work has started. Uncovering the social fabric of communicational devices was the way to access their meaning as a domain of oppression or emancipation. However, in the mid-1980s, the relationship between communication and society became what Mabel Piccini (1987) called a “chain remission to totalities” (p. 16) – imperialism, oligarchy, dominant ideology –, burdened with generalizations that spared us from analyzing national and local contexts. The critical perspective of denunciation has become mere empty academic jargon.

My encounter with Brazil, in September 1983, brings me closer to a critical analysis of communication, in which thinking about the media implies not only revealing the conditions of ownership and power plots, but also *thinking about Brazil*: its complex formation as a country, its dense and conflicting cultural and political miscegenation. Starting with the ambiguities of a populism<sup>2</sup> that, crossed by the irruption of the urban popular masses, establishes the State's double commitment to these and to the old classes that held power, in a *commitment* whereby the people grant legitimacy to the State and the latter recognize the subject of the national in the people. Investigating, from this point of view, the radio or the press, cinema or education from the formation of political discourse redirected the axes of the critical project, introducing new issues and scenarios, in which what was at stake was not just the function of the media, but also communication between classes, and between state and people.

<sup>2</sup>On the subject refer to: Melo (1981).

A text by Roberto Schwarz (1981), "As Ideias Fora do Lugar" [Misplaced Ideas], has played a decisive role in understanding the *political-cultural* scenario of communication, and inaugurated in Latin America the study of modern intercultural relations: in other words, the way in which these countries appropriate political discourses and forms, such as liberalism, which were in conflict with a society that still supported slavery and therefore could not appropriate them without modifying it. It is through this displacement that these discourses stop being foreign and begin to shape the country's national life. In the literary space in which Roberto Schwarz's text moves there is the intelligibility of strange ways in which cultures communicate, in addition to all the misunderstandings, disappointments and truths in the communication between different times and mental maps contained in the cultures and how this interaction mobilizes and becomes complex in the exchange and appropriation of any cultural trait or element.

I believe that this innovative perspective was possible in Brazil due to the density with which the historical contradictions of its formation as a *nation* have been considered and also the web of complicity and seductions which its national culture is made of. This is the Brazilian debate on *national-popular culture*. The culture that Mario de Andrade envisioned in his nationalist project of "synthesizing and stabilizing a popularly based musical expression as a way to conquer a language that reconciles the country in the horizontality of the territory and the verticality of classes" (Squeff & Wisnik, 1983, p. 148), but which, in the early 1980s, is seen by Adauto Novaes as an expression of an ideal without objective reality, which, however,

transforms the multiplicity of desires of different cultures into a single desire: that of participating in the national feeling. Diabolical and efficient operation that makes

the desire not fall into a real object – the culture itself – but into an external and abstract feeling. (Novaes, 1983, p. 8)

In my point of view, this debate seems crucial for communication studies, and with the exception of Mexico, no other country has had Brazil's theoretical and political density. A good summary of what this debate mobilizes are the seminars coordinated by Marilena Chaui (1983, 1990). After reviewing the different manifestos and moments of the debate, Chaui (1983) proposes three approaches: 1) that of the national and popular as “a field of theoretical, empirical, imaginary and symbolic meanings and practices, within which we learn to articulate politics, culture and history” (p. 55); 2) in a second moment, she points out the dilemma that continues to divide the research to this day: the search that aims to discover manifestations of the national-popular in *itself* or the questioning approach in some areas of cultural production to ways and forms as the national and the popular are represented; 3) finally, she addresses the imbrication of the national-popular in the productions of the cultural industry, and this on three levels: as a *portrait of everyday life*, that is, the way common people live; as a critical reevaluation of everyday life and its values, and how cultural democratization that enables the presence of the people on television, obviously submitted to the demands of this *new populism* that mobilizes the market, imposing centralization and heteronomy as characteristics.

Two of the most lucid investigations, in which the enrichment introduced by this perspective is empirically perceived, are those carried out by Squeff and Wisnik (1983), in music, and by Ramos (1983), in cinema. In the first, starting from the slavery farm, the path that allows the arrival of black music to the city is traced. Despised as obscene by elites and reduced to folklore by populists, black music enters the city through two actors seen as culturally and ideologically dangerous: radio and record market, and the foreign avant-garde. Its incorporation into the city will generate a new culture, “which takes place through polymorphous appropriations and the establishment of a musical market where the popular undergoing transformation coexists with elements of international music and everyday citizenry” (Squeff & Wisnik, 1983, p. 148). *The black gesture becomes massive-popular*, that is, a contradictory field of affirmation of work and leisure, sex, religion, and politics. A circuit of comings and goings that intertwining and superimposing leads to the passage that from *candomblé* takes this music to the record and to the radio. It is the circuit of stratagems and astuteness, of *tactics*, in the sense given to them by Michel de Certeau (1980, p. 21), from which the dominated struggle to open their way to social recognition.



In the research of Ramos (1983) on cinema, we also witness the tracing of a path explicitly linked to the evolution of state nationalism and the consequent politicization of a cinema that seeks to explain Brazilian reality/identity, either through a “awareness cinema” (à la Diegues) or of an “anthropological cinema” (à la Rocha). What will happen is a perverse relationship between the dictatorial state and the film industry growth. State-oriented modernization will give rise to a National Policy of Culture (1975) in which “culture is conceptualized as a matter of nationality”, and it will be disputed by the state tendency to transform cinema into an “apparatus of hegemony” and by the search for construction of a national-popular identity, which, in turn, will become a strategic terrain of disputes between the totalizing vision of “defensive nationalism” (p. 199) – of certain left-wing movements and all right-wing movements in the face of the search for an independent cinema that brings out the country’s cultural diversity: the multiplicity of manifestations of popular culture in the face of state unification or market homogenization.

In 1988, Renato Ortiz, who had already dedicated a book to exploring the adventures and ambivalences of ideas about popular culture and national identity in Brazil (Ortiz, 1985), resumes this discussion – “it has always been a way of becoming aware of our destiny, which made it closely associated with the national and popular themes” (Ortiz, 1988, p. 7) – in the process of emergence and formation of the modern cultural industry. The shocking element is already in the title of the book, *A Moderna Tradição Brasileira* [*The Modern Brazilian Tradition*], and it can be also found from the first – when he calls attention to the silence regarding the question of mass culture among the majority of intellectuals, whose prejudices about radio or television prevented them from noticing the consolidation of a *mass culture* “that grew under their feet” – to the last pages, when he coins the category of the “international-popular”. In this excerpt, Ortiz (1988) perceives a series of phenomena that bring to light the Brazilian peculiarities of the cultural industry.

Since the 1950s, some writers, directors and theater critics have begun to realize that in Brazil, “contrary to central countries, stage dramaturgy is associated with a mass technology: television . . . [, allowing] a transit between spheres governed by different types of logic” (p. 29). In other words, it opens up new creative spaces for some cultural groups, while attracting certain intellectuals to act within the commercial logic. This Brazilian transit between different and even contrary types of logic has to do with a *modernity* whose meaning is also *out of place* and becomes especially clear in the mismatch between the aesthetic modernity of its cinema (or its architecture) and the material conditions of its

emergence. This silence about mass culture “gives place to a speech that articulates modernization and cultural industry” (p. 37).

The best example of the new idea of nation that the cultural industry promotes will be television as a vehicle for *national integration*. This is where the particularities of the place are definitively overcome by a modernization that finally integrates regional markets into a single national market: the consumer community is now the basis of the new national identity, of which the soap opera is the best discourse. But, as Walter Durst observes, the ‘telenovela’ presented to Brazil a double contradiction: it came from abroad, from Argentina, and it was also pure alienation: “That explains our arrogance when we talked about: oh boy, not making soap operas. We who had already conquered, left alienation to arrive at a Brazilian reality, and suddenly, everything went back” (Durst, cited by Ortiz, 1988, p. 177). But maybe not so much; for Roberto DaMatta (1985) the ‘telenovela’ is, on the contrary, the extreme form of the Brazilian genre par excellence, the carnivalesque: the genre “in which author, reader and characters constantly change their positions” (p. 96). Carnavalesque character that will find its fullness when, converted into a cutting-edge cultural industry, the Brazilian ‘telenovela’<sup>3</sup> – from *A Escrava Isaura* to *Roque Santeiro* – replaces its ability to talk about the national in the discourse in a second moment of its modernity: *the international-popular*.

<sup>3</sup> On the subject refer to: Ortiz et al. (1988); Fadul (1993); Busato and Capparelli (1990); Meyer (1996), mainly the second part: *O Folhetim no Brasil*.

I believe that this Brazilian perspective, which involves investigating the meaning of the mass media in understanding the country’s transformations, goes far beyond the academic space and inserts us directly into politics. It couldn’t be more significant than it is in Brazil, where television is perhaps more strongly mediated by market conditions until it constitutes a gigantic industry, in which this medium has become a space of strategic intersections with its cultural, theatrical, soap opera, cinematographic tradition, and even with the thought and work of many left-wing intellectuals and artists. While in most Latin American countries intellectuals and artists continue to suffer from a persistent *jinx* that makes them insensitive to the challenges posed by the media, and in particular by television, in Brazil some of the most important philosophers and social scientists, such as Décio Pignatari, Sergio Micelli, Muniz Sodré, or writers and artists such as Walter Durst, Dias Gomes, Doc Comparato or Aguinaldo Silva, are authors of research and decisive essays on the relationship between television and the country, or scriptwriters and directors of very expressive series and soap operas both of the country’s miscegenation and transformations and of its capacity for dramatic and audiovisual experimentation.

## POPULAR CULTURE AS A SPACE OF COMMUNICATIVE COUNTERHEGEMONY

The other proper aspect that for me seems to characterize Brazilian communication research as a whole, and which constitutes a second strategic contribution to Latin American research, is the *early overcoming of dualistic reason*, which has tenaciously prevented us from understanding the complexity of relations between the popular and the massive, obstructing, in turn, the design of political projects capable of assuming what the media have in terms of culture and the various social uses that people can make of them.

It was in the early and pioneering research on television audience programs by Sergio Miceli (1972) that, for the first time, a theoretical reflection is formulated affirming, on the one hand, the presence of “peculiar symbolic demands, which do not entirely coincide with the dominant cultural arbitrary” (p. 210), in the products of the cultural industry, and, on the other, questioning a reading of massive products that, by ignoring and despising the system of representations and images with which popular sectors decode symbolic products, ends up assuming as singular the representation that the dominant culture offers of itself and the *other*. By attributing to the messages of the cultural industry the status of mere *ideological indicators*, the researcher puts as a presupposition, or as something already solved, what should constitute the problem to be investigated: what is the effective position that the cultural industry occupies in a *not unified material and symbolic market*, that is, in which products, demands and heterogeneous readings intersect?

In one of his most recent and expressive essays, *Antropologia da Saudade* [Anthropology of *Saudade*], Roberto DaMatta (1993) speaks of an anthropology capable of thinking together what this “double concept” – *saudade* – has in terms of the experience of space, passage and duration, experience of a time thinking *from within*, and of this other temporality that is uniform and abstract, chronometric and progressive. Because *saudade* – “that emotion that Brazilians learn to feel as we learn to play carnival and eat *feijoada*” (p. 23) – is a *relational category of time*, at the same time universal and marked by a peculiar way of dealing with duration: that of a memory whose collective time experience indicates returns, reversals, cyclical recursions. Thus, even the temporality *encompassed by the market* is crossed by duration experienced, aesthetically apprehended. This is the same conception that, ten years before, DaMatta (1985) had conceived to understand the relationship between *the house and the street*:

the basic thing is to study that “&” which connects the big house with the slave quarters, this supposedly empty and hideous space, which relates the dominant

and the dominated . . . and which is capable of bringing together desire and law, freedom and control, work and trickery: sex and marriage, discovery and routine, excess and restriction, personal relationships and universal laws, life and death, individual and relationships. (pp. 21, 106)

Between this non-unified heterogeneity of the symbolic market, approached by Miceli, and the relational temporality that for DaMatta constitutes the originality of *saudade*, there are the keys to a non-Manichean conception of the relations between popular culture and cultural industry that have allowed the advancement of two strategic lines of research in Brazil: one related to communicative counterhegemony and other to the competence of the receiver. The first is based on a *modern conception of popular culture*, that is, instead of tracking the traces of original purity, of the authentic-autochthonous, asks about what is still alive, so that the popular connects with today, with the worlds of people's lives, with their hopes and struggles. This is what the pioneering works of Luiz Beltrão (1980) point to when investigating the relevance and validity of popular forms of communication in the cultural richness of their festivals and discourses, both rural and urban, religious and civic, from the messianic discourses to political ones, including erotic and even pornographic graffiti.

It is very significant that from 1979 Cycle II (Melo, 1980) to 1981 Cycle IV (Silva, 1982) of the Brazilian Society for the Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication (Intercom) – 1980 Cycle was about communication and populism –, the thematic axis given to researchers has been communication in the subordinate classes and the relationship between hegemony and counterinformation. In 1979 Cycle, there is a demystification of the popular and one of the first Latin American critical readings of the Frankfurtians' pessimistic elitism based on the reading of Benjamin, Swingewood and Enszemberger, while a new map of the media as the scenario for the struggles for hegemony is designed. At a theoretical level, a statement by Brandão, cited in the splendid work of Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva, deserves to be highlighted:

When living conditions are transformed and the people's struggle takes another turn, the speeches of their culture not only change, they must change. Wanting to preserve them just because they belong to "the people" or to "our tradition" is to play the game of those who control the "popular" transformed into a commodity for high-end consumption. (Brandão, cited by Silva, 1980, p. 47)

The objects of study that are sketched are not at all conventional, as they range from the history of forms of resistance of the popular culture in the sixteenth

century, or the popular press in the nineteenth century, to country music, pilgrimage songs and "cordel" literature. The Brazilian conception of popular culture and communication is enriched when, in Cycle IV (1981), this issue is rethought in the light of the Gramscian concept of *hegemony*, and the proposal, also at this time native to Italy, for a communicative praxis of counterinformation. However, one reaches the concept, more than by its theoretical richness, by means of a journey through the praxis of Latin American communication, in which the emergence of radio stations from Minas Gerais in Bolivia stands out, praxis created in the unions of the "altiplano" around 1950. And it is from there that it will be possible to rethink the specialized condition of communication research to propose an interdisciplinary perspective and a dialogue between the theory of the media and the social sciences, with an emphasis on political theory and on issues raised within the scope of the various hegemonic and subordinate communication practices (Silva et al., 1982, p. 9).

The concept of *hegemony*, which was just beginning to be worked on in Latin America, will relocate the study of communication in the field of *culture* and, especially, of *cultural policy*. This will allow the early connection with the *cultural theory*, proposed by Williams, from the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, and with the reflection that, from Bologna, allowed Pio Baldelli to legitimize the social use of the mass media – from radio to theatre, passing through the cinema and the press – through the subaltern classes. That is, the insertion of the media in political projects of *cultural insurrection* or *semiological guerrilla* with the objective of *counterinforming*, that is, putting information into circulation at the service of popular sectors, and at the same time encouraging cultural initiative and popular creativity. The theoretical reflection and the map of Brazilian practices through which counterinformation goes through, in which a popular hegemony is built – workers' press and theater, documentary cinema, popular literature, communicative praxis in base religious communities – coincide with what gathers together in Europe, in those same years, at the conference coordinated by José Vidal Beneyto (1979) near Barcelona, in whose introduction he writes:

The alternative is popular or degrades into a toy and/or domain machine. And popular means that it enables the expression of collective aspirations and expectations produced by and from base social groups. Both majority and minority. Both at a patent and latent level. (p. XXXIX)

The communicative creativity of popular cultures will find support in Brazil, on the one hand, in the strength of social movements and their lucidity

in assuming the media as a stage for political and cultural struggle, when most unions and movements in Latin America still suffered from a great instrumental and moralistic short-sightedness in this regard; and, on the other, in the *gap theory* that the very political contradictions open up in the cultural industries. With regard to the relationship between social movements and the media, the work of Regina Festa and Luiz Fernando Santoro (1991) will be crucial: not only for their long experience as communicators in the large unions of São Paulo and their animation of communication projects in several movements in Brazil and Latin America, but also for their reflexive monitoring of the different moments that the country and social movements have been going through (Festa & Santoro, 1991; Festa & Silva, 1986).

The *gap theory* – which gave great hope to Latin Americans in the difficult years of dictatorial repression, which devastated most of our countries between the 1970s and the mid-1980s – is generated in Brazil from the meeting of some social sciences open to the transformations of the cultural industry, which they see not as “a monolithic and impenetrable whole, an instrument used by the ruling classes to impose their ideology on the entire population”, but as a space “of cultural activity in which there is relative autonomy” (Silva, 1986, p. 31). This is expressed in the contradictions of content and meaning that consumers give it, with the multiple experience of base Christian communities, and with the “jogo de cintura” [a knack for problem solving]<sup>4</sup>, from football to politics, which has allowed the popular sectors to dodge the adverse. Referring to black culture, Muniz Sodré (1983) gives us a fundamental background to understand the meaning that Brazilians give to *gaps*: they are spaces considered *harmless*, not cumulative from the white perspective, and in which “black people clandestinely revived their rites, cultivated their gods and resumed the line of community relationship” (p. 124).

This is especially the case of radio, a medium despised by the educated strata, precisely because it is the territory of the oral and, therefore, a space for popular experimentations, such as those pointed out by a group of researchers on Gil Gomes’ program<sup>5</sup>, which, before the news discourse – concealing the narrator subject and the narrative plot –, exalts the narrator, transforming the enunciation, the narrator’s own experience, into an *account of experience* that makes present the *corporeal side of the art of narrating*. Body that is voice, which carries the story with sensory effects and explores, from the tone and rhythm – which accelerates, decelerates, changes, alters, yells, whispers – the universe of emotions and the listening experience. And if, as Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (1988) points out, Gil Gomes’ voice “is the testimony involved in his insertion in power” (p. 139) and in the maintenance of order, however, perhaps

<sup>4</sup>Alves (1987) was who applied this expression to popular culture tactics.

<sup>5</sup>In the original, the author makes a reference to “VV.AA. *A narrativa popular de Gil Gomes* [VV.AA. Gil Gomes’ popular narrative], São Paulo, 1984”. We tried to obtain the authors’ and the publisher’s names, according to the parameters of the standard used in the journal, but we did not succeed (E. N.).

this voice is not entirely flat and made of inflections and folds that, when *dramatizing the real*, endows the anonymous characters of the police chronicle with a face, situation and everyday life, and through this description allows feeling the uprooted poor, city dwellers, as people.

It was in the same movement that rescued the communicative creativity of popular cultures that Brazilian *researchers* detected the presence of the *listener's voice*, the receiver's hidden face. Alongside my readings of Michel de Certeau (1980), in the early 1980s, I have to put the text in photocopy of the investigation *Sobre a Recepção Crítica dos Meios de Comunicação de Massa no Brasil* [On Critical Reception of Mass Media in Brazil], by Anamaria Fadul (1983), investigation, if I am not wrong, commissioned by the *União Cristã Brasileira de Comunicação Social* [Brazilian Christian Communication Union] (UCBC). Also in photocopy, I received the manuscript of *A Rosa Púrpura de Cada Dia Trajetória de Vida e Cotidiano de Receptores de Telenovela* [*The Everyday Purple Rose: Trajectory of Life and Daily Life of Soap Opera Receivers*], by Mauro Wilton de Sousa (1986). If in Anamaria's text reception is explored mainly in the diversity of its capacity for *questioning reading* of the mass media messages, in Mauro Wilton's the investigation is already focused on the modalities of insertion of the "telenovela" in the young workers' daily lives.

I think that, in the early attention paid by Brazilian researchers to the receiver's reading competence and its insertion in the everyday world, the pioneering presence – in relation to the rest of Latin America – of an urban anthropology that manages to go beyond an anthropology *in the city* for an *anthropology of the city* (Cardoso, 1986), exploring the worlds of popular life, from the circus (Magnani, 1984) to the political culture of the neighborhood (Caldeira, 1984), and of the culture of the middle class (Velho, 1981) to the educators' representations and imagination (Rocha et al., 1984). It is precisely an anthropologist, Ondina Fachel Leal (1990), who systematically introduces ethnographic work in research on television reception, which will have a broad echo in investigations in other Latin American countries, especially for her inquiry into the space and time of watching to the "telenovela", and the comparison of the reading processes, that is, the production and symbolic reformulation that two social classes of spectators perform with the "telenovela".

From a sociological point of view, Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva (1985) was a pioneer in investigating the reception of Rede Globo's national news in two working-class communities, especially questioning the critical mediations that the Church, the union movement, the political parties, the movement feminist and other means of communication introduce in the interpretation of the TV newscast. Along with these pioneering works, I cannot fail to highlight the

seminar that a group of researchers from the University of São Paulo held in 1991, which included sociologists, anthropologists, communicators, psychologists and historians, whose mere title, *Sujeito, o Lado Oculto do Receptor* [*Subject, the Receptor's Hidden Side*] (Sousa, 1995), reveals the peculiarities that, in addition to academic craze, characterize reception studies in Brazil.

### COMMUNICATION GLOBALIZATION AND WORLD MODERNITY

A ghost runs through the social sciences and Latin American communication research in recent years: the ghost is called *globalization*. Confused by many with the *old* and persistent imperialism – assimilated to transnationalization, or rather to the accelerated expansion of transnational corporations and logic – and identified by others with the technological *revolution* and even with the secret impulse of post-modernity, *globalization* doesn't seem to let itself be captured by academic schemes or traditional scientific paradigms. Articles and anthologies proliferate endlessly, but the vast majority of what is written in Latin America on this subject disappoints. Interestingly, it is in Brazil, the country that has most widely and polemically debated the vicissitudes of its national formation, that a horizon of understanding the novelty that globalization processes introduce into the economy, culture and sensitivity starts being traced, that is, in the perception of space and time.

Today, three Brazilians stand out as thinkers of globalization in Latin America. From geography, Milton Santos (1993) reflects on the transformations of space, stating that, due to the lack of analytical categories and the present history, we are still mentally anchored in the time of international relations, when what we need to think today is about the *world*: the passage from internationalization to globalization. It is precisely the communication technologies – satellites, computers, television – that, by transforming the *sense of place in the world*, make the relationships that structure it opaque, making a so interconnected world somehow obscure. This opacity brings to the fore the materiality from which *space* and *speed* come from, producing a noticeable world that, insofar as it transforms culture into the great vehicle of economics and politics, becomes the key to epistemological change that all disciplines undergo.

However, this assessment of the world does not prevent Milton Santos (1995) from making a strongly critical analysis of a *sick globalization* (pp. 22-42), because it seeks to *unify*, more than unite, and

what is unified throughout the world today is not a desire for freedom but for domination, it is not a desire for cooperation but for competition. . . . Space is



globalizing, but it is not global as a whole, but as a metaphor. The global dimension is the market. (Santos, 1995, p. 33)

There is then a universal and abstract, hegemonic clock, whose temporalities are the vectors of economy and culture. But there is no *world time*. And if it is true that world networks regulate an order at the service of hegemonic actors on a planetary scale, at the *local* level these same networks are carriers of *disorder*. The question about globalization thus becomes a question about the meaning of diversity: “Does diversification contribute to unity or unification?” (Santos, 1995, p. 41).

From sociology, Renato Ortiz (1994) introduces the need to differentiate the unifying logic of economic globalization from those that globalize culture. Because cultural globalization does not work from the outside, in spheres endowed with autonomy, such as national or local. Globalization is a

process that reproduces itself and breaks down incessantly . . . In this sense, it would be inappropriate to speak of a “world-culture”, whose hierarchical level would be situated outside and above national or local cultures. . . . The globalization process is a total social phenomenon that permeates all cultural manifestations. In order to exist, it must locate itself, root itself in men’s daily practices. (Ortiz, 1994, p. 30)

Globalization cannot, then, be confused with the *standardization* of different spheres of life, which was the product of industrialization, including the sphere of culture, this *cultural industry* that was the object of analysis by the Frankfurtians. Now we are facing another type of process, which is expressed in the culture of *modernity-world* as “a new way of ‘being in the world’” (Ortiz, 1994, p. 33), which concerns the profound changes produced in the world of life: at work, at marriage, at food, at leisure. It is because the full working day has made it impossible for millions of people to have lunch at home, and because more and more women work outside the home, and because children become autonomous from their parents very early, and because the patriarchal figure has been devalued as much as women’s work has been valued, that daily eating is no longer a ritual that brings the family together, and, de-symbolized, found its form in fast food.

Thus, the success of McDonald’s or Pizza Hut speaks less of the imposition of American food than of the profound changes in people’s daily lives, changes that these products undoubtedly express and monetize. Out of synchronicity with past ritual times and places that symbolized family life and respect for patriarchal authority, the new ways and food products “lose the fixity of

territories and customs . . . they are information adjusted to the polysemy of contexts” (Ortiz, 1994, p. 87)<sup>6</sup>. Recognizing this does not mean ignoring the growing monopolization of distribution, or the decentralization that concentrates power and uprooting pushing the hybridization of cultures. Structurally linked to economic globalization, but not limited to it, there are phenomena of globalization of imaginaries linked to music, images and characters that represent deterritorialized styles and values to which new figures of memory also correspond.

<sup>6</sup>Refer also to Ortiz (1996).

Also from sociology, Octavio Ianni (1996) has been one of the few Latin Americans to dare to take on the theoretical challenges involved in thinking “that the globe has ceased to be an astronomical figure to fully acquire historical significance” (p. 3). This meaning cannot be derived any more than it has hitherto been the central category in the social sciences, that of the nation-state, globalization cannot be considered as a mere quantitative or qualitative extension of national society. Not because this category and this society do not continue to be valid – the exasperation of nationalisms, regionalisms and localisms attests to this –, but because the accumulated knowledge of the national responds to a paradigm that can no longer account for “neither methodological nor historical nor theoretically to the whole reality in which individuals and classes, nations and nationalities, cultures and civilizations are inserted today” (p. 160). Resistance in social sciences to accepting this is a *new object* is very strong. Hence, on the one hand, the tendency to subsume this object in the classical paradigms of evolutionism, functionalism, etc., and, on the other, to prioritize partial aspects – economic, technological, ecological etc. – that seem to be able to remain understandable from a trauma-free continuity with the idea of national.

This continuity, which notions such as dependence, interdependence and imperialism speak of, hides the need to submit these notions to a profound reformulation in light of the radical changes that permeate the idea both of sovereignty and of hegemony. The fact that there are still dependencies and imperialism today does not mean that the scenario has not changed, but that the old types of bonds are subsumed and crossed by new ones, which do not accept to be thought of based on the transfer of categories and notions such as State, party, union, social movement, territory, tradition, etc., that is, without these categories and notions being previously reformulated. The conditions of inequality between nations, regions and states continue and even get worse, but they can no longer be considered apart from the emergence of networks and alliances that reorganize and comprise both state structures and political regimes and national projects. The challenge to the social sciences, which Octavio Ianni

addresses, becomes even more decisive in the field of communication, whose transformations play a leading role in the processes of globalization and in the world-modernity. And not just in terms of the technological dimension, but also in the epistemological horizon from which the new meanings of communicating become visible.

### CRITICAL APPROPRIATION OF LATIN AMERICAN RESEARCH

If Brazil's contribution to Latin American communication research has been so fruitful, this is largely due to the dialogue that Intercom made possible. With a clear Latin Americanist vocation since its creation, Intercom has given shape to the rhythm of its consolidation as a national association and the institutionalization of its contacts with other countries in the region: through comparative research, the active exchange of researchers and professors and the publication of its annual study cycles and its newsletter, which has already been converted into the *Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação* [*Brazilian Journal of Communication Sciences*]. We must also add these other two journals, close to Intercom, which also maintain a permanent dialogue with Latin American researchers: *Comunicação & Sociedade* [*Communication & Society*] and *Comunicação & Política* [*Communication & Politics*].

Expressing this desire for dialogue, Cycle V, held in São Paulo in 1982, has as its theme "Impasses and Challenges in Research in Communication", in a clear indicator of internationalization, which becomes reality, on the one hand, in the works of Brazilian researchers who reflect on the trends in communication research in metropolitan countries and, on the other, on the opening to the participation of researchers from other countries, most of which Latin American. The relevance of this Latin American presence will be witnessed in the title of the publication, which, under the coordination of José Marques de Melo, brings together the following works: *Teoria e Pesquisa em Comunicação: Panorama Latino-Americano* [*Communication Theory and Research: Latin American Panorama*] (Melo, 1983). From this cycle on, the relationship of Intercom with Latin American research will become increasingly stronger. Cycle IX has as its central theme "Communication in Latin America: Development and Crisis" and Cycle XII is dedicated to "Cultural Industries and the Challenges of Latin American Integration".

The commitment of Intercom to reconstituting the Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación (Alaic) will be especially decisive, which was achieved in 1989, within the sessions of Cycle IX, held in Florianópolis. Taking up the proposal made by several former presidents and

members of Alaic present at the Congress of the Association Internationale des Études et Recherches sur l'Information et la Communication (Aieri) held the same year in Barcelona, Marques de Melo promotes the reconstitution of Alaic, which had been going through a long period of crisis, and takes office as its president. This will culminate, in 1992, in São Paulo, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Latin American Congress of Communication Researchers, in which an assessment of the main research trends in the 1980s was carried out and a proposal for priority lines for the 1990s was presented (Melo, 1992).

The dialogue with Brazilian communication researchers has become particularly fruitful in recent years through the debates introduced in Brazil, both on the meaning and scope of theory and research in communication teaching and on the theoretical background with which research is performed and the methodological strategies used. In this regard, I see as extremely relevant the criticisms made by Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (1993, 1994) to certain culturalist tendencies in the investigation of processes of reception that, by replacing the concept of social class by the concept of social stratification, forget the structural meaning of the social groups, removing them from the conflictual character that covers their relationship with the various forms of organization and expression of power. Reduced to the relationship of different groups – age and gender – with the environment, and the instances of structural mediation by the family, school or neighborhood replaced, reception ends up becoming a circular process, which can hardly escape the circle that introduces the fragmentation of consumers proposed by the market. The author of this precise critique also wrote one of the few books in Latin America that had the courage to take on the methodological challenge implied by the new objects and new research proposals (Lopes, 1990).

Even if more controversial, the criticisms of José Marques de Melo (Melo, 1987, 1991) of communication teaching models far away from the demands that come from an increasingly specialized labor market and with a proposal with a multipurpose profile, which would condemn most graduates to unemployment or to the alternative field, also produced an important debate about the meaning of theory and research in undergraduate and graduate education. On the one hand, it is necessary to rethink the purely formal presence of theoretical courses distanced from the communicator's creative and producer work and, on the other, reveal the pitfalls of a type of research whose combination of formalism and denunciation makes it incapable of contributing to the knowledge of transformations that the field of communication is undergoing. This debate, at the same time, made it essential to consider ways of dealing with the predominantly market trends in the growth of graduate studies, which, although reflecting the

demands for specialization in the labor field, threaten to liquidate the presence of social sciences and any critical character of studies and academic communication research. These traits are part of this *Latin American school of communication* that Marques de Melo (1996) himself proposed to investigate and claim.

I will conclude by taking on the voice of my Latin American colleagues in order to recognize the decisive presence of Brazilian research in the development of Latin American thinking on communication, which, while allowing us a deeper understanding of the peculiarities and dynamics of our world, it is enabling us, at the international level, to move from the trade of *native informants* to that of true producers of thought and knowledge.

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# Brazilian testimonies remembering Jesús Martín-Barbero

## *Testemunhos brasileiros que fazem memória de Jesús Martín-Barbero*

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IN BRAZIL, NOT only the work of Jesús Martín-Barbero exerted a notable influence on communication research, but his person also left indelible impressions, as well as friendship ties and affinities for the most diverse universities, spread across the country, where he exerted, in his numerous visits, his role as a regular speaker and also as an attentive listener to questions and doubts. To honor him, **MATRIZES** invited researchers – very few among his countless Brazilian correspondents – to relay their memories of the intellectual and affective relationship they kept with this unique figure. Our intent was to do justice to the idea that practicing a memory means remembering intersubjectively, assuming the role of remembering witness – a role Martín-Barbero embodied in many occasions. One of them is the English version of “Lo que la Investigación Latinoamericana de Comunicación Debe al Brasil: Relato Personal de una Experiencia Intercultural” (“What the Latin American Research on What Latin American Communication Research Owes to Brazil: Personal Account of an Intercultural Experience: An Intercultural Experience’s Personal Report”) (1999/2021), published in this issue of **MATRIZES**.

Remembering how the work of Brazilian intellectuals seduced him and impacted his research program, which proposed thinking *communication from culture*, he offered us a vast list of scholars who, more than critically analyze means of communication, tried to “think of Brazil: its complex formation as a country, its dense and conflicting cultural and political miscegenation” (Martín-Barbero, 1999/2021, p. 130). Thus our invitation to two of them, Muniz Sodré (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – UFRJ) and Renato Ortiz (Universidade de Campinas – Unicamp), to, each in his own fashion, activate their memory and retrace their intellectual discovery and befriending of Martín-Barbero.

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However, twenty years after that narration by Martín-Barbero about the marks of Brazilian thought in Latin American communication research, we deem it essential to take on an update approach, extending the invitation to other scholars who had their research trajectories affected, above all, by his work. Given the limited available space, we solicited testimonies from Nilda Jacks (UFRGS) and Simone Maria Rocha (UFMG). The remembrance from these different generations do historicize our tribute to Jesús Martín-Barbero, updating and rendering visible the different aspects of his work's power, keeping the memory of his absence alive.

## A VOICE OF INNOVATION

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In one of the verses in *Faust* (in the scene “Vor dem Tor”), Goethe assures us that “everywhere form in development moveth”. I feel the strong temptation to paraphrase it under Jesús’ idiomatic eye: “within the people form in development moveth”.

Decades ago, before meeting him, he had urged me, in writing, to free myself from my “habit for the apocalyptic” (Martín-Barbero, 1987). A fair and humorous criticism. He referred to the speech monopoly hypothesis, in which I pushed my suspicion of television being a Goethean *witch kitchen*, detrimental to freedom of speech and cultural creativity.

Having the Frankfurt School as theoretical reference, I feared that electronic communication would neutralize the dialogic, sensitive dimension of common life. Mass manipulation would be feasible even without a visible manipulator.

But there was also, of course, the thought of communication as a dynamic system, open to mutual influence games among its constitutive elements. Jesús Martín shared this view, electing the receptive masses a *people* fit for cultural mediation. Between media and mediations lied a political space for social response.

Implied therein is a shift from European and North American theories to the current Latin American situation, allowing studies and methodological outlines to pin cultural diversity against the hegemony of circulating models.

This may also be called *social counter-movements*. Within this opening, communication approaches the Greek concept of *pharmakon*, both *poison* and *cure*. In other words, that which poisons the classic corporeity of institutions

renders, at the same time, *productive* possibilities regarding other forms of social action.

We, thus, glimpse “form in development moving”.

Jesús Martín-Barbero followed this path in his several decades of lucid and thought-provoking analyzes of culture, education and communication in Latin America. Many of his epigones produced valuable studies (both theoretical and applied) on the relation between the masses and the world of communication.

Last time we meet, I was in Bogotá for a week of lectures on communication and culture at the Universidad Javeriana. Although ill, he generously attended the lecture to partake in a discussion table. I am convinced that the Latin American theory of communication owes him a great deal.

## MIS AMIGOS LATINOAMERICANOS

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I met Jesús Martín-Barbero on February 6, 1987. The exact date – found in one of my notebooks – written with a fountain pen, records dinner at the Opera restaurant in Mexico City, at Néstor García-Canclini’s invitation. I had arrived from New York and had plans, after visiting Mexico, of going to Cuba, in search of the origins of the radio soap opera. At the time, I was working on a paper on Brazilian television soap operas, and Néstor had invited me for a course at the Escuela de Antropologia. Perhaps it was the subject that brought us closer together, since the electronic *feuilleton* bedazzled him so. We were to become both friends and accomplices. I saw him again the following year (1988) and throughout Latin America (Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Antigua, Cartagena, Havana), Spain (Almagro, Madri, Barcelona, Sevilha), and France (Paris); I fail to remember ever seeing him in the US. Jesús Martín evokes these trips within me, for a journey is a strong metaphor for intellectual work, and he was a traveler in the full sense of the word, who did not belong *anywhere*; a Spaniard turned Colombian, inhabiting a slit of this fractured territory. I think he appreciated that that stranger’s dimension (in Simmel’s sense of the word) had allowed him to see the world differently. His wit would nestle in this contradictory and fertile condition. His dissatisfaction with the world and its ideas always drew my attention. He could stand neither Francoism nor Latin American populism; and would invest with the same strength – perhaps “objection” is the right word – against established truths, theories, concepts,

and notions. I recall: non-conformity is a powerful thought driver, and Jesús Martín knew how to cultivate its potential.

What drew us closer amidst our differences? Certainly, a confluence of factors. The starting point was via communication media and cultural industries. He connected me to a whole Latin American network of communication studies. Congresses at the Federación Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Facultades de Comunicación (FELAFACS) introduced me to an unfamiliar world I knew only through books. I had lectured on Urban Anthropology and Religion in Latin America at the Université de Louvain and some of my texts were, thereafter, translated into Spanish (the first of them published in *Dia-Logos de la Comunicación*, edited by FELAFACS). The continent's doors were opening up to me, introducing me to a circle of people I affectionately dubbed *mis amigos latinoamericanos* (Néstor García-Canclini, Aníbal Ford, Germán Rey, Rossana Reguillo, Carlos Altamirano, and many others). Two things brought us together; by that, I do not mean only research themes and subjects; ours was a form of tacit commitment, a common complicit ground. That fact would come up repeatedly, though spontaneously, in our conversations, as if beyond any conscious act. Against an entire Latin American intellectual tradition, we *distrusted* the category of nation. It seemed incapable of grasping Latin America's reality and the contemporary world. We departed, thus, from the acclaimed canon: the debate on the national identity. We ached for a look beyond its borders. But we had yet another *elective affinity*. The term (I clearly remember) applied to differences converging to a single direction: it was possible to think creatively and fruitfully regardless of the *metropolis'* theoretical demands. For Jesús Martín, intelligent life was not a prerogative stemming from Eurocentric or Americancentric domination of various disciplines' conceptual debates. In this sense, he was always a restless cosmopolitan in the *periferia*.

## JESÚS MARTÍN-BARBERO AND MY ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

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I first heard of Jesús Martín-Barbero in 1985: at the Brazilian Society for the Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication's (INTERCOM) VIII Ciclo de

Estudos Interdisciplinares em Comunicação (VIII Cycle of Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication) and in the course “Sociedade, Cultura e Comunicação no Brasil (1979-1985)” (Society, Culture and Communication in Brazil 1979-1985), ministered by Anamaria Fadul at the Escola de Comunicações e Artes at the Universidade de São Paulo (ECA/USP).

His proposal of thinking communication in cultural terms breathed life into my dissertation, *Mídia Nativa. Indústria Cultural e Cultura Regional* (Jacks, 1998), defended in 1987, in which I analyze advertising in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in the wake of the Nativist Movement. He is even more influential in my *Querência: Cultura Regional como Mediação Simbólica. Um estudo de recepção* (Jacks, 1999) – defended five years later. In this case, his discussion about the importance of receptors and mediations was fundamental to build the object of study and the methodological procedures for an empirical research on the relationship between families from Rio Grande do Sul and a soap opera from TV Globo.

These studies cemented my academic background, and rooted him firmly in my theoretical horizon; even after I discovered other authors.

One of the articles I published – “Repensando a Pesquisa em Comunicação” (Jacks, 1997) – was my attempt at overviewing what I considered at the time to be the strong points of his theoretical proposal. I found out, over time, that his work was far too extensive and complex for such gall.

I had the privilege, in 2006, of enrolling in a postdoctoral internship under his tutelage at the Universidade Javeriana, in Bogotá, in which I researched for the book *Meios e Audiências. A Emergência dos Estudos de Recepção no Brasil* (Jacks, 2008), whose preface featured him as a gateway to understanding Brazilian audiences.

He participated, in 2011, in the *Análisis de Recepción en América Latina: Un Recuento Histórico con Perspectivas al Futuro* (Jacks, 2011), presenting a research agenda.

The highlight of this long relationship was in 2017, when in his office in Bogotá, he told me that, if there were ever a country in which he would have liked to see the translation of *Memoria y Promesa. Conversaciones con Jesús Martín-Barbero* (Huergo & Morawicki, 2016, published in Argentina), that country was Brazil. I shared that mission with Ana Carolina Escosteguy and Veneza Mayora!<sup>1</sup>

I had the honor of giving him the book’s published translation (Huergo & Morawicki, 2018). He was static. That was the last time I met him!

<sup>1</sup>The books cited since 2006 are co-authored.



## MARTÍN-BARBERO: SOWER OF QUESTIONS

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Jesús Martín-Barbero and his work, especially the masterful *Communication, Culture, and Hegemony: From Media to Mediations* (Martín-Barbero, 1987), are regarded as a watershed in communication studies in Latin America. For he was, first and foremost, a sower of questions. For him, one needed to question what was obvious, what was known; to develop myopia to see better, to discover a new way of seeing. This intellectual disquiet led him, through an epistemological and hermeneutical cartography, to remap his starting points; to essentially, *relocate* questions.

Two dimensions of his nightly maps draw my attention: the mediation of temporality and the cultural matrix of orality. During the first decades of his work, Jesús managed to avoid the *evil eye* that intellectuals used to cast at television, to see, through it, the country in the relation the urban *populus* kept with melodrama. He thus managed to explore Colombia, Latin America and our sentimental geography differently, and preoccupy himself, from this standpoint, with how we watch soap operas. His subsequent investigations on the notions of time-as-now and secondary orality criticized education's disregard for the sensual, the perception and epistemology that surrounds young people; these beings living at a crossroad between palimpsest and hypertext. The former, a kind of return to the past that refuses to disappear, seeping through familiar and institutional standards into the oppression subjugating them. The latter conforming sequentiality upon which to build new scriptures and readings. For Jesús, education will not reach them as long as it disregards orality and the new forms of audiovisuality, through which flow young people's knowledge and experience.

I am very grateful to Jesús. Reading and meeting him marked my career, my work, and my relationship with Colombia. In the many times I have been to this country (where I now write this), I could explore its regions, its many shades of green, its many wonderful flavors; a little of its people, television, and political culture; and grasp the violence cutting through its history in many ways; from which it can never escape. It is this Colombia which Jesús adopted as his own, though fear and sadness would take him abroad for some time.

I am grateful for having learned much from my dialogue with his work; from the seminar we presented in Bogotá, at the Cathedral in Cali; from all my

visits to his studio for long and instigating conversations, in which he turned simple and complex questions into a contemporary social vista.

His passing deeply affected me and many others; I am, however, resigned to that paradoxical and generous side of life which, after decades of absence and before his passing, brought him back to Cali, the city he loved dearly and in which his adventure with communication began. I owe Jesús a great deal of the affective and effective relationship I cherish with this cultural fact called Latin America. ■

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# Latin-American Testimonials in Memory of Jesús Martín-Barbero

## *Testemunhos latino-americanos em memória de Jesús Martín-Barbero*

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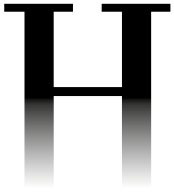
VERY FEW LATIN American social researchers, and even fewer communication scholars, have achieved such a wide recognition, inside and outside the region, as Jesús Martín-Barbero throughout his long and outstanding career. Spanish by birth, but Latin-American by choice, he lived and worked most of his life in Colombia, from where he participated in numerous trips around the world, publications in different languages, and in the key debates (and *combats*) in the field of communication in the last five decades. His fruitful and polemical scientific work is a crucial reference to the study of communication, and a legacy that transcends its presence and extends its influence, although “times are not [yet] of synthesis”, “in the field of mass mediation, its production devices and its consumption rituals, its technological apparatuses and spectacular staging, its codes of assembly, perception and recognition” (Martín-Barbero, 1987, p. 9).

The four testimonials presented below were written by Latin-American scholars who, like so many others, enjoyed the close friendship of Jesús Martín-Barbero. They value his work and legacy of priceless contributions, worthy of continuing to be discussed and adopted in the field, as “investigating communication has become a strategic ‘place’ to rethink the meaning and scope of critical thinking, both in its epistemological relation and in its political insertion in our societies” (Martín-Barbero, 2002, p. 455).

Many other testimonies regarding Jesús’ departure, which were expressed in different media, could have been incorporated here as evidence of the strong imprint of his impact on several generations of Latin-American scholars. For

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reasons of scope, the testimonials by Eduardo Gutiérrez, Carlos Alberto Scolari, Omar Rincón, and Néstor García Canclini are included as examples.

### MOVING THOUGHT: RE-READ *CARTOGRAPHER'S CRAFT*

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How can the text of the cartographer, who tells his own journey, be read? Has the territory undergone many changes and is it read as an old map of the destroyed city with visible fragments and ruins? Is it archaeologically explored to capture the signs and traces of places that were once inhabited territories? Is it construed according to the present to find early signs of some catastrophe, or indicators of a predicted and never realized future? Then is a by-then unpredictable genealogy perceivable from the cracks and voids. Is it then and now disclosed as a premonition of emerging geographies?

Resuming *Oficio de Cartógrafo* (Cartographer's Craft) (Martín-Barbero, 2002) almost 20 years after its publication is above all to inhabit Jesús Martín-Barbero's moving thought. To follow him on his journey. If *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987) invited us to understand the map itself, here we have the opportunity to lose the object – the map – to win the process: the journey. It is no wonder that still in the introduction he shows us his double condition of cartographer and chronicler: of engaged thinker.

Thinking in movement is, above all, to be able to resume one's own paths and, in the present, move away from the debate that took place in the 1970s and 1980s about the issues of discourse and power, toward a way of historically reconstructing one's own debates in a 30-year context. It means verifying the aspects that, despite the enduring battle, remain as constitutive tensions in the field of communication: the utilitarian pragmatisms and the deterministic ideologies. Then, show the way out: the overcoming of dualisms through culture, and in culture through the popular.

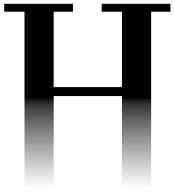
That is, the journey route confirms some of the deep scars of geography and, at the same time, unveils the burden that survives in the way it continues to think and act today. It is thinking about the self and on the change in the emerging field of knowledge. The specific reason that leads him to conclude this balance in the perspective of the 1980s may be the tension between technologies and appropriations, between determinisms and uses, that concludes the section, leaving open the debate that unquestionably suggests how

modernization and divergent modernity will shape the decades to come in the Latin-American context.

In the same vein, in the section devoted to the 1990s, the moving thought of Jesús Martín-Barbero takes up a more recent past, selects and assembles pieces of different puzzles, and makes up an attractive picture in which, in the fashion of cinematographic montages, different forms and densities are put in tension. By counterpoising plans, three topics are outlined: a balance of the constitution of the academic field in that decade; a new conceptual synthesis; and an agenda for the end of the century. All the three points deserve to be further developed.

The first one is, above all, the contradictory report of a decade that embodied the centrality of communication as a key issue of society and, at the same time, perceived its political and transformative meaning diluted among bureaucracies, the market and the asphyxiation of the voracious institutionality. The second one constitutes the very core of the book. In twenty brief pages, it presents an outline of what may be the way to think about the end-of-the-century mutations and the updating of the Martín-Barberian way of thinking mediations: the links between regimes that abound in technicality, institutionality, rituality, and sociality. The third one is to draft an agenda that reflects the set of scenarios in which, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Martín-Barbero continued to work in order to think the present and understand and act toward what is lived in the very moment of the experience. Namely: globalisms concerning the ways of seeing, deterritorialization and the emerging worlds we inhabit; mutation of experience, sensorium and urban life amidst flows and networks; mediatization of politics in contrast and connection with the politics of communication; challenges posed by communication to education; and the still pending construction and recognition of the Latin-American cultural space.

There, the cartography that does not define absolute territories, but is the foot down record of experience in the reliefs, daring to think in changeable places and expose an agenda crossed by the contemporary debates. Keep up with the changes. For this reason, there is a reflective and even poetic power in the decision of closing the book with a space for dialogue gathering the collection of prologues written since the 1980s. At the same time, it is a journey through an anthology of texts and authors crucial to the inhabited cartography of communication-culture in Latin America. Signposts, meeting points that are also traced on the map, and speak to the journey of communication in culture. Compared to other works of the Martín-Barberian bibliography, this is a book to think with the author, to follow him on the path, to be a witness and embrace contradictions and doubts, free of fear. To contemplate the landscape or discover the trace. To welcome a way of seeing.



That is how the *Oficio de Cartógrafo* (Martín-Barbero, 2002), an expression of the moving thought that marks the legacy of Jesús Martín-Barbero, has this characteristic of ongoing work which does not only mean assuming, assessing and examining the change in one's own thinking – a valuable theme in itself – but above all the willingness to enter the dialectic between stubborn facts and ways of thinking. Keys to seeing with others, leaving dualisms or rereading, deterritorializing, and serving mutations are alive and evidenced in a work that is not an atlas, but a way to explore and exercise cartography as a handmade, precarious, and mutant knowledge. A polyphonic palimpsest of maps in constant construction.

## READ JM-B

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How to approach the work of Jesús Martín-Barbero (JM-B)? How to read a textual corpus rich both in form and content, which went through different moments and met different listeners at each stage? When JM-B started to outline his thought late in the 1970s, many researchers of the critical-reproductive school, then hegemonic on the continent, frowned at a proposal that shifted the debate from the dual quality of media/ideology to the mass culture/popular culture axis. Some researchers, however, prefer to refer to the JM-B prior to the *epistemological chill*, that is, the one that continued to broadcast on the wave frequency of the traditional ideological criticism of French matrix. One should not be mistaken: JM-B is not AM.

If some read him as if he were the new incarnation of the report of monopolistic power of the media, we should remember that it was precisely JM-B who taught us to escape *dualistic reasoning* and not to fall into Manichean approaches. If we have learned anything from (with) JM-B, it is to look at the interstices, to investigate the borderlands (NGC *dixit*), and to get fearless inserted into those cultural territories that are neither solid nor liquid, but murky and muddy. Aware of his devotion to wordplays and his anarchist DNA, I have no doubt in saying that Jesús taught us to keep our distance from theoretical religions.

In my case, JM-B's gaze has served to rethink the relationship between (new) media and the collaborative cultures emerging in digital networks; at the same time, it allowed me to escape the cult of *new media* so in vogue since the beginning of the silicon revolution. Translated into JM-B's language, it was about losing the object (*new media*) to recover the process (*hypermediations*).

As I wrote in a book published in 2008, “without mediations there would be no hypermediations” (Scolari, 2008, p. 113). And, without JM-B’s work, today we would be much more lost and deprived of core analytical categories to understand what is happening in the world of media, communication and culture.

## THE MARTÍN-BARBERIAN STYLE

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There is a *Martin-Barberian’s* way of thinking. A style unveiled in his ways of naming, writing, imagining, and falling in love. His way is from the south, but in dialogue with the north, the east, the many souths.

This style is stated in mantras that become a tutorial for intervening in the field of communication and culture: one must lose the object to win *the process*; to investigate communication is to *see with others*; it requires moving from media to *mediations*; one should seek neither effects nor audiences, but *acknowledgments*; we need to move from reasoning and illustrating to *narrating*; while commercial television is made for the consumer, open television addresses *the citizen*; the Internet is not a revolution of distribution (à la Gutenberg), but of writing, that is why we are writing in an *oral-visual way*...

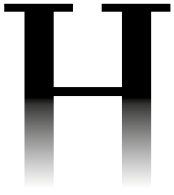
Mantras of communication that we repeat, but we really don’t get their meaning. And we don’t know it because the *Martin-Barberian* way consisted in provoking, exploding, bothering, but not defining: leaving the senses in the adventure, in the flow, in the essay. The *Martin-Barberian* style is materialized in five fields of experimentation:

*Inhabiting the contradiction of modernity.* Son of modernity and its enlightenment, its critical thinking, its perspective on rights, his original struggle is to be modern, fighting against its senses and hypocrisies, blowing it up to make it less white, less Western, less masculine. Blowing up modernity to produce a *jodernidad*<sup>1</sup>, something tastier and more beautiful in the feminine, Afro, indigenous, gay, trans, young flavors...

*Learn from the popular.* The popular, that of the territories of identity and politics, but also that of the mass media and dance music, was his tactic to intervene in Modern and Western Cultures, and to challenge pop culture, the cultural industry and their obsession with the market. And his proposal is to think and produce knowledge in stories, to understand that people from lower classes have a speechless experience that is only told in the story.

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<sup>1</sup> In another text, Rincón (2018) defines this term as follows: “something like modernity that got screwed [jodió], broke, blew away... and also the playful, humorous, ironic, paradoxical way in which Latin America assumes and experiences modernity” (p. 224) (N. of the T.).



*Listen to diversity.* His permanent struggle is against moral dualisms (that of God and family) and ideological Manichaeism (that of left and right wings). His permanent quest is to inhabit ambiguity and diversity, to not even agree with himself, challenging himself to step out that moral and superior comfort found in the academia and theory.

*See with the others.* Keep the usual questions, but always changing their place. Look from the other side, listen to the youth, be a fan of experiments, and believe that from below, from communities, from others, one can think/ imagine more beautifully. And that is the reason for his proposal of moving from reasoning and illustrating toward narrating (telling-talking, telling-narrating, paying attention to and being taken into account).

*Propose the mediations* as the *coordination* between the movements of the industrial, the popular and the political.

Finally, the *Martin-Barberian* style proposes that every communicator should do three things: *think with their own head, have something to say, and be able to listen.*

**“WE SHOULD RESONATE WHAT JESUS TOLD US...”<sup>2</sup>**

NÉSTOR GARCÍA CANCLINI<sup>3</sup>

Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Iztapalapa. Mexico City, DF, Mexico

**Omar Rincón:** What made Jesús uncomfortable?

**Néstor García Canclini:** I could mention misunderstandings and some that bored Jesús a little bit. For example, when he wrote an introduction for a reprint of *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987), he told me that many people who had read the book didn't want to buy the new edition because they thought they already knew it, and so they kept asking him about positions he had changed or explained in the introduction. Yes, writing a book like that makes an impression. And even among those who will read other works later, on different topics, for example, the transnationalization of culture and the latest technologies, audiences and publics, few have grasped the changes. Jesús, on his side, clearly understood that rethinking was needed to understand contemporaneity.

**OR:** Among those misunderstandings, I think Jesús is quoted a lot, he is like a pop star, but his work is little read. Everybody talks about him, but few people read him...

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from a conversation with Omar Rincón, held in Mexico City, July 1, 2021.

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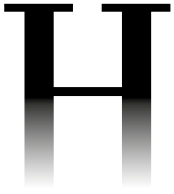
**NGC:** That is quite common. The misfortune of an author that reverberates so much in such a short time, as happened with Jesús with *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987) is that although many people read him, they also turn him into a brand. In a meeting we attended together, a long time ago, in Montevideo, we talked a lot, but Jesús was very upset because they were forcing him to participate in two or three interviews a day on TV and with journalists from the print media, and then he had to deliver a massive two-and-a-half-hour conference. He told me “I’m not going to accept being treated like that anymore. They took me to a TV program where the interviewer hadn’t read anything of mine, and then they took me to journalists who, yes, had read my work, and I was already tired”.

**OR:** Both you and Jesús are intellectuals. I think there is a difference with other academics, because intellectuals think the world politically. In that, Jesús and you are similar.

**NGC:** And that has grown as the number of academics has increased, although few students get to work later in the university, because no new positions are created. But it seems to me that several decades ago, even in countries where intellectuals were heard as public voices, and one could fantasize that they could steer the opinion direction, as in France, today we no longer have that possibility. Since the massive diffusion of television, hardly anyone is driven by what intellectuals say. However, in some Latin-American countries some still believe that they can be influential interlocutors to change the course of the vote next Sunday. It is curious that this happens when fewer youngsters enter universities, when most of us who remain in research are voices that come from another era. I believe that Jesús was not deluded by this power of influence. He knew how to perceive situations where he could speak and say something that would be heard, for example, about the new Colombian constitution, that of 1991. But he was not interested in being invited to go on television this week. He also made contributions to the political field by helping to understand the relationship between culture and education. He was very aware of what the media was saying about these issues, but he was not eager to be seen on television or on the media. Instead, he would show up for the pupils and readers who quoted him. ■

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# Iberian and North American testimonies

## *Testemunhos ibéricos e norte-americanos*

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THE TESTIMONIES OF Margarita Ledo Andión, from the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, and Manuel Pinto, from the Universidade do Minho, reflect two different experiences concerning the intellectual proximity to Jesús Martín-Barbero (JMB) in the Iberian Peninsula. In Spain, more specifically in Galicia, Margarita Ledo lived closely with Master Martín-Barbero, from the academic work shared in meetings and tables of congresses, conferences and seminars in Brazil, Spain and in several countries of Latin America.

In Portugal, JMB, although known and read in some universities and higher schools of Communication and Education, has never had significant theoretical and conceptual impact, which is due to different reasons, but the proximity between Brazilian and Portuguese researchers is astonishing. I tried, with Fernanda Castilho, to explain and understand this phenomenon in an article published in this magazine (Cunha & Castilho, 2018). I crossed with the master in several academic and private moments, and his precise reasoning, looking trained in exercises of seeing and the constant work to deconstruct the media-centrism, insisting on culture and relationships between and within communities, always impressed me. However, in the Portuguese academy, almost always, his bibliography was avoided, replaced by Anglo-Saxons more *valued* by the prevailing academic policies. Thus, Manuel Pinto's testimony is undoubtedly important as a record of personal and intellectual memory.

The text of the galician professor and researcher reflects a continuous line of thought in the time, which permeates the European and Spanish philosophy and intersects, at different moments of her professional and research trajectory, with the theoretical and methodological devices proposed as a challenge by Martín-Barbero. Margarita Ledo also highlights the master's ability to give daily meanings to the emancipation of Latin American thought and experiences

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by appropriating theoretical and conceptual parameters of disciplines such as sociology, history, and economics. This path led, according to the researcher, to the creative production of a theory that valued experiences of memory and communicative processes in Latin America.

Manuel Pinto, professor at the Universidade do Minho and researcher at the Center for Communication and Society Studies, presents a testimony in which he resumes the elaboration of his doctoral thesis in the early 1990s. When he was researching the bibliography about the relationship between children and television – and at that time, the internet and social networks were not yet active – he found a text by Martín-Barbero. The text was published in the journal *Nómadas*, of the Universidad Central de Bogotá, Colombia, and was entitled “Heredando el Futuro. Pensar la Educación desde la Comunicación” (Martín-Barbero, 1996). JMB’s proposal, which is related to cultural anthropology, communication processes, electronic media and education, opened alternative horizons to Anglo-Saxon literature, focused on the effects of television, to the researcher. For Manuel Pinto, the reading of this text not only increased his search for new ways of looking at the technological devices of communication and its interrelation with culture, but also encouraged the rethinking of communication processes in education, drawing attention to the need to develop an action research in media literacies, preferably aimed at children and young people.

In a unique North American interpretation, the testimony of Joseph Straubhaar, professor at The University of Texas, Austin, and researcher specializing in geographic space studies in Lusophony and Latin America, is particularly relevant. With great knowledge of the domain on which he works and being a tireless traveler, he crossed countless times, in his personal and professional life, with JMB, having shared tables in congresses, conferences and seminars. On the other hand, he is known by many institutions and researchers in the area, which leads him to elaborate an interpretive snapshot of Martín-Barbero’s communicational thinking and how it expanded and was appropriate in the different countries of Latin America. As he points out, at the very beginning of the text, how his path as a researcher in Brazil and Latin America gave him the opportunity to observe, live and in progress, the development of an original theory of communication and media in Latin America. Martín-Barbero contributed a lot to this purpose, as well as the researchers and Latin American academic and research institutions, which persisted in collaborative research and constant dialogue, which were developed in projects, conferences, seminars, and other academic exchanges.

## AROUND JESÚS MARTÍN-BARBERO: MAP FOR NIGHTFLIGHTS

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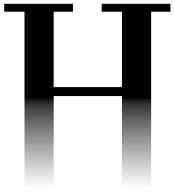
In the preface of *Vol de Nuit*, by Saint-Exupéry, André Gide (1931) speaks of the “overcoming of oneself” and the “sense of duty”, and perhaps that is why it is common to find in the writings of Martín-Barbero himself, as well as in his analysts, these tops that put us in the night in a “slow and beautiful” way, as when Fabien, the pilot of the postal flight between Patagonia and Buenos Aires, contemplates how each house illuminates its star, its saint and sign of inhabited.

Jesús Martín-Barbero told to Omar Rincón on Monday, May 22, 2017: “For me, it is more important to I think from where I am, than what I think”. And the Professor Rincón repeated this at the inaugural conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Congress, in Cartagena de Indias, a place where we hoped to meet the *passer* Martín-Barbero, the pilot who expands and sometimes patches his night map to explore a new field and, as the note three says in one of his notebooks, find the mixed-race cartographer who, without ceasing, groping.

Overcoming its own limit and searching for that place, in this case Latin America, from which it decides to run with others. This is the turn that we will honor in the thought of the person who summons us, the intellectual-interpreter or the one who goes to the square because he feels, in Blanchot’s just observation, “the concern for the other” (“*le souci de l’autre*”). And we will do so by relying on some of the references he himself cites and on aspects such as the constitutive dimension of languages in the perception of the world or on his position on a multiple theme, as addressed as *diversity*, because he was able to explain it as what “is here, that touches us closely”, insisted in the conference on April 29, 2010, in Santiago de Compostela.

Shortly before, at its second congress in the city of Malaga, the Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación (Aeic) recognized in Martín-Barbero one of its organic references. And when, in his speech, he declared that one of the marks of the century emerges in the words of performative order “the personal is political”, I understood why he had turn so often to the work *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987) that, at that moment, people so different read together.

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Intertwining politics, culture and communication represented a change that brought us the emergence of the other, as a face in which we recognize Levinas' mark; as this alterity that gives meaning to the action of looking and that leads us to thickness, towards what others see and we do not see – in the cinema or telenovela, its field of testing – while the wings of the technical artifact become a possibility that allows us to celebrate, once again, the loss of the object in favor of the process. Operation carried out to overcome the event and touch the rough fabric of truth procedures, producing one of *the profane illuminations* that Martín-Barbero, with his beloved Benjamin as the source author, develops and shares, under the sign of interculturality and cultural sustainability, with female authors and authors from Latin America and the world.

“Every identity is generated and constituted in the act of narrating itself as a history, in the process and in the practice of *telling to others*” (Martín-Barbero, 2014, p. 20), he writes in a text for journal **MATRIZes**, an idea that, following in the wake of his work mechanics, has been nourishing and examining, in a visible and latent way, from the beginning to the moment, the work that summons us.

In the background, the “intertwining of radiation” that Paul Ricoeur (2004) locates in *the translation* because he understands that this is where we learn – I quote – the real possibilities and also the limits of any exchange between cultures. And this idea of limit, that “cultures know each other and recognize themselves as such in the possibilities and limits of exchange between them” (Martín-Barbero, 2014, p. 20), is seminal in the politics of diversity. As an example, I look back, quite within my reach, and I find myself encouraging several research projects in this sense, the latter with the title “For a European Subtitling Program in Non-Hegemonic Languages”, with the 2018 label, *European Year of Material, Immaterial and Digital Cultural Heritage*, elaborated from a very simple idea to which Martín-Barbero draws attention: the permanent declarations and tributes to cultural diversity are inversely proportional to what happens in the field of protection and incentive policies to it, the core of his intervention in Santiago de Compostela, a city for which he traveled in the company of Elvira Maldonado and which served to bring together the Asocia Galegación de Investigadores e Investigadores en Comunicación (AGACOM) around him.

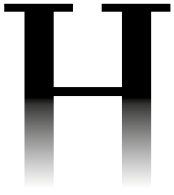
Language is not external to action. This performance capacity is always, for him, the announcement of a transformation program – literacy, freeing the word – that is already in his doctoral thesis (Martín-Barbero, 1972) and that Thomas Tufte recovers with the author in an interview in 2010, from the reading that our intellectual interpreter makes of the Danish linguist Hjelmslev

(Martín-Barbero, 2017). These are issues that we get used to find in their texts, enriched from one to another with singular observations, with borrowings of multiple origins and that take away from us the fear of thinking and establishing new relationships and other hypotheses.

And perhaps due to the echoes of a linguistic system shared between Galician and Portuguese, the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos has his perspective on globalization as *perversity and possibility*, as a generator of inequality and abysmal precariousness, but at the same time as an immense utopian horizon that he calls empirical *universality*. Milton Santos, as we said, this “presence of an absence” that we used to call *saudade*, was a very special guest in that memorable session in Compostela, while we learn to look elsewhere at the worst symptoms of neoliberalism and to think about the “centrality of the periphery’ not only at the level of countries, but of the marginalized social” (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 82) for which the return of politics is a nodal element, which should not cause strangeness in journalism and communication studies. The teacher-organizer told us this way: at a time when the theory of dependence was enabling the Latin American appropriation of sociology, history and economics, we wanted to make a structure that would assume, without any chauvinism or provincialism, the task of working creatively in the production of a theory that had as axes the cultural and communicative experiences and memories of the Latin American peoples.

Centrality of the periphery that Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (2018) also converts into a rather recent proposal of what *he calls barberian theory of communication*, in which he interweaves epistemology, concepts and methods, reminding us of that *epistemological chill* that Martín-Barbero (2002) always gives as an example to make visible the moment when he is aware of the “indispensable methodological displacement, done at the same time as an *ethnographical approach and cultural distancing*, which allows the researcher to see with people, and people to tell what they see” (p. 29), until dialogue, in this last stage, according to the Brazilian researcher, as Jacques Rancière does, with the multiple sensitivity regimes.

As for me, every time I read Beatriz Sarlo’s essays (2000) about that Benjamin whose synecdoche is what she calls the “poetic method in action”, with “the quotation [which] travels from one writing to another, it is torn from its original scripture, from its aura to merge into another writing and surround itself with other marks and other senses” (p. 29), I think of Martín-Barbero. And like Benjamin, I see him accompanying Hélène Cixous (cited by van Rossum-Guyon, 1997), who comments:



I always had a kind of panoramic view of our time: being on the balcony of our apartment in Oran, I was on the balcony of the century, and I saw it develop tirelessly behind me, in front of me, around me, in the future, and I was inside of it. (p. 236)

The text, which at that moment is covered with the fog of absence, leads me to finish with a quote that also travels from a philosopher and theologian from Galicia, Andrés Torres Queiruga (2018), in which I find so many coincidences with the professor of Javeriana of Bogotá – phenomenology, Ricoeur, the position against addiction and in favor of liberation –, who, during a Galician-Portuguese congress around nostalgia, used as material, among others, the poem “Campanas de Bastabales” by Rosalía de Castro, author who since the mid-nineteenth century

recovered the cognoscitive character of the feeling. And he recovered precisely by revealing the complicity and rapprochement between the subject and the world. So that the clear evidence of feeling has a polar character: it reveals objective reality by affecting the subject, and reveals above all the subject when reflecting his agreement or disagreement with reality. (Torres Queiruga, 2018, p. 219)

Agreement or disagreement with the reality that, returning to Gide (1931), leads us to *this overcoming of itself*, to this overcoming of its own limit that defines the master Jesús Martín-Barbero.

### A TESTIMONY

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Since I am not a scholar of Jesús Martín-Barbero, I only have the record of the testimony.

I had read *The Practice of Everyday Life*, by Michel de Certeau (1980) and I intended to study how young children appropriate television in their daily lives. Interestingly, the literature I found, especially North American – the internet was yet to arrive – almost always led me to where I did not want to go: the purposes of television in children.

As I was seeking, I found, even in these Anglo-Saxon stops, other perspectives and more innovative topics, such as the research of W. Schramm or H.

Himmelweit, in the 1950s. They were more valued, for example, in the diversity of content: to whom the children belong to and what are the contexts of television use. But the hegemonic current of research at the apex was imposed, conditioned in many cases by the interests of the funding agencies.

I also dedicated some time to the authors of the Frankfurt school. It was then that I found, in the library of the University, *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987). What I discovered in that work, whose projection I only later became aware of, opened the path I had been looking for since Certeau's reading. It made me believe that it would be possible to build the thesis project breaking with the media-centric orientation and simultaneously exploring a critical perspective on socially differentiated children's daily lives and differently guided by the relationship with the television environment.

I met Martín-Barbero at the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) congress in Mexico City in 2017, and I was able to participate in a simple tribute that was made there to *De los Medios...*, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the book, so remarkable not only in Latin America, but also internationally, especially with translations. In my notes, and which I went to recover, I heard him say: "the mediation proposal breaks a lot of dichotomies and overcomes them".

In its fourth decade of existence, the contribution of the book remains alive and inspiring. Overcoming dialectically and critically dichotomies and simplifications remains an important challenge today. In the communication sciences and, in general, in the social sciences.

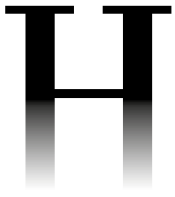
## THE ROLE OF JESÚS MARTÍN-BARBERO IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE WORLD

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It has been very striking to me to observe the growth of a notably independent communications and media theory and research sphere in Latin America. By that, I mean a community of scholars who build on each other's work, attend the same conferences, work on projects together, and cite a somewhat common canon of theoretical and analytical literature. José Marques de Melo, Raúl Fuentes Navarro, Maria Cristina Gobbi, and others have done excellent work to look at the intellectual history of this growth of a remarkably autonomous intellectual

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sphere. It has inspired theorizing outside Latin America as well. John Sinclair with his ideas of geo-cultural regions and my work on cultural-linguistic regions, based in the related development of a Lusophone communication research area, have been inspired by thinking in and about Latin America.

Since this Latin American communication research sphere takes place largely in Spanish and Portuguese, it has also grown to include Spain and Portugal, as reflected in publishing in Portugal and Spain that includes Latin American work prominently and vice versa. It also includes several conferences, such as IBERCOM, that target the whole cultural-linguistic academic sphere of Iberia and Latin America. Within this context, Spain has re-emerged as a power in publishing and education in the area, along with Portugal to a lesser degree, but Brazil has the best developed academic system in terms of PhD-granting institutions. I would also argue that Brazil and Mexico have added the largest number of innovative researchers, although Spain has quite a few, too. Still, it is interesting how Martín-Barbero and other innovative scholars from across the region have helped create an academic sphere in which the former colonial powers are important players but by no means dominant, certainly not hegemonic.

Both the Latin American communication research sphere and its inclusion of Iberia has led to very productive current efforts like the Ibero-American Observatory of Television Fiction (OBITEL), led by Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes of Brazil and Guillermo Orozco-Gómez of Mexico, with teams in several countries, stretching to include the Hispanic U.S., which does have an increasing presence as not only an import market, but producer of media for Latin America with Telemundo and Univision, and their partnerships in the region.

There was an initial wave of pioneering research in a critical political economy wave, written by some of the first major writers like Antonio Pasquali and Luis Ramiro Beltrán. There was another wave of somewhat more comprehensive thinkers that built on the classic elements of political economy, but included elements of cultural studies, anthropology, cultural sociology, U.S. mass communications, and French social theories. In this generation, I would include Muniz Sodré, José Marques de Melo, Jorge González, Guillermo Orozco-Gómez, Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes and other amazing, innovative scholars<sup>1</sup>. Looking at both Latin America and the wider world, though, I would argue that the two with the widest impact as theorists are Jesús Martín-Barbero and Nestor García Canclini.

Canclini is better known in the English-speaking world through a series of excellent translations of some of his works, such as *Transforming Modernity* (García Canclini, 1993), *Hybrid Cultures* (García Canclini, 1995), and *Consumers and Citizens* (García Canclini, 2001). He has particularly been considered as very

<sup>1</sup> In a very comprehensive review, Maria Cristina Gobbi (1999) breaks this generation into two groups: First, Innovators: Eliseo Verón (Argentina), Armand Mattelart (Chile), Mario Kaplún (Uruguay), Juan Díaz Bordenave (Paraguay), Javier Esteinou Madrid (Mexico), Jesús Martín-Barbero (Colombia), Muniz Sodré, José Salomão, David Amorim e José Marques de Melo (Brazil). Second, Renovators: Jorge González (Mexico), Jesús María Aguirre (Venezuela), Daniel Prieto (Argentina), Luciano Álvarez (Uruguay), Valerio Fuenzalida (Chile), Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva, Venício Artur de Lima, Nilson Lage e Sérgio Caparelli (Brazil).

important in the definition of a major wave of post-colonial theory about hybridity that strongly touches media studies but also anthropology, sociology, and literature. He communicates well the different take on the concept coming from Latin America, which is often more about racial *mestizaje* and religious syncretism than the literary hybridity focused on in many other post-colonial writings.

However, in the breadth of the history of Latin American media and communications studies, Martín-Barbero has emerged as perhaps the most cited and centrally placed theorist, more even than Canclini. His book *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987) contains a wealth of insight about the development of communication and media theories, which lends it to inclusion in advanced theory classes – including mine at Michigan State University and the University of Texas at Austin. That this book has been so widely taught across Latin America – and insufficiently in the rest of the world – is one reason that his thought has tended to be so central.

He very insightfully reviews a broad range of ideas that are essential to communication research. He starts in a key place that most such histories don't reach – core historical, usually national conceptions of how we think about people as subjects. For example, the first chapter addresses the terms of Romanticism and the national romanticism that underlies many popular and even hegemonic ideas about national identity, followed and then critiqued by ideas of class. He also does a much better job than the majority by analyzing the importance of how people were thought about as masses, which was a crucial predicate for the early 20th Century fear of and focus on propaganda, which produced the beginnings of North American effects research, which has ostensibly been rejected in most Latin American communication research traditions, but still underlies much research on persuasion, campaigns, advertising, public relations etc., which have had a resurgence as professionalized academic communication research fields, particularly in Brazil.

Perhaps most central and influential has been his concept of the mediations of the media themselves. He asks essentially what forces help mediate the influence of the media on the audience. This idea that media were not inherently all-powerful but were, in fact, mediated by a variety of social forces was one of the central insights from the North American research on both propaganda and persuasion that began in WW II and expanded in the 1950s-60s. This is an excellent counterweight to theorizations that give media extremely strong centrality and power, such as those of the Frankfurt School research in the 1940s-50s. Martín-Barbero gives one of the most sophisticated and critical readings of that set of theories that I know of, which was a useful corrective to the strong hold that the Frankfurt School had over theory and research in Latin America for



decades, at least up through the 1970s-80s, leading to the very acute wisecrack by Anamaria Fadul (2005) that Latin American communication research was suffering from “Frankfurt’s curse”.

He follows his critique of the Frankfurt School with an interesting focus on culture as the most important focus for communication research. That is very parallel to the *cultural turn* that was being taken through cultural studies in media studies in Great Britain, the U.S., and Europe, but I have always thought that his take, from the point of view of Latin America, was an excellent complement to what my students and I had learned from those other sources. The overall effort, notably including his work, to define what Latin American cultural studies might look like had been very interesting. I only wish that there was even more work in this area and that more of the world research community was aware of it, as it has become aware of cultural studies in East Asia, Australia, and other parts of the world.

As Martín-Barbero, in *De los Medios a las Mediaciones*, focused on the early historical conditions of mass media, I have always been intrigued with his idea of “the long process of enculturation”, in the fifth chapter. He perceives greater cultural and political complexity than most authors, examining the interplay between the nation-state and its hegemony, and the development of a popular culture of resistance. That should have great global resonance as a theory idea, but for my interests in also gains greatly by its nuance as a Latin American work, in the particular way that the region has developed popular cultures that work resist or hybridize outside forces, as Canclini would emphasize.

It is interesting to me, in his next step, in *De los Medios...*, as he focuses on the interplay between folk culture and popular culture, that he both provides some key seeds for the development of what Brazilian scholars now see as folk-communication and with greater impact, lays out much of the terminology and concepts for the region-wide focus on melodrama and its expression in television as the telenovela. He also continues a theoretically interesting move by connecting the older idea of the masses with the new idea of mass communication through media.

In *De los Medios...*, Martín-Barbero led more Latin American scholars to focus on the greater complexity of a variety of possible mediations of the media. I think that helped develop another major strength of Latin American research, as it has helped produce a strong wave of reception theory studies across Latin America by scholars like Orozco-Gómez and Nilda Jacks. That wave, inspired at least partially by Martín-Barbero, is another one of the distinctive aspects of Latin American research, as reception research in the region shared some

trajectories with North America and Europe, but developed its own specificities, in part due to the theoretical focus on mediations.

I also think Martín-Barbero has been important in global communications literature. I know I have assigned generations of media theory students to read *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to the Mediations* (Martín-Barbero, 1993). I am very fond of the broad historical sweep of the book and how it develops the history of a wide set of theories before arriving at his specific ideas about the theories most relevant to Latin America. However, I also know from graduate students' complaints that the translation of Martín-Barbero's work was not as good as the translation of Canclini's work, which they consequently found easier to read.

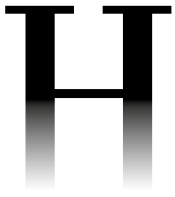
His two final chapters in *De los Medios...*, focus less on sweeping issues relevant to broad theoretical concerns and more on the specific issues of Latin American media studies. His already interesting analysis of nationalism gets even more fascinating when applied fully to Latin America, where it is in tension with transnational processes as well. His major book was written before the turn to focusing on many of these issues as part of globalization.

I would love to have seen him produce a book that fully addressed the turn toward seeing things in the context of a supposedly new phase of globalization. He does address that in "Comunicación y Cultura Mundo: Nuevas Dinámicas Mundiales de lo Cultural" (Martín-Barbero, 2010). He notes that the change from the modern era of nation-states to the global era is just as profound as that from traditional society to the nation-state. He also makes a theoretical distinction between global and world ("mundial") media systems and flows, reflecting some French theorizations that I find very useful – to the point of entitling my 2007 book *World Television...* (Straubhaar, 2007) instead of global television.

In his final chapter in *De los Medios...*, Martín-Barbero preferred the Latin American idea of *mestizaje* to the more common global focus on hybridity. Assigning him has enabled me to stress what Latin American research has added to the overall concept when teaching about hybridity, but it may have made his work slightly more difficult for global scholars to absorb. ■

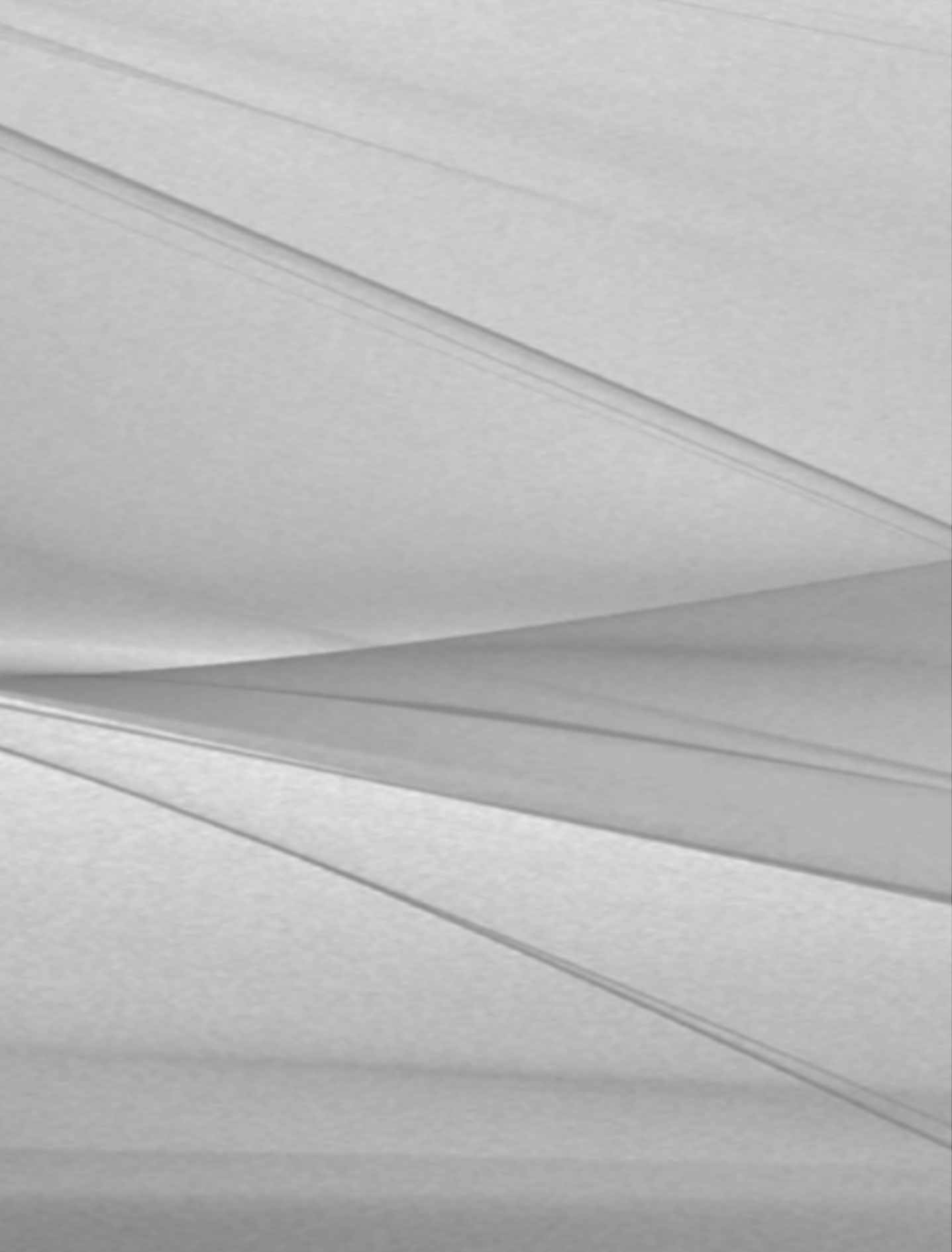
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# EM PAUTA

NAS PESQUISAS DE COMUNICAÇÃO







# Disinformation about gender and sexuality and the disputes over the limits of morality<sup>1</sup>

## *Desinformação sobre gênero e sexualidade e as disputas pelos limites da moralidade*

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### ABSTRACT

The article analyses the disinformation circulation in Brazil from its socio-cultural ground. It examines the false stories about gender and sexuality shared in 2019, arguing that they take part in a field of moral disputes. The research involved mapping fake news and rumors regarding these two markers through fact-checking agencies' databases. Narratives' characteristics of false stories were examined by qualitative textual analysis, and their publication sources were identified by reverse search in search engines. Among the main findings, it is stated that at least 65 disinformation pieces addressed gender and sexuality, most of them referring to events that guided the public agenda.

**Keywords:** Disinformation, gender, sexuality, morality

### RESUMO

O artigo analisa a circulação da desinformação no Brasil considerando seu substrato sociocultural. Investiga histórias falsas sobre gênero e sexualidade compartilhadas em 2019, argumentando que elas se inscrevem em um terreno de disputas morais. A pesquisa coletou *fake news* e boatos sobre esses dois marcadores nos bancos de dados de agências de *fact-checking*. As características narrativas das histórias falsas foram averiguadas via análise textual qualitativa e as fontes de publicação foram identificadas por pesquisa reversa em motores de busca. Dentre os principais resultados, constata-se que ao menos 65 peças de desinformação abordaram gênero e sexualidade, a maioria delas referindo-se a eventos que pautaram a agenda pública.

**Palavras-chave:** Desinformação, gênero, sexualidade, moralidade

<sup>1</sup>An initial version of this article was presented in the Grupo de Trabalho Comunicação, Gêneros e Sexualidades of the XXIX Encontro Anual da Compós, Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande – MS, June 23-25, 2020.

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INTRODUCTION

IN RECENT YEARS, the literature focused on apprehending the characteristics, the production infrastructure and the circulation of disinformation has grown (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2018). There is some consensus that the recent shift in this field stems from the unexpected result of the 2016 US elections and the referendum in favor of Brexit voted in the United Kingdom in the same year (Gelfert, 2018; Humprecht, 2018). Suspicions that these decision-making processes were severely affected by the profusion of false stories, which would have compromised the rational competencies of citizens to make well-informed decisions (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Nelson & Taneja, 2018), stimulated considerable attention on the topic in the public sphere. In a global aspect, since that year, governments of different countries have prepared laws and produced coordinated campaigns to supposedly contain the harmful effects of disinformation (Tenove, 2020).

From 2018 onwards, annual global reports such as the Digital News Report and the Edelman Trust Barometer began to include issues regarding citizens' concerns about the circulation of rumors and unfounded narratives. Since the first investigations on the subject, Brazil places at the top in the ranking of nations where the population affirms to be apprehensive about not knowing how to discern what is real or false on the internet. According to the latest Reuters Institute survey (2020), 84% of Brazilians are concerned about this possibility (the global average is 56%), and according to the most recent Edelman report (2020), 80% of the population is afraid that fake news is used as a political weapon. Nevertheless, the 2019 Global Corruption Barometer Report (Pring & Vrushi, 2019) indicated that four out of five Brazilians said they believed that uninformative content was disseminated to influence the results of the 2018 elections, which elected former federal legislator Jair Bolsonaro – at the time a member of the Social Liberal Party (PSL) – to the Presidency of the Republic.

The accusations of the instrumentalization of digital platforms for political purposes increased the number of questions about the influence of disinformation on the result of the 2018 election<sup>2</sup>. Such suspicions were intensified when considering, for example, a study by the consulting company IDEIA Big Data/ Avaaz (Avaaz, 2018) released after the elections' second round: 74% of interviewees said they had heard the story that Fernando Haddad, a candidate for the Workers' Party (PT), would implement a *gay kit*<sup>3</sup> in schools if elected. Moreover, 46% had access to the rumor that Haddad had invited the then federal legislator Jean Wyllys to be the Minister of Education in his eventual government; and another 44% heard the rumor that the presidential candidate had defended pedophilia and incest in one of his books. Among Bolsonaro voters, circulation

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the representatives of the WhatsApp messaging application themselves recognized, at a journalism event at the Gabo Festival, in Colombia (occurred in October 2019), that in the 2018 Brazilian election, automated systems hired by companies fired mass messages at public groups, distributing political content often favorable to – the then candidate – Jair Bolsonaro and potentially hurting the electoral legislation in force in Brazil (Mello, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Pejoratively dubbed this way by reactionary critics, the *gay kit* refers to a set of educational materials that would be aimed at discussing homophobia in public schools, the result of a public-governmental cooperation project proposed by the National Plan for the Promotion of LGBT Citizenship and Human Rights, in 2009 (Romancini, 2018). However, given the conservative reaction to the project in the following year (2010), such educational materials were never implemented by the Ministry of Education. In the 2018 elections, the issue returned to the public agenda as part of Jair Bolsonaro's defamatory campaign strategy against his main competitor in the dispute, Fernando Haddad.

rates for these false stories are even higher: 85% reported having received the *gay kit* story; 60% heard about Haddad's false invitation to Wyllys; and 55% read the complaints about the fictitious criminal publications of PT's candidate.

Finally, it should be noted that, in the Brazilian case, as in other countries ruled by far-right populist leaders (Bennett & Livingston, 2018), Bolsonaro himself qualifies as a systematic diffuser of disinformation, not merely benefitting or falling victim to rumors shared by users or interest groups in digital media. For example, in an interview with *Jornal Nacional* on August 27, 2018, still as a candidate for the presidency, Bolsonaro showed to the cameras a book entitled *Aparelho Sexual e Cia* (Sexual Apparatus etc.) that, according to him, would be part of a *gay kit* distributed to libraries of public schools in the country<sup>4</sup>. As early as 2019, in his first year in office, a survey by the fact-checking agency *Aos Fatos* indicated that Bolsonaro made 607 false or distorted statements, which corresponds to an average of 1.66 untenable statements per day (Ribeiro, 2020).

<sup>4</sup>In October 2018, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) prohibited Bolsonaro from reproducing untrue content ("TSE Diz que 'Kit Gay' Não Existiu", 2018).

Given this situation, this article intends to focus on an aspect little discussed in studies on the circulation of disinformation so far, namely, its sociocultural background (Cabañes, 2020; Humprecht, 2018). Along with the profusion of research portraying Brazil as a country severely affected by false stories and rumors (Baptista et al., 2019; Bastos dos Santos et al., 2019), there is also a large volume of works dedicated to discussing the emergence of a liberal-conservative shift in Latin America (that would reconcile globalized neoliberal thinking with authoritarian values), even tracing its socio-historical roots (Gentile, 2018; Messenberg, 2017; Sanahuja, 2019).

We thus seek to argue that the profusion of disinformation in a given country also results from their attunement to the prevailing moralities, and not exclusively from the population's discredit towards the institutions that make up the democratic system or from the manipulation of citizens' beliefs by external agents. In particular, this argument will be developed considering the recurrence of disinformation on gender and sexuality issues in Brazil in 2019 (Bolsonaro's first year in office as the president of the republic), given its relevance in the Brazilian context at least since the presidential elections.

Despite the resurgence of inequalities in the period mentioned – according to data from *Gênero e Número* (Bulgarelli & Fontgaland, 2019), during the 2018 elections, more than 50% of LGBT+ individuals said they suffered some kind of intimidation –, there is a historical persistence of gender and sexuality asymmetries in Brazil. The country currently ranks 92nd in the ranking of gender equality according to the World Economic Forum (Carvalho, 2019) and 68th in the list of safe nations for the LGBT+ community, according to the Spartacus website (2019), which lists 197 countries. In addition, Brazil remains



<sup>5</sup>The term *travesti* is used especially in South America to designate people who were assigned male at birth but develop a feminine gender identity.

the country that kills the most *travestis*<sup>5</sup> and transsexuals in the world, according to data from the National Association of Travestis and Transsexuals (Benevides & Nogueira, 2020).

Investigating the expressiveness and narrative configuration of disinformation about gender and sexuality in Brazil will therefore enable a discussion about the moral sensitivities triggered by false stories on these issues. We hypothesize that the potential for circulation of these unfounded narratives stems from their link to the country's sociocultural context, which would, therefore, amplify their reverberation in public opinion. For this purpose, the study design chosen was an exploratory qualitative research that intends to survey disinformation about gender and sexuality in circulation in Brazil during 2019. Through this mapping, a textual analysis of the collected narratives will be carried out (covering its central themes, dissemination format, and privileged circulation spaces).

The next topic starts from the effervescent literature (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2018) on the phenomenon of disinformation to discuss the lack of studies dedicated to understanding its sociocultural roots and the moral values activated in unfounded stories of high appeal among citizens. This epistemological redirection is considered fundamental to contain a certain *mediacentric* and technicist tendency in this literature, restoring the phenomenon's properly communicative dimension. Next, operational concepts are presented for two of the main disinformation subgenres, rumors and fake news. The subsequent topic revisits the concept of morality, contextualizing the ongoing moral disputes in Brazil and in the hegemonic normativities reiterated by negative representations of gender and sexuality minorities. Then, the methodological operationalization of the study and the composition of its analytical corpus are presented. The results and the main inferences obtained by the research are discussed soon after. Finally, in the final considerations, the pertinence of examining the production and circulation of disinformation from a contextual perspective is highlighted, as well as indicating possible limitations and outcomes of the article.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The sociocultural context of disinformation

Amid the recent shift in studies on disinformation, several authors (Anderson, 2020; Andersen & Søre, 2019; Cabañes, 2020; Marres, 2018) began to question the resumption of a strong media effects paradigm, which hypothesizes that disinformation would be *the evil of the century*, capable of harming the ways of acquiring human knowledge (Levy, 2017) and polluting the

epistemic environment (Blake-Turner, 2020). Its harmful consequences would range from the corrosion of citizens' cognitive skills (Brown, 2019; McKay & Tenove, 2020) to the production of intellectual vices (Meyer, 2019), and the reinforcement of extremist and sectarian worldviews (Rini, 2017). Some studies have even suggested an association between the spread of false stories and viral contagion, proposing solutions to the problem that would act as antidotes to disinformation (Roozenbek & Linden, 2018), such as corrections promoted by fact-checking agencies (Morris et al., 2020) and media literacy campaigns (Jones-Jang et al., 2019).

According to Anderson (2020), the effervescence of this literature reflects a mediacentric mythology<sup>6</sup> in which social media owned by the *big techs*<sup>7</sup> would take over the place formerly attributed to radio or television to distribute messages on a large scale that act on an atomized mass of individuals. For the author, the dominance of research aimed at tracking the collective effects of contents that circulate predominantly on digital platforms is based on an understanding of human action proposed by the very platforms. In his words, "Facebook categorizes its human users as subjects who act, and whose acts are influenced by short-term communicative stimuli" (Anderson, 2020, p. 16). In this sense, the endorsement of this behavioral and anti-interpretative approach to the communicative process in the literature on disinformation would be motivating a disregard for its necessary sociocultural roots (Andersen & S e, 2019; Caba es, 2020), subsumed by its quantifiable digital footprints.

Restituting the interactional component in the circulation of disinformation is an important step to recognize that such phenomenon is not restricted to a merely instrumental problem that can be solved by the aforementioned *inoculation* tactics or even by an update in the platforms' content moderation policies (Andersen & S e, 2019; Caba es, 2020; Marres, 2018). As a counterpoint to a *technicist* treatment of disinformation (which equates the phenomenon to a *noise* that disorients cognition and deteriorates the functioning of democracy), it is argued that the persuasive force of fraudulent stories and false rumors stems from the moral judgments that resonate in them (Andersen & S e, 2019; Caba es, 2020; Humprecht, 2018).

Although empirical research on the subject has only recently been redirecting its analytical lens towards an axiological and contextual foundation of disinformation<sup>8</sup>, articles such as those by Humprecht (2018) and Caba es (2020) attest to the pertinence of this approach. In a comparative international perspective, Humprecht (2018) detected how the main promoters of disinformation in Austria and Germany are alternative websites of anonymous authorship, linked to fascist groups that broadcast fake news referring to immigrants who reside

<sup>6</sup>By mediacentric we mean an attempt to hypertrophy the role of the media as the only explanatory factor for any social transformations taking place in contemporary times.

<sup>7</sup>The term refers to the Silicon Valley technology companies that currently control the digital market, notably Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft, also identified by the acronym GAFAM.

<sup>8</sup>By way of illustration, through the prism of social epistemology, Levy (2017) pointed out that rumors about social minorities could reinforce prejudiced representations about their members.



in these countries, while in the United States and in the United Kingdom the main subjects of false stories are political elites. Cabañes (2020), on the other hand, approached the anti-elitist, misogynistic, and racist imaginaries that emanate from the disinformation circulating in the Philippines, strengthening the populist rhetoric of President Rodrigo Duterte. In his words, the pull of these stories hinges on “aspirations that ordinary Filipinos had about discipline brought about by their fears about the country’s rampant disorder and criminality” (Cabañes, 2020, p. 11).

Considering the above, this article intends to investigate the incidence of a conservative morality – specifically linked to issues of gender and sexuality – in the Brazilian disinformation ecosystem after the 2018 elections<sup>9</sup>. Understanding disinformation as a type of information that configures deliberately distorted world representations capable of reverberating in the values shared by a social stratum or group (that is, it is not about forgeries that are completely disconnected from the context of their interlocutors’ lives) (Fallis, 2015), it is known that its forms of manifestation in the digital environment (this research’s object of study) can range from news production to image manipulation (Gelfert, 2018; Tandoc et al., 2018). Therefore, in line with Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019), we propose to think of disinformation as an umbrella concept that branches out into operational notions for empirical research. This article focuses on two of them: rumors and fake news.

Although rumors are not necessarily based on disinformation – they can refer to narratives that support social relationships and a sense of intersubjectivity in a given community (Andersen & Søe, 2019; Gelfert, 2018) –, those that are subject to verification and eventually labeled as fake by content moderation on digital platforms or by partner fact-checkers (Marres, 2018) often fall into this category. Often published by apocryphal profiles with a narrative configuration that does not emulate the stylistic resources of journalism – taking more advantage of the technical architecture of the very platforms to amplify their visibility, being shared inadvertently or deliberately by other users –, rumors are a central component of the Brazilian disinformation ecosystem due to their capillarity in messaging and social media applications, as previous studies on the context of the 2018 elections have shown (Bastos dos Santos et al., 2019; Gomes & Dourado, 2019).

Fake news, on the other hand, correspond to publications with deliberately false or misleading content that actually mimic journalistic language – typically containing a title, handle, and photographs –, are broadcast predominantly in

<sup>9</sup> As correctly noted by one of the anonymous reviewers of this article, the 2018 presidential elections did not inaugurate a period of accentuated circulation of disinformation based on gender and sexuality in Brazil. For example, the impeachment process of former president Dilma Rousseff, which took place in 2016, was supported by a disinformation campaign in which gender was used to morally disqualify the president (Piaia, 2018). That said, we argue that, unlike other presidential elections in the post-redemocratization period, the 2018 election was strongly marked by the production of moral panics (Miskolci & Campana, 2017) that claimed, via disinformation, the restoration of a declining conservative morality. Considering that this discursive formation was victorious in the elections, we considered pertinent to observe its developments in the year immediately following the electoral dispute.

digital environments and produced to deceive different audiences, whether for commercial purposes – as in the case of clickbait articles –, whether for ideological interests – as in the pages of hyper-partisan groups that intend to convert or reinforce the beliefs of their audience through disinformation (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Gelfert, 2018; Tandoc et al., 2018). Despite some authors questioning the heuristic validity of the concept, considering it a discursive weapon used by authoritarian politicians to restrict freedom of expression (Coady, 2019; Habgood-Coote, 2018), the concept's operationality must also be considered, given that it is not a subgenre of disinformation homologous to correlated notions more established in the literature, such as advertising and journalistic errors<sup>10</sup> (Tandoc et al., 2018). Therefore, the proposed characterization reserves the term for content that has been published on pages that exploit journalistic authority for disinformation purposes, that is, false stories and statements that do not make use of this journalistic camouflage are excluded from this definition.

That said, when examining fake news and rumors referring to the themes of gender and sexuality in the first year of Bolsonaro's government, this article does not disregard that the architecture of digital platforms and the information and ad targeting filtering algorithms enhance the creation of low investment content capable of generating high revenues via monetization of virtual traffic (Bakir & McStay, 2017). Nevertheless, it moves away from causal explanations for the phenomenon of disinformation since, given the technical and political conditions for its production at an industrial pace, its circulation will depend on the resonance of shared moral values in a given sociocultural context. In other words, if the technological infrastructure of digital media provides the extraction of value through the quantification of accesses regardless of the type of content broadcast, the concentration of users in an "attention market" (Wu, 2016) fertile in disinformation is not the result of a cognitive distortion effect that would distance them from the factual truth (Anderson, 2020). As will be argued in the following topic, the moral substratum on which certain normativities rest is an important factor to be considered when scrutinizing the particular traction of false histories in a given society.

### **Moral life, gender norms and sexuality**

The moral dimension of social life is considered to be eminently constitutive, and not just regulatory, of everyday practices (Vandenberghe, 2015). There is a normative horizon that underlies human action in the world, providing

<sup>10</sup>In line with the argument presented by one of the anonymous reviewers of this article, it is a fact that, historically, mistakes made by the press cannot be fully classified as accidental since, in various circumstances, media organizations deliberately aired rumors in order to respond to economic and/or political interests contrary to journalistic ethics. By way of illustration, between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, it was common for tabloids to publish intentionally fictional stories to increase their circulations (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018). As much as we agree that the distinction between professional journalism and disinformation should not be established by an approximation criterion to the factual truth, we argue that, in analytical terms, it is important to differentiate professional journalistic coverage from the deliberate production of disinformation since, in the second case, the very narrative construction is inspired by social reality with the sole purpose of deceiving the audience.



“evaluation standards (principles, values and norms) by which actions (own and others) can be judged” (Vandenberghe, 2015, p. 69). By composing “the shared cultural order that is institutionalized in structured social practices” (Vandenberghe, 2015, p. 69), morality is not the property of specific individuals or groups and is not confused with worldviews, whether conservative, progressive, or partisan biases, widely studied by social psychology as variables that influence the predisposition or not of individuals to believe in disinformation (Faragó et al., 2019). Simultaneously, as it is inherent to the socialization process of individuals, basing their more or less conscious value judgments on the situations they experience and the affective reactions that emanate from them, such as rancor, anger and indignation (Fassin, 2008), morality is an indispensable component of action and effectively materialized in practices.

Within the field of morality, the normativities that govern gender and sexuality play a central role, acting in the constitution of identities and expressions of sexualized and gendered subjects. They are responsible for grounding the sociocultural conventions that permeate these markers, establishing norms and moral principles disputed and reiterated. Based on the premise that disinformation resonates with moral values, it is extremely important to understand how the norms around gender and sexuality are constituted and figured in false stories about these themes.

According to Butler (1990), the normativities around gender and sexuality are established amid the contentious universe of morality, seeking to establish coherence between gender identities and expressions of sexuality that come to be alluded to and reiterated in everyday life. According to the author, these sociocultural norms have a particular *modus operandi*, acting from the requirement and prohibition of certain behaviors and roles. Therefore, they act through vectors of approval and valuation and sanction and punishment, establishing the limits of morality. For Butler (2004), normativities are constituted through their opposite pole, creating a field of abjections that stipulate the boundaries between the morally acceptable and the unacceptable. Threats to norms base their *constitutive exterior*, alluded to and rejected in the symbolic production of gender and sexuality.

The intersection of morality about gender and sexuality institutes a set of socially sanctioned values and practices. Similar to gender, sexuality is based on a system of vertical inequalities established in a pyramid of valuations and sanctions. Rubin (1993) presents the idea of a “hierarchical system of sexuality” in order to show how the punitive environment and formal and informal controls

that fall on this system work. According to the author, there is a symbolic scale that determines the status and sociocultural value of erotic-sexual behaviors and expressions, constituted in a pyramidal way: at the top remain sanctioned practices, such as monogamous heterosexual relationships, and at the bottom are perversions, such as homosexual practices and exchanging sex for money. In sexuality, as in gender, it is the clash between requirements and prohibitions that determines moral values and the attribution of status.

Both the system of gender stratification and sexuality's hierarchies are neither monolithic nor immutable. As proposed by Butler (2004) and Rubin (1993), gender and sexuality are established amid socio-historical processes subject to change. This field of normativities, which corresponds to the affirmation of hegemonic morality, becomes the target of dispute in moments of great social stress and sociopolitical transformations, reverberating in moral panics that try to reinstitute and re-establish the limits of social life also in terms of gender and sexuality through the reconstruction of restrictions and sanctions (Carrara, 2015). Moral panics, according to Carrara (2015), are predominantly aimed at minority groups or practices, expanding the terrain of perversions that must be rejected from the social body. The author states that homosexuals and transsexuals – and women who do not reproduce the normative marks of gender and sexuality – are the main target of such moralizing hysteria. These subjects are taken as an abject constitutive exterior that, in turn, helps to reaffirm the importance of norms for the maintenance of moral hierarchies.

The contemporary Brazilian context is marked by moral panics (Carrara, 2015; Leite, 2019; Miskolci & Campana, 2017), especially those focused on gender and sexuality. Today's moral panics are considered as the result of two main phenomena; they emerge along with the expansion of neoconservatism in Brazil, which surfaced in the public sphere with the protests that took place in 2013, known as the *Jornadas de Junho* (June Journeys), and became commonplace during the cycle of protests that began in 2014 (Tatagiba, 2014), which culminated in Bolsonaro's election to the Presidency of the Republic. Neoconservatism's main ideas are the defense of the *traditional family*, moral conservatism, religion, and nationalism (Messenberg, 2017). According to Leite (2019), among the components of the new national conservatism, the reaffirmation of gender and sexuality norms stands out, seeking to re-establish social roles within the family and the nation, fighting the identities that supposedly would be eroding *traditional values*. In the second instance, moral panics are





accompanied by disputes against the “gender ideology” (Miskolci & Campana, 2017), which arise concurrently with Brazilian neoconservatism. This symbolic front of struggle advocates for a heteronormative model of family and against the advancement of sexual and reproductive rights, seeking to accentuate, according to Leite (2019), the need to re-establish the limits of the moral field that governs gender and sexuality.

This situation, which expresses an intense process of symbolic and moral debate, is associated with the formulation of normativities around gender and sexuality, revealing the background of the circulation of disinformation on these themes in 2019. Therefore, it is urgent to understand how false stories participate in this contentious field.

### METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

In line with previous empirical research on the production and circulation of disinformation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Humprecht, 2018), the corpus of this research was structured based on false stories about gender and sexuality fully debunked by three of the main fact-checking initiatives in activity in Brazil, namely, the *Lupa* agency<sup>11</sup>, the *Fato ou Fake* center<sup>12</sup> and the *Boatos.org* website<sup>13</sup>.

Data collection and encoding were done manually by both researchers from the 2019 checked files, made available by each initiative on their respective websites. Only publications that referred to issues of gender and sexuality and that were motivated by disinformation on the web were considered, excluding, therefore, statements from public authorities, subject to varying degrees of imprecision and not necessarily based on rumors and fake news.

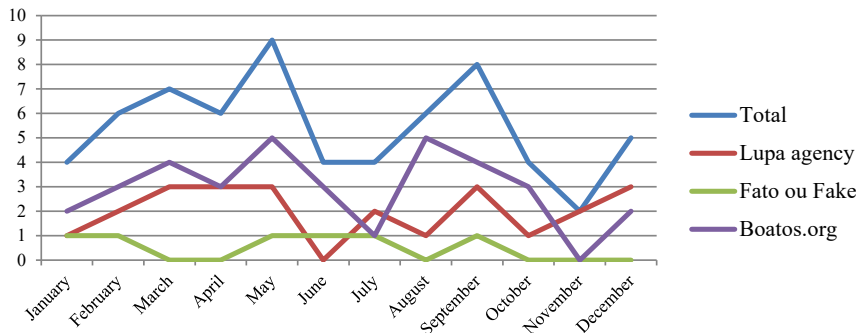
The decision to include or not a certain item in the corpus resulted from a joint discussion between the researchers. Any discrepancies in the codification process motivated its interruption for the proper resolution of the divergence. Considering that the result of the collection does not reflect the totality of false stories about gender and sexuality that circulated in the first year of Bolsonaro’s government, it is expected that the diversity of agencies contemplated will allow covering a more expressive amount of content to be examined, given that *Boatos.org* produced 1,008 verifications in 2019; the *Lupa* agency, 497; and the *Fato ou Fake*, 231.

Excluding duplicate publications (that is, fact-checking of the same story produced by more than one of the three agencies), the total number of rumors and fake news about gender and sexuality found in 2019 was 65. That is, every month, on average 5.41 disinformation pieces about these themes circulated in digital environments, as indicated in Figure 1.

<sup>11</sup>Founded in 2015, it is currently configured as one of the main fact-checking organizations unrelated to media conglomerates.

<sup>12</sup>Inaugurated in 2018 as a coalition of Grupo Globo vehicles..

<sup>13</sup>Independent channel that, since 2013, exclusively checks suspicious content shared on social networks and messaging applications.

**Figure 1***Disinformation on gender and sexuality in 2019*

Note. Designed by the authors.

The collected data were treated via open qualitative textual analysis in two steps. At first, we sought to delimit the publication's circulation format. The verification sources were classified as rumors or fake news based on information provided by the fact-checking agencies in their corrections. In addition, two elements of the 65 narratives that make up the research corpus were examined: the main agents mentioned and the link or not of history to social events relevant to the Brazilian sociocultural context, in order to weave inferences about the disputed moralities in these plots.

The second stage of the research consisted of locating publication sources of fake news about gender and sexuality, aiming to track some of the websites they circulated on. The objective was to understand how the apocryphal pages found define themselves – as journalistic channels or spaces for opinion and analysis, for example –, their possible affiliation to certain ideological positions and the journalistic style adopted in the publication – if the text was presented, for example, as news (containing title, subtitle, photographs with captions, and main text) or as a note (accompanied by title and photograph only). The reverse search of sources was carried out using digital search engines, considering titles, keywords and publication date of the disinformation piece classified as fake news in the first stage of the study. Complementarily, based on recent surveys carried out by the *Aos Fatos* (Nalon & Ribeiro, 2020) and *Pública* (Rudnitzki & Scofield, 2020), and by *Coletivo Bereia* (Costa, 2020), a direct search was carried out in nineteen pages labeled as apocryphal (Table 1) to identify which of them published the fake news that make up the corpus of this investigation.



**Table 1**

*List of analyzed disinformation pages*

<b>Website</b>	<b>Link</b>
Jornal da Cidade Online	<a href="https://www.jornaldacidadeonline.com.br/">https://www.jornaldacidadeonline.com.br/</a>
Senso Incomum	<a href="https://sensoincomum.org/">https://sensoincomum.org/</a>
Gazeta Brasil	<a href="https://gazetabrasil.com.br/">https://gazetabrasil.com.br/</a>
Agora Paraná	<a href="https://www.agoraparana.com.br/">https://www.agoraparana.com.br/</a>
Conexão Política	<a href="https://conexaopolitica.com.br/">https://conexaopolitica.com.br/</a>
Jornal 21 Brasil	<a href="https://www.jornal21brasil.com.br/">https://www.jornal21brasil.com.br/</a>
CPAD News	<a href="http://www.cpadnews.com.br/">http://www.cpadnews.com.br/</a>
Gospel +	<a href="https://gospelmais.com.br/">https://gospelmais.com.br/</a>
Gospel Prime	<a href="https://www.gospelprime.com.br/">https://www.gospelprime.com.br/</a>
Pleno.News	<a href="https://pleno.news/">https://pleno.news/</a>
Renova Mídia	<a href="https://renovamidia.com.br/">https://renovamidia.com.br/</a>
Terça Livre	<a href="https://tercalivre.com.br/">https://tercalivre.com.br/</a>
Revista Oeste	<a href="https://revistaoeste.com/">https://revistaoeste.com/</a>
Estudos Nacionais	<a href="https://www.estudosnacionais.com/">https://www.estudosnacionais.com/</a>
Agência Caneta	<a href="http://www.caneta.org/">http://www.caneta.org/</a>
Brasil Sem Medo	<a href="https://brasilsemmedo.com/">https://brasilsemmedo.com/</a>
Conservadorismo do Brasil	<a href="https://conservadorismodobrasil.com.br/">https://conservadorismodobrasil.com.br/</a>
Editorial MBC	<a href="https://editorialmbc.com.br/">https://editorialmbc.com.br/</a>
Mídia Sem Máscara	<a href="https://midiasemmascara.net/">https://midiasemmascara.net/</a>

*Note.* Designed by the authors. Despite having been included in the initial listing, the Notícia Brasil Online page is no longer available and therefore it was impossible to consider it in the analysis.

To understand how the pages that shared unfounded stories define themselves, the “About Us” sections of each site, portal or blog considered were consulted. Finally, the data were systematized in order to understand what are the typical formats for publishing fake news on gender and sexuality that most circulated in 2019, what are their predominant dissemination channels, and what moral sensibilities they intend to trigger in their target audience.

**RESULTS**

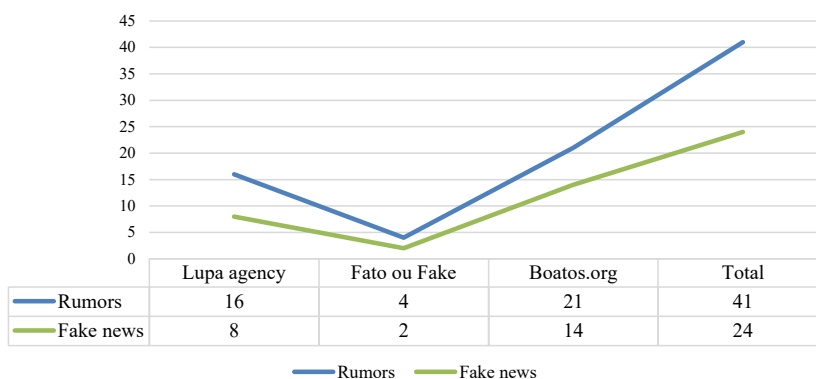
**Formats and characteristics of disinformation about gender and sexuality**

Among the 65 disinformation pieces about gender and sexuality shared in 2019 in Brazil, most circulated in the form of rumors (41), with a typical configuration of posts on social networks or messaging applications: publication with passionate speeches, caps lock highlights, amateurishly tampered images, misspellings, and use of profanity. Another 24 were disseminated as fake news and verified by fact-checking agencies from their distribution on apocryphal pages (Figure 2). Segmenting the data by the considered initiatives, it appears that

*Lupa* agency verified eight stories with journalistic configuration and another sixteen in the form of rumors; *Fato ou Fake* examined two in the first category and four in the second; and *Boatos.org* analyzed 14 and 21, respectively.

**Figure 2**

*Disinformation formats on gender and sexuality in 2019*



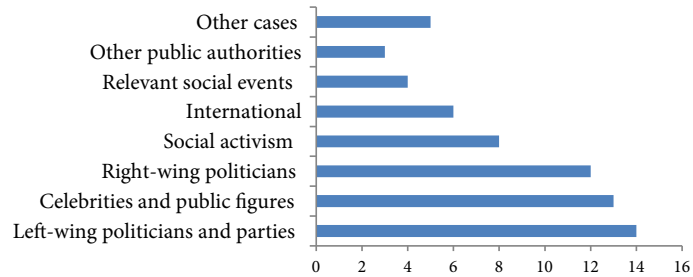
Note. Designed by the authors.

When examining the contents of the disinformation pieces (Figure 3), it is clear that most fomented criticism against politicians and parties linked to the left, accused of corrupting the values of the *traditional family*. Of the fourteen contents that fall into this category, five mention projects by politicians from the left judged morally reprehensible, such as Bill of Law 3.369/2015, authored by federal legislator Orlando Silva (Communist Party of Brazil – PCdoB), which proposed to institute the statute of families in the 21st century, recognizing union forms different from the heteronormative nuclear model. At least three different unfounded narratives on the subject were published between the date the project would be discussed by the Commission on Human Rights and Minorities of the House of Representatives (August 21st, 2019) and early December, all of them accusing the document of normalizing incest, polygamy and pedophilia. At the time it would be put to a vote in plenary, the project was even removed from the agenda due to the false stories that circulated about it, specifically leveraged by PSL federal legislators (Barbosa, 2019). Content associating members of left-wing parties with practices considered reprehensible, contradictory and even criminal appear repeatedly, as in a headline that states that federal legislator Maria do Rosário (PT) would have defended the decriminalization of pedophilia, or in a publication that claims that the federal legislator Glauber Braga (Socialism and Liberty Party – PSOL) allegedly attacked journalist Patrícia Lélis.



Figure 3

Disinformation issues regarding gender and sexuality in 2019



Note. Designed by the authors.

Second, thirteen disinformation pieces relate celebrities and public figures to false events. Among them, there are stories that hint at a plot between artists and the media to undermine the morality of the traditional family, for example the narratives that declare that the singer Pabllo Vittar would present a children’s program on TV Globo entitled *Gay Child TV*; that singer Johnny Hooker would be featured in *Criança Esperança*<sup>14</sup> in 2019<sup>15</sup>; or that YouTuber Felipe Neto would have encouraged children to access pedophilia forums on his channel<sup>16</sup>. Other publications in this category include materials that legitimize forms of violence against women, exonerating the famous figures involved in the cases, as the insinuations that the young woman who accused the player Neymar of rape, in May 2019, was a malicious person; or in a text that suggests that the ex-wife of goalkeeper Jean, who worked until December 2019 at São Paulo Futebol Clube, had been attacked by her husband for sending intimate photos to other men via WhatsApp.

Third, twelve disinformation pieces about gender and sexuality disseminated in digital media during 2019 are about public authorities known for their overtly reactionary positions. In this case, there is a predominance of publications that refer, in a recriminatory or ironic tone, to false statements by the current Minister of Family, Women and Human Rights, Damara Alves. The evangelical pastor had six mentions, as in a story that proposed that she would revoke the Maria da Penha Law; in another one that said she would have visited the “Valley of the Homosexuals” in hell; and still in a publication claiming that she had created a project to limit sex to procreation only. The current President of the Republic and his family are also protagonists of five disinformation pieces, such as in a material published early in 2019 claiming that Bolsonaro would decree the end of Carnival and the Gay Parade.

<sup>14</sup>*Criança Esperança* is a television program and a national social mobilization campaign held in Brazil that seeks to raise awareness in favor of the rights of children and adolescents.

<sup>15</sup> This fake news assumes a denunciatory tone as it is based on the singer’s defense of the play *O Evangelho segundo Jesus, Rainha do Céu* (The Gospel according to Jesus, Queen of Heaven) in 2018.

<sup>16</sup>This disinformation piece began to circulate after the influencer purchased 14,000 LGBT+ themed books to be distributed at the Rio de Janeiro’s Book Biennial in response to the former mayor Marcelo Crivella’s decision to censor the copies of *HQ Avengers: The Children’s Crusade*, which was being marketed at the event.

False content that rebukes social activism (specifically groups on the left) occupied fourth place in the corpus (eight cases). Four of these stories aired accusations against public universities in the same period that former Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub insulted such institutions and implemented a 30% cut in their funding (“MEC Mira UnB, UFF e UFBA”, 2019). Protests arising from these actions of the federal government, mostly led by students, motivated publications that related the protests to libidinous and immoral activities according to the conservative worldview, such as several montages with images of nude students and text that asserted that the young people would have created an “anal art studio” at a university.

In this list of false stories linked to issues of gender and sexuality, we identified fewer materials denouncing sexual practices and non-normative gender expressions in other countries (six texts), distortions of social events that motivated reactionary actions<sup>17</sup> (four occurrences), accusations that other public authorities would be encouraging forms of “sexual perversion” (three cases) and more diffuse content on the subject (five texts), which reinforce a compulsory heterosexuality, as in the case of a false study that would have assured that men who enjoy anal sex with their partners would have homosexual “inclinations.”

In view of the aforementioned data, it is possible to sustain that most of the disinformation pieces about gender and sexuality considered in this study refer to social events relevant to the Brazilian sociopolitical context (40 out of 65, or 69% of the total). This predominance points to two distinct phenomena: on the one hand, it demonstrates the relevance of these themes for Brazilian society, which appear as elements of tension and concern in the conflicts over “gender ideology” (Miskolci & Campana, 2017); on the other, it reveals how these issues started to compose a picture of *moral panic*, which indicates the urgency to define and establish the “limits of morality” (Rubin, 1993). These two points stand out in view of the data that reveal the most sensitive themes among the analyzed publications, that is, the supposed deterioration of the sustaining values of the *traditional family* and the presumed perversion of conventional positions and expressions of gender and sexuality.

Following a set of moral disputes that centralized the conjunction between gender and sexuality (Carrara, 2015), the most recurrent disinformation in 2019 challenged the achievement of civil rights by LGBT+ people, as an example of texts that associated the bill of law that proposed an extension of common-law marriage in the Federal Constitution to the incitement of incest and pedophilia, criminalizing family arrangements that clash with heteronormative standards. In line with this, the danger of uprising of the mononuclear family appears as the second most alluded subject in these narratives, recurring in stories about

<sup>17</sup>Essa desinformação passou a circular logo após o influenciador ter adquirido 14 mil livros com temática LGBT+ para serem distribuídos na Bienal do Livro do Rio de Janeiro, em resposta à decisão do ex-prefeito Marcelo Crivella de censurar exemplares da HQ *Vingadores: A cruzada das Crianças*, que estava sendo comercializada no evento.



celebrities from the LGBT+ universe who would assume the post of presenters of children's programs or attractions in televised shows, reinforcing the ideas of danger and threat historically associated with homosexuality and transsexuality (Rubin, 1993). While the discussion of the bill of law focuses on the risks of subverting the compulsory roles assigned to men and women in affective-sexual relationships, rumors involving celebrities focus on fictional harm to children when exposed to *gender ideology*.

Another highlight in the analysis were the pieces of disinformation that pointed to inappropriate behavior by women, using known cases of gender violence to discern the good from the bad, as occurred with the story of the nude photos of the goalkeeper Jean's wife. As Carrara (2015) asserts, these distinctions serve to maintain the hegemonic social positions of men and women in heterosexual arrangements, reaffirming a norm that allows for violent sanctions for eventual transgressions.

The false stories focused on denouncing social activism recriminate forms of exercising sexuality considered *libertine and depraved*, responsible for propagating risky behavior and contrary to hegemonic moralities. These cases convoked valuation hierarchies regarding the expressions of sexuality (Carrara, 2015), using the actions of activists and university students as examples of *immorality*. Working from the opposition, these texts contrasted an imaginary of *correct sexuality* with the *obscene* behavior of students and activists who supposedly used nudity and anal penetration to express themselves. Once again, these are narratives that aim to establish the limits of morality, as pointed out by Rubin (1993), defining a set of possible and sanctioned practices and another of condemned and reprimanded activities. Rubin's system of sexuality demonstrates how heteronormative moral norms establish unequal classifications of sexuality, indicating those that should be persecuted, corrected, and penalized.

Similar inferences were obtained in the analysis of materials that hypertrophied the conservatism of right-wing politicians of prominent public expression, especially Damares Alves and Jair Bolsonaro. Although most of these materials are characterized by an ironic and recriminatory tone, they establish a dialogue with the moral codes mentioned above, distinguishing the exercise of healthy sexuality from the dangerous one. Given this situation, the disinformation that mentioned a decision by the Federal Government to ban Carnival and the Gay Parade refers to the decency and caution needed in relation to supposedly libidinous acts, which were being duly fought in Bolsonaro's government.

The moral axes of false stories demonstrate how they are instituted through a worldview about gender and sexuality based on the dynamics of interdiction that, according to Butler (1990), speaks of the establishment of boundaries

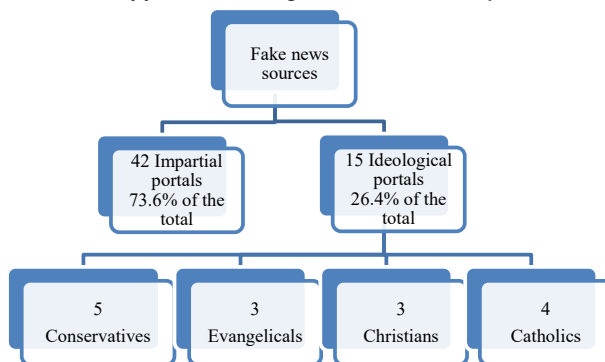
between normativities and their constitutive exteriors, building a set of abjections to be rebuked. Such publications resonate with the prohibition on certain ways of incorporating and experiencing gender and sexuality, acting as mechanisms to demonstrate and ratify social norms. Thought together, and considering their main themes, the texts express the normative content of the conventions, emphasizing its opposite to demonstrate the dangers and threats posed if these same conventions are overturned (Butler, 2004). Consequently, such narratives reflect both a fear of breaking the hegemonic moralities and an instrument of symbolization of these same moralities. Therefore, the discursive format of publications identified as fake news and their publication channels must be analyzed so the elements that make up their social circulation and help to establish their credibility.

### Publication sources of fake news

Regarding the 24 pieces of disinformation classified as fake news and published on apocryphal websites, we found that they circulated in the format of news articles and notes. Five of them appeared in both formats, seven exclusively as news articles and twelve as notes only, all published on pages that define themselves as informative (Figure 4). Considering the frequency with which the 24 fake news were published, we can infer that they circulated at least 43 times in note format and at least 32 times as news articles.

**Figure 4**

*Main publication sources of fake news on gender and sexuality in 2019*



Note. Designed by the authors.

Among the analyzed fake news, twenty were published in more than one portal or website, whereas another four appeared in only one portal or website.



# A

Of the 24 fake news, those structured in the classic news format have a prominent factual title, an explanatory subtitle, one or two photos with captions, and the main text headed by a lead and composed of three or more paragraphs. Those published in note format have a highlighted factual title, an explanatory subtitle, a captioned photograph and text of a paragraph beginning with a lead.

All the fake news analyzed were disclosed on self-titled informative internet pages (57 in total), of which 42 (or 73.6%) describe themselves as *impartial*<sup>18</sup>, whereas fifteen others (or 26.4%) are aligned with some ideological position. Among the latter, five consider themselves as *conservative*, three claim to be *evangelical*, three assume themselves to be *Christian*, and four others as *Catholic*. The pages that most shared disinformation were: Pleno News (five stories), Terça Livre (three stories), Gospel Mais (three stories) and Top Mídia News (three stories). The first of these sites identifies itself as *Christian*, the second as of *Catholic inclination*, the third as *evangelical*, and the last as *impartial*.

The most shared fake news, which appeared on five or more portals simultaneously, were:

1. The so-called Congressional bill of law that would legalize the marriage between parents and their children (pejoratively called the *polyamory law* and published on ten websites). This story appeared in three different versions, sometimes presented as a proposal by federal legislator Orlando Silva, sometimes as a project by former legislator Manuela D'Ávila, and sometimes as a proposal by federal legislator Túlio Gadêlha;
2. The apparent negligence of the press and leftist groups with the attacks suffered by Karol Eller, a youtuber voter of Bolsonaro victim of a possible homophobic attack (published on five websites);
3. The rumor that the singer Johnny Hooker, who would have called Jesus “gay and travesti”, would perform on *Criança Esperança* (published on five sites);
4. The case of a “young woman” who would have said “she is happy to have been impregnated by her father” (published in five portals);
5. A presumed booklet distributed by the City Hall of Fortaleza, advocating for child masturbation as a means of calming children (published on five websites).

Among these false stories, the first three were formatted as news articles. The last two were published as notes, accompanied by images and a single paragraph.

<sup>18</sup>The *impartial* qualifier is commonly used in the “About Us” section of the 42 analyzed pages, seeking to highlight a non-partisan and supposedly exempt character. The use of such a qualifier is a discursive resource that aims to differentiate pages with an informational bias from those with an ideological bias.

It is noteworthy that the most shared publication sources of fake news are self-declared informative websites. The fake news published by them dealt exclusively with events sensitive to the national moral universe. Such narratives sought to weave unfounded complaints of the alleged incitement for incestuous practices and pedophilia by public authorities in Brazil, as well as celebrities who diverge from the normative standards of gender and sexuality – and that, for this reason, would instigate *gender ideology* on national television with the consent of TV broadcasters. Furthermore, one of these stories sought to highlight a *hypocritical* attitude of the press and left-wing movements, which would have ignored a homophobic violence committed against a far-right lesbian. Between the lines, this story would reinforce the thesis that civil rights activism would not really be concerned with fighting injustices but with imposing the *gender ideology*. All fake news appealed to the corruption of moral values and the alleged degradation of the family institution, making social factors identified as belonging to the left or social minorities (centrally LGBT+ people) responsible for this situation, urging the audience to oppose and combat such initiatives.

It is concluded that the potential public targeted by these fake news is consistent with a conservative worldview, since such texts aim to trigger moral sensibilities for an ideological purpose, that is, the promotion of reactionary ideals, discursively mobilized in the narratives. Their credibility rests on a journalistic guise, carefully emulated with more political (of mobilizing actions) than economic purpose (of monetization by increasing traffic on the websites). However, given the fact that the fake news on gender and sexuality included in this study frontally expose the dangers associated with a presumed subversion of heteronormativity – aiming to restore conventions that underpin its axiological system (as the ideality of the mononuclear family based on the complementarity between the male and female genders (Messenberg, 2017)) – one cannot disregard the fact that they imply a prior sharing of meanings with their audiences.

From this perspective, the moral panic scenario shaped by the materials analyzed acts less as a vector of ideological conversion through disinformation than as a reinforcement of moral sensibilities rooted in the audience. In other words, and taking into account the thematic specificity of many of the portals identified in the analysis, the fake news observed take on the function of resonating the bases of a heteronormative morality for an already ideologically inclined audience, reaffirming shared beliefs that are would have been weakened through narratives that are socially recognized and worthy of credibility (Rubin, 1993). Such fake news act as discursive and moral devices of gender and sexuality,



mobilizing and building normativities through their content, formatting, and means of dissemination.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study shows that the pieces of disinformation related to gender and sexuality in Brazil refer, for the most part, to sensitive issues to Brazilian society, pointing to alleged sexual perversions as a preferential target (such as incest and pedophilia) and the subversion of normative gender identities (as in cases involving celebrities from the LGBT+ universe). In this sense, the pertinence of examining the production and circulation of disinformation is supported, taking as reference the sociocultural context in which they arise and the moral disputes they mobilize, overcoming a mediacentric approach to the phenomenon. Therefore, this study highlights the moral field in which the analyzed fake news falls, focusing especially on the limits and borders drawn for gender and sexuality in these pieces of disinformation. The reinforcement of shared moralities between fake news and their audience is noted, echoing a conservative worldview that intends to be ratified and endorsed<sup>19</sup>.

Although the results offer substantial contributions to the critical observation of the relationship between disinformation and morality (linked specifically to issues of gender and sexuality), the investigation has some limitations that deserve to be pointed out. The main one refers to the fact that the study was based only on false stories detected by fact-checking initiatives, which do not necessarily correspond to the entire volume of digital disinformation that circulated in 2019. Although this methodological choice has been inspired by the literature on the subject, it is considered that complementary mapping efforts (via network analysis, for example) can improve this type of investigation. Likewise, the search for publication sources of false stories on search engines is undoubtedly hampered by the ephemeral nature of these contents, which are often deleted or modified by their creators after they have been exposed. This phenomenon can negatively impact longitudinal analyses, generating a delay in the accounting of disinformation propagating sources.

Possible ramifications of our research would include future studies focused on identifying false narratives based on other social markers of difference – class, race, and ethnicity, for example – and reception studies capable of scrutinizing the audiences summoned and mobilized concretely by disinformation based on ongoing moral disputes in a given sociocultural context. Such investigations would allow us to go beyond the tendency to reduce human action to its digital footprints (Livingstone, 2018), contemplating the interpretative processes adopted

<sup>19</sup> Although the results point to central groups in the circulation of false stories about gender and sexuality, with emphasis on religious groups, this study did not aim to analyze the interests or methods used by these groups to produce and share fake news. It was limited to discussing the delimitation and reinforcement of moral boundaries, a discussion that can aid future investigations on the consider the formation of groups and networks that share disinformation.

by the subjects to understand this type of disinformation and symbolize them in the social fabric. Finally, they would also help to understand the moralities triggered by these untrue narratives, revealing how and through what mechanisms they make the normativities explicit for their readers. ■

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Article received on December 11th, 2020 and approved on April 27th, 2021.





# Financial capital goes to heaven: Bitcoin, fintech 3.0 and the massification of the indebted man

## *O capital financeiro vai ao paraíso: Bitcoin, fintech 3.0 e a massificação do homem endividado*

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### ABSTRACT

The article analyzes Bitcoin cryptocurrency as part of a new sector of the financial market, fintech 3.0. Subscribing to Maurizio Lazzarato's thesis that the category of the *indebted man* would be the form of governmentality of contemporary capitalism, it is discussed how Bitcoin works as a vector of expansion of the social logic of indebtedness to a portion of the population. At first, I propose to think of cryptocurrency as media. Below, I present a genealogy of the ideologies that animated the creation of Bitcoin, in order to demonstrate the libertarian values that guided the design of this new technology. Finally, I discuss how fintech 3.0 spreads the social logic of the indebted man through personal digital devices. **Keywords:** Bitcoin, fintech 3.0, currency as media, financialization of everyday life, indebted man

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### RESUMO

O artigo analisa a criptomoeda Bitcoin como parte de um novo setor do mercado financeiro, a fintech 3.0. Subscrevendo a tese de Maurizio Lazzarato de que a categoria do *homem endividado* seria a forma de governamentalidade do capitalismo contemporâneo, discute-se de que modo a Bitcoin funciona como um vetor de expansão a uma parcela da população da lógica social do endividamento. A princípio, proponho pensar a criptomoeda como mídia. A seguir, apresento uma genealogia das ideologias que animaram a criação do Bitcoin, a fim de demonstrar os valores libertários que nortearam o desenho dessa nova tecnologia. Por fim, discuto como a fintech 3.0 difunde a lógica social do homem endividado por meio de dispositivos digitais pessoais.

**Palavras-chave:** Bitcoin, fintech 3.0, moeda como mídia, financeirização da vida cotidiana, homem endividado

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v15i2p205-227>

V.15 - Nº 2 mai./ago. 2021 São Paulo - Brasil LEONARDO DE MARCHI p. 205-227

MATRIZES



INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Cryptocurrencies are an open source digital asset designed to function as a payment system between users of a distributed network (peer-to-peer). Coin ownership records are stored in a digital ledger, the blockchain, which uses encryption to protect transaction records, control the creation of additional coins, and verify the transfer of the property of coins.

<sup>2</sup> A set of principles and techniques used to encrypt a script, making it unintelligible to those who do not have access to the stipulated technical conventions.

<sup>3</sup> The problem of the indebtedness of individuals (notably, the indebtedness of university students in the United States) took center stage in the agenda brought by the Occupy Wall Street movement. Since then, indebtedness as a form of governmentality has become the object of academic reflection among intellectuals from different theoretical currents (Graeber, 2011; Lazzarato, 2017).

THE CRYPTO CURRENCIES<sup>1</sup>, OR encrypted digital currencies<sup>2</sup>, gained prominence as one of the most innovative financial assets in recent years. Launched in 2008 after the publication of an article by a developer whose identity is unknown, but who presented himself under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto (2008), Bitcoin seemed to be a turning point in the trajectory of the financial market. Unlike previous experiences (such as Bit-Gold or B-Money), its registry system, the blockchain, promises to guarantee the necessary confidence for the use of this medium of exchange by a decentralized community, without the need for any political authority to certify its value. In addition, Bitcoins were offered not by large institutions in the financial sector, but by individual developers and/or small computer companies (startups), revealing the emergence of new economic agents that could restructure the financial market. It is not surprising, therefore, that Bitcoin has been hailed as the future of financial technology, or fintech.

Bitcoin's release date is emblematic. The financial crisis caused by the bursting of the housing bubble (called the mortgage crisis or subprime) in 2007, which started in the United States and soon became global, marks a turning point in contemporary capitalism. Unlike previous crises, which could be circumvented with the creation of new speculation bubbles, that of mortgages showed the exhaustion of neoliberalism's capacity to generate capital growth (Streeck, 2018; Varoufakis, 2016). At the time, popular uprisings emerged that demanded the regulation of financial capital and the end of neoliberal policies, which resulted in increasing indebtedness of the population.<sup>3</sup> The Occupy Wall Street movement was the most emblematic effort in this direction (Harvey et al., 2012). Among intellectuals and analysts of the political and economic situation, it was even declared the end of neoliberalism and the return to economic policies that presuppose greater State participation in income distribution as a way to achieve social justice.

What happened following the state intervention to remedy the economic crisis was, however, just the opposite. Instead of offering *mea culpa* for rampant speculation, large banks and financial agencies began to demand that national states be better able to bail out the financial sector in case of need. However, as the states lent (non-repayable) money to the financial sector in order to provide liquidity to the economy, the public debt of these countries increased remarkably. In the reading of financial capital, this meant that states would no longer be able to pay (to the financial market itself) the interest on their debts (Blyth, 2017). Despite the obvious paranoid nature of this argument, financial market lobbyists successfully pressured states not to regulate financial capital

and, instead, accelerate fiscal austerity policies, reduce public investment in public services, deregulate the labor market and privatize common goods (water, energy, road infrastructure etc.).

This movement led to the deepening of direct relations between civil society and financial capital. The neoliberal period in politics is characterized by the displacement of the State's social functions and the deregulation of labor protection. This has a series of consequences for the workforce, such as the general decrease in wages and the transformation of unemployment and informal employment into structural factors in the economy. Without guaranteed jobs and with scarce and precarious public services, most individuals turn to the private sector for the goods and services necessary for their livelihood. This unprecedentedly increases the level of personal indebtedness, creating a systemic relationship between *creditor* and *debtor* with financial capital. By relying more and more on private credit to fund their lives, individuals are incurring more and more debt to the point where most of their working time is devoted to paying multiple bills, which are never extinguished. Thus, a new type of economic subject emerges, who does not seek so much to maximize their profits as to pay their debts. Hence, Maurizio Lazzarato (2017) created the concept of the *indebted man* (*l'homme endetté*) to account for the subjectivity characteristic of neoliberal capitalism.

However, after the financial crisis of 2007, how would it be possible to direct families and companies to seek more private credit in a scenario of economic depression and disbelief in the financial system? One possible solution was to offer financial products that could be accessed through personal digital devices such as laptops or cell phones. Not by chance, as of 2009, we witness the emergence of a growing number of digital companies that offer access to financial products via the internet: crowdfunding platforms, digital banks, digital portfolios, investment platforms in the stock market or in public bonds for individuals, cashback, cryptocurrencies, tokenization, among other products.

This set of digital platforms ended up constituting a new niche in the financial system, which has been labeled fintech 3.0<sup>4</sup> (Arner et al., 2015; Nicoletti, 2017). Their peculiarity lies less in the novelty of the products they offer (although some are quite innovative) than in their audience: any individual with minimal availability of money and access to the Internet. Thus, the financial market would have access not only to large sums of money from a few large investors, but also to the little money of millions of small investors, who could give back the liquidity of a sector of the economy depleted by fears of the subprime crisis. Under the banner of *democratization of the financial market*, the problem of both liquidity and the population's confidence in the financial market had

<sup>4</sup>In their analysis of the financial market after the mortgage crisis, Arner et al. (2015) decided to create a historical perspective of the global financial system from the agents who offered financial products, that is, through some evolution of financial technology companies. From a historicist perspective, the authors decided to classify three moments: between 1866 and 1987, when fintech 1.0 would be established; between 1987 and 2008, when there is a shift to fintech 2.0; and, finally, from 2008 until the present moment, when fintech 3.0 would be configured.



been alleviated not with a strong regulation of financial institutions, but with the attraction of an immense public to its speculative logic. Ironically, it can be said that the occupation of the financial market actually took place, but in a diametrically opposite way to the intention of the insurgent demonstrators.

As the contracting of financial products becomes more accessible, individuals see themselves more as *investors*, each having their own *investment portfolio* (collection of financial investments that would replace the traditional savings or guarantee fund). As a manager of their own investments, each individual starts to conceive of themselves as a manager of their own money – or rather, as an *entrepreneur of themselves* (Foucault, 2008). However, it is critical to understand that the entrepreneur himself needs to take risks in order to undertake and profit, that is, incurring debt. His objective as a manager is, first of all, to take care of his debt so as not to go bankrupt. Therefore, every self-employed person is necessarily indebted.

It is crucial to note that there is an ideological dimension that cannot be dissociated from the emergence of fintech 3.0. The entrepreneur of himself is not a mere technician in business administration, but someone who must believe in market forces (and not in politics) as the only solution to solve problems in everyday life. That is, it is imperative to internalize a set of values that make rational the act of assuming debts to undertake. In short, it is about adopting a new spirit of capitalism, under the neoliberal aegis (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2009).

The Bitcoin case is paradigmatic. Its developers are part of a movement calling itself cypherpunk (Assange et al., 2013), which advocates that individuals resist state surveillance through the use of cryptography. Its anti-statism derives from anarcho-capitalism, a radicalization of the neoliberalism principles that intends to completely dismiss the need to have a State as regulator of the social body, preaching the protection of individual sovereignty through private property and the free market (Morriss, 2008; Paraná, 2020; Rothbard, 2013). For anarcho-capitalism, one of the ways to get rid of the State would be precisely private entities' freedom to issue their own currencies, which would be regulated by competition among themselves (Hayek, 2011). This is the worldview that underlies the entire Bitcoin architecture: the blockchain allows this means of exchange to be guaranteed by a system for verifying economic transactions that is, at the same time, the means of controlling the issuance of coins. Thus, users of the virtual community are allowed to maintain confidence in the payment system, without the need for a regulatory political authority. Therefore, its developers maintain that Bitcoin is an apolitical currency.

Besides the ideological issue, it is also decisive to note the existence of a communicational dimension: Bitcoin presents itself as a registration system

for archiving, transmitting and processing information – or rather, a *medium* (Kittler, 2017), whose materiality aims to replace politics. After all, it is the belief that the blockchain architecture can technically certify the existence of past transactions that makes the Bitcoin user community exist and challenge any attempt to regulate cryptocurrency.

This article aims to analyze Bitcoin as an integral part of fintech 3.0, in view of the spread of the governmentality of the *indebted man*. It is understood that cryptocurrencies are a privileged object to discuss the working logic of fintech 3.0, as it is a medium that translates into technology, in a unique way, the values of radical strands of neoliberalism. It is, therefore, an object that produces a convergence between political philosophy and media studies. On the one hand, I propose to think of Bitcoin as a medium, an information registration system to transform individuals' financial information – assets and debts – into data that can be traded on digital platforms. On the other hand, I defend analyzing how the materiality of this medium incorporates the values of the political philosophy that founded its development, presenting relevant political consequences.

The article is divided into three sections. In the first, I analyze cryptocurrency as a medium. Then I carry out a genealogy of the values that founded the development of Bitcoin. Finally, I discuss the place of fintech 3.0 within the broader framework of contemporary capitalism's transformations, supporting the thesis that it serves as a vector for the massification of the indebted man's logic. The final considerations are dedicated to aligning fintech 3.0 with studies on platform economics.

## A CONTRIBUTION TO CURRENCY THEORIES: CURRENCY AS MEDIA

Capitalism is a monetary economy in which the intervention of currency is not functional (facilitating exchange, measurement, treasury), but political, as it expresses and sanctions power relations. (Lazzarato, 2017, p. 137)

Currency is a challenging phenomenon for any socio-economic science<sup>5</sup>. Although fundamental to the functioning of modern capitalism, its origins precede it. Even its current use has a number of dimensions that exceed the merely utilitarian capacity of explanation, since, if it is true that every currency is defined as a means of exchange and a store of value, it is also a system of signs, a system of objects, a political instrument and an agent of social relations.

Incredibly, it is the economic theories that present the most difficulties in dealing with the subject. For orthodox economic theory (classical liberal,

<sup>5</sup> In this article, I use *money* and *currency* practically synonymously, although it is known that there are differences between these terms. In general, the word *money* is reserved to designate the modern currency of capitalist states, while the term *currency* refers to every means of exchange used throughout economic history. See Théret (2008).



<sup>6</sup>In their critique of the liberal theory of money, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972/1976) would label every theory of money that is based on the idea of exchange as *exchangiste*, a French term translated as “exchangist”.

neoclassical and neoliberal), it was established as an assumption that currency is only a means of exchange, a measure of value and a store of value. From this perspective, currency would have emerged as a more efficient instrument for carrying out exchanges based on the barter economy<sup>6</sup>. Currency would facilitate the exchange of goods, as its ability to represent goods would overcome the limitations of time and space inherent in barter. Thus, money would be a functional creation of the market, a public good resulting from the search of private agents to minimize the transaction costs inherent to the barter system. This conception leads to the conclusion that money has a double form of neutrality: logical and political (Dodd, 1997). Logical neutrality holds that money simply mediates the exchange of goods, being a more efficient substitute for commodities. Political neutrality means that, although the distribution of money generates inequalities of wealth in a society, it is never itself the cause of inequality. Such neutralities allow orthodox economic theories to elude both the social dimension of money and the role of the State in its functioning (money would therefore be apolitical) (Dodd, 1997; Metri, 2014).

In the 20th century, neoliberal economists would return to the assumption of money as an apolitical entity in order to stand against state economic policies. Fundamentally, the so-called *quantitative theory of money* is based on the hypothesis that substantial changes in the price level and nominal income are the result of changes in the nominal money supply, that is, the problem of inflation would be solely linked to the amount of money in circulation in the market. This axiom underlies Friedrich Hayek's (2011) argument that the best way to control the inflation problem would be the issuance of coins by private entities, which would compete with each other in the market. The competition would automatically control the amount of coins in circulation, keeping it at an optimal level.

With Milton Friedman monetarist thought reaches its peak. Briefly, Friedman (1984) defended that the issuance of money by the government should strictly follow pre-established and nominally unalterable rules, which would be updated according to the population growth rate. If the inflation problem is due to the amount of currency in circulation, the automatic control of market liquidity would be enough, instead of monetary policies decided in the political sphere. Friedman even stated that the US central bank, the Federal Reserve, should be replaced by a computer that would calculate the amount of currency needed at a given moment (Paraná, 2020).

The liberal conception of money has received important criticism throughout history. The best known is that of Karl Marx (1867/1983). By placing the labor force of the proletariat at the center of his theory of value, Marx diverges from

the economic theory of money in realizing in it not a mere articulator of the activities of independent producers, but a means through which labor is abstracted and commodified in order to be bought and sold in the labor market. There are, in this definition, two important implications. The first is that money takes the form of a commodity, albeit of a special nature. Note that Marx too perceives money as a development of the exchange system; not as a state production<sup>7</sup>.

Indeed, the dimension of sovereign power would only be added to theories of money by Georg Friedrich Knapp when he published, in 1905, the work *Staatliche Theorie des Geldes* (The State Theory of Money), which founded the Charlatist theory of money (Metri, 2014). Knapp's thesis is that the guarantee of the value of money would not reside in its parity with precious metals, but in the authority of the State, which grants legitimacy to a specific means of payment (currency) in a given territory, under a given legal framework (Metri, 2014; Weber, 1921/1999). This approach allowed the analysis of the institutional dimension of money (monetary policies, financial institutions etc.) as an endogenous element to its value, in opposition to the assumption of currency neutralities. As the State imposes its currency as a means of paying its taxes, it makes it circulate among the population, creating a debt ratio to be paid in sovereign currency. Money would be, first and foremost, an instrument of state power.

The twentieth century will witness a profusion of heterodox theories of money. A very influential approach is what might be labeled as *cultural*. In this perspective, the works of Georg Simmel and François Simiand stand out. Commentators insist that Simmel's (2004) philosophy of money can only be understood as a specialized application of his theory of modernity, which supports the uprooting of social relations, characterized by social mobility, expansion of social circles, individualization and autonomy of things, which come to be governed by their own laws (Dodd, 1997; Waizbord, 2000; Zelizer, 1994). Money appears as the perfect instrument, as its characteristic of abstraction and anonymity gives individuals the *freedom to do something*, that is, buy what they can, without pre-established social restrictions.

Money is conceived as an instrument of exchange, not containing any instituting capacity for domination, which reaffirms the concept of the political neutrality of money. Its value would result from the perception of individuals when evaluating and desiring certain objects, a fact that constitutes, as Leopoldo Waizbord (2000, p. 140) well observes, a psychological theory of value. François Simiand (2018) would, in turn, follow the program stipulated by Durkheim for economic sociology, studying money as a social fact (Steiner, 2018). In this sense, he develops the assumption that money expresses value and balances exchanges because the individuals who use it deposit a faith, a social belief in maintaining

<sup>7</sup>It is important to note, however, that Marx also follows the view that money is a symbol of the socio-economic contradictions immanent in capitalism, but not its direct cause. This assumption is visible, as Nigel Dodd (1997) underlines in his criticism of the Proudhonians about giving up the use of currency. It is precisely because he understands that money does not have intrinsic social values that Marx will disagree with the proposal to abolish the use of money as a way of achieving social equality.





its value, that is, the support to its existence lies in the power of collectivities. In these two cases, albeit in a different way, the question of individuals' *trust* in money is the pillar of explanations of the value of money.

The dimension of power immanent to money would be better developed, but through an approach that permeates philosophy and anthropology. His hypothesis is that the *raison d'être* of money resides not in the rationality presupposed by liberal theory, but in social relations based on the concept of *debt*. This thesis begins with Friedrich Nietzsche (1844/1908), in *The Genealogy of Morals*. As a form of criticism of the utilitarian argument of exchange as social cement, the philosopher argued that mnemonic techniques are developed to inscribe memory in individuals. Subsequently, the concept of debt would have metamorphosed into notions of guilt, punishment and compensation, thus functioning as a structuring force in social relations: hierarchical social relations are thus established, based on the fundamental division between *creditors* and *debtors*.

Decades later, Marcel Mauss (1950/2003) performed a reading that, in a way, echoes Nietzsche's polemic in his essay on the economy of gift, when he stated that exchanges in primitive societies followed the dialectic of give-receive-reciprocate, the founding link of social ties in these societies, moving away from the utilitarian conception of exchange. In this case, money becomes not a perfect instrument of exchange, but an entity that contains within itself a power of social agency. This heterodox reading would be taken up by authors from fields of knowledge as distinct as philosophy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1976; Lazzarato, 2017), economics (Théret, 2008) and social anthropology (Graeber, 2011). It will be discussed in detail in the third section of this article.

At the moment, it is necessary to recognize that the profusion of theories about money reveals the existence of at least three currency states, according to the Bruno Théret's formulation (2008, pp. 12-16):

- *Incorporated state*: the confidence of individuals in the stability of the monetary system. Currency is a symbolically organized means of communication – or rather, a specialized language that allows people to communicate with a view to establishing economic relationships;
- *Institutionalized state*: this is the currency and regulation, or even the institutional dimension of the currency that forms a payment community, and sovereign power is what determines the currency's validity;
- *Objectified state*: monetary instruments, means of payment and current currencies. Such technologies are “the purest expression of currency... not expressing itself anymore... as a language, but through a system of objects” (p. 15).

The objectified state stands out for being the least theoretically developed. This is because, to some extent, the conception of the materiality of money brings the burden of the metallist theory of money<sup>8</sup>. In general, this theory ended up being restricted to justifying the use of gold (because of its divisibility and rarity) as a base for modern currencies. With the end of the gold standard in 1971, metallism became an obsolete explanation.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, its decay also dampened interest in thinking about the materiality of money as a system of objects.

In this article I proposed to resume the analysis of the materiality of money, considering it as *media*. By media we adopt Friedrich Kittler's definition (2017) for all technology that performs archiving, processing and transmission of data, constituting a registration system (*aufschreibesysteme*). In this sense, it is worth thinking about how the technological structure of currency influences the formation of its value and its circulation in society. This approach does not dispense with other currency states, but aims to make the debate more complex by proposing something more than a hermeneutic and/or institutional theory of currency. Currencies also have a materiality that, in different ways, underlies their applicability as a means of exchange and store of value: whether they are shells, precious metal, paper money or bits, each of these materials plays a role in the way people use money and, therefore, in the way money structures the relationships between people and goods.

Cryptocurrencies have revived interest in the materiality of currency as an information system. After all, one of the decisive points of its novelty lies precisely in the Blockchain's ability to create an artificial rarity in the digital environment and generate a set of rules (a deflationary monetary policy, in fact) that determine the uses and assessments (trust) about Bitcoin.

Interest in the materiality of money should not be limited, however, only to the physical qualities of each technology. Such an approach must be coupled with another level of analysis, in which one seeks to understand currency as part of a complex of financial technologies (economic policies, taxes, financial institutions, among others), forming an *axiomatics*, in the sense proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972/1976), that is, utterances, catch words, commands (axioms) and corresponding devices (realization of the axiomatics) designed to convert the decoded flows of desire into new abstract forms of value (Guéron, 2017; Lazzarato, 2017). In other words, it is necessary to conceive currency as part of a technical machine that involves people and things in specific ways, generating different forms of subjectivation and social relations. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the values that lead to the adoption of a certain technology as currency.

<sup>8</sup>Title created by Knapp in order to criticize theories that maintain that the value of currency is determined by the purchasing power of the commodity upon which it is based. The fundamental problem with this perspective would be to fail to understand that the value of gold itself is ultimately determined by (1) cultural principles and (2) political institutions (Metri, 2014).

<sup>9</sup>Strangely enough, cryptocurrencies attempt to rescue the metallist theory of currency through the constant analogy their developers make to gold. The adoption of terms like gold (in the case of the Bit-Gold experiment) and coin mining is notable. In the paper by Satoshi Nakamoto (2008, p. 4), it is literally said that "The steady addition of a constant amount of new coins is analogous to gold miners [emphasis added] expending resources to add gold to circulation". Some authors even speak of some digital metallism as a theory of currency among cryptocurrency developers (Maurer et al., 2013; Paraná, 2020).



### **CYPHERPUNKS AND ANARCHO-CAPITALISM: THE GENEALOGY OF MORAL OF BITCOIN AND THE MODUS OPERANDI OF FINTECH 3.0**

Liberalism has always left it to the socialists to produce utopias, and socialism owes much of its vigor and historical dynamism to this utopian or utopia-creating activity. Well, liberalism also needs utopia. (Foucault, 2004, pp. 218-219)

Bitcoin analysis cannot do without the genealogy of values that mobilized the early developers of cryptocurrencies. The effort to build a complex information system capable of mimicking the money issuance process in order to compete with fiat currencies responds more to political philosophy than to technical imperatives of the financial market. After all, most of the money that circulates in the global economy today is digital, as noted by Edemilson Paraná (2020). Thus, Bitcoin should be seen as a disjunctive media insofar as it gives concrete form to a supposedly apolitical currency.

A close look at cryptocurrency developers reveals that they position themselves as members of the cypherpunk movement. The neologism refers to an insurgent political movement, of anarchist inspiration (hence the reference to the punk musical genre), which uses cryptography (cypher) as an instrument of social and political transformation. The so-called anarchist ethos refers to the fierce opposition to the State, seeing in it merely an agent of coercion to individual freedom, understood as the capacity to carry out economic actions. As the authors of the book *Cypherpunks* (Assange et al., 2012) state: “Recall that states are the systems which determine where and how coercive force is consistently applied”, which, given the new world promoted by digital networks, “would prevent the independence we had dreamed of, and then, squatting on fiber optic lines and around satellite ground stations, it would go on to mass intercept the information flow of our new world” (pp. 3-4). To prevent the State from affecting individual freedom, cypherpunks present themselves as a political vanguard that seeks to monitor and thereby limit the power of States through disjunctive digital technologies (Paraná, 2020).

The anti-state spirit of cypherpunks stems from a radical strand of neoliberalism, anarcho-capitalism, or libertarianism. The term gives name to the political philosophy that advocates the complete abolition of the State, assuming that private agents, communally associated, would be able to provide all the necessary conditions for the survival of individuals through the defense of private property and free competition (Morriss, 2008; Rothbard, 2013). According to this theory, all public goods and services should be privatized, as free competition between private agents would result in the offer of the best

possible service at a fair price – including in the case of money. Without the State, taxes would not be necessary and, thus, currencies could be supplied through a free banking system, competing with each other, which would guarantee control of the volume of money available, thus avoiding inflation (Hayek, 2011).

Cypherpunk believes in technological innovation as creation strategy of a society against the State. As well noted by Michel Foucault (2008, pp. 317-319), the neoliberal conception of human capital allows us to reread technological innovation as a lever for social development, giving new impetus to the Schumpeterian conception of creative destruction<sup>10</sup> (Schumpeter, 2010). From a libertarian perspective, innovation is seen as an escape line for entrepreneurs in relation to the State: the continuous technological innovation carried out by civil society would prevent politics from intervening to control the pace of social change. The creation of cryptocurrencies tries to realize this libertarian worldview: the creation of a currency technically capable of guaranteeing the trust of the user community would be the perfect substitute for a sovereign currency linked to taxes, economic and monetary policies, in short, to the State (Ulrich, 2014).

<sup>10</sup>Term that refers to the phenomenon of introduction of an *innovation* (which can be a new work method, product or production technology, among other possibilities) by a differentiated agent within the market, the entrepreneur, which causes such a disjunction of traditional knowledge, techniques and commercial practices that it would create a new market.

Cryptocurrencies began to be developed in the 1980s, when programmer David Chaum proposed an anonymous system for digital payments. Over the next decade, developers Nick Szabo and Wei Dai tried to implement two cryptocurrencies that would work through a decentralized peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing system, Bit-Gold and B-Money (Cannucciari, 2016; Paraná, 2020). Bitcoin was, however, the first successful experience, as it was guaranteed by a distributed transaction verification system, the blockchain (Nakamoto, 2008).

Blockchain is a registration system that works like the accounting ledger (where debits and credits of an account are registered), that is, it is a shared digital accounting technology that records all transactions between users of cryptocurrency. Transactions are not, however, visible to users a priori. Therefore, the work of the so-called *miners* is needed, who check the validity of registered transactions and, in doing so, receive as a form of prize (*proof of work*) a certain amount of new coins. Note that the blockchain mechanism was therefore developed to set in motion a true automatic monetary policy. Its *modus operandi* avoids the problem of *double spending*, that is, using the same coin more than once in different transactions (fraud in the exchange system). The transaction file guarantees that a Bitcoin unit used in a transaction is withdrawn from the market until its receiver uses it in a new trade. This creates an artificial rarity for the cryptocurrency. At the same time, Bitcoin's algorithm expressly controls the issuance of coins over time. As the user community grows, mining becomes more difficult. Thus, the issue of coins is slowed down and market liquidity is



proportional to the community population. Here, the influence of the quantitative theory of money on cryptocurrencies is revealed: as a true fulfillment of the Friedmanian dream, the Bitcoin-based algorithm is programmed so that, in the year 2140, there will invariably be an offer of 21 million Bitcoins in the digital market (Paraná, 2020; Ulrich, 2014).

The publication date of the article that starts Bitcoin, the year 2008, is emblematic because it is part of a moment of crisis in the financial market and of questioning the capacity of states to avoid economic crises. The mortgage financial crisis had at least two important immediate consequences for the financial market. From the start, there was a large amount of layoffs from investment agencies and large banks, pouring a highly qualified workforce into the labor market. At the same time, the economic crisis marked a moment of popular criticism of the financial market and its products, notably derivatives. Movements like *Occupy Wall Street*, which repeated themselves around the world under the name *Indignados*, revealed extreme popular dissatisfaction with neoliberal policies and finance capital (Harvey et al., 2012). That moment was even considered as the end of neoliberalism and the resumption of more interventionist economic policies or those with a neo-Keynesian or socialist matrix. However, instead of making efforts to produce some *euthanasia of the rentier*, taking up the famous expression of Keynes, the measures taken were paradoxically aimed at accelerating neoliberal recipes.

To increase liquidity in the financial markets, certain governments decided to focus on facilitating the population's access to credit granted by private entities. The best example was the US government's effort to redesign its financial system. While measures were taken to control the issuance of derivatives by large banks and finance companies, efforts were made to develop ways to offer access to financial products at low cost and in the simplest possible way.

In 2012, the government launched a plan called Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act. Its main objective was to encourage startups that offer financial services, with minimal bureaucracy to a broad audience, or, precisely, "to increase American job creation and economic growth by improving access to the public capital markets for emerging growth companies" (cited by Arner et al., 2015, p. 17). In fact, the government wanted to achieve two goals in one blow. On the one hand, it was expected that such companies would generate occupations for the various professionals specialized in finance who were unemployed. On the other hand, they wanted to provide credit to a large number of people whose living conditions were precarious, not through the State's social programs, but through the financial market itself, which, at that time, had low liquidity.

In practice, the aim was to leverage the financial market through the little money of thousands of new investors. It was no coincidence that, since then, we have witnessed the growth of digital platforms that deal with financial products of different natures: crowdfunding platforms, digital banks, credit and debit payment machines for small entrepreneurs, equity investment platforms (day trade), cryptocurrencies, tokenization, among other services offered to individuals. Taken together, such companies would characterize a new financial market sector, fintech 3.0 (Arner et al., 2015; Nicoletti, 2017).

To understand the specifics of fintech 3.0, I sought to access Bitcoin users through comprehensive individual interviews<sup>11</sup>. In effect, this research technique helped me understand the role that financial firms' application interfaces play in directly connecting individuals to the complex financial market.

To buy Bitcoins, for example, one just needs to open an account on an exchange (digital platform for buying and selling cryptocurrency) through a website or a smartphone application. By completing a brief registration, the blockchain produces a digital identification of the user's wallet, who can purchase the cryptocurrency by transferring national currency directly from their bank account to their digital wallet.

In an interview for this research, Laura appears as a typical investor at fintech 3.0: a middle class woman around 40 years old, living in a large urban center in Brazil, with little experience in the financial market<sup>12</sup>. Her willingness to invest in Bitcoins was due to the knowledge she had through a friend who speculated with this asset. She described her interaction with the digital platform through which she invested in Bitcoin:

I used both the mobile app and the *exchanges* site ... but I preferred the sites because they have more thorough information. The graphics they show can have different complexities, from beginners to professionals, there are various settings. (Interview given on June 11, 2020)

Transactions are monitored by the investor through the exchange's website and/or application. Transactions are automatic, made by platform algorithms, which assume the role of financial market agents (*brokers*), as described by the same investor:

Quotations and transactions are automatic. On the site there are people wanting to buy and people wanting to sell, and these people carry out transactions between them, through buy or sell orders. The platform earns from the fees it charges for each transaction, but users have no contact with miners, for example. (Interview given on June 11, 2020)

<sup>11</sup>Between June 11, 2020 and April 10, 2021, fifteen comprehensive one-on-one interviews were conducted with Bitcoin users. The objective of the interviews was to know the practices of using cryptocurrency and users' impressions about their interaction with the financial market. As postulated by Jean-Claude Kaufmann (2013, p. 47), the comprehensive interview is a qualitative research method and aims to understand the rationality of social actors, how they organize and justify their actions; there is no search for some truth of the acts behind the speeches they utter. Despite the desire to have carried out a closer monitoring of the practices of Bitcoin users, the research period coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, which made closer contact with the interviewees, to say the least, technically and ethically impracticable. The interviews followed a semi-structured script and were conducted through email or remote meeting applications (Zoom, Google Meet or WhatsApp). In order to protect the identity of the interviewees, fictitious names were used in the quotes.

<sup>12</sup>In the interviews carried out for this research, 60% of the interviewees had no experience in financial investments (except for the purchase of foreign currency for occasional trips abroad). A percentage of 30% had as their only experience the purchase of public bonds from the Brazilian State through the *Tesouro Direto* system. The rest had some experience in the financial market, especially in the stock exchange (stocks).



Commenting on how her friend traded bitcoins, Laura stressed:

My friend was a self-employed investor, he invested his own money on several different platforms and spent his days (nights and sometimes early mornings) buying and selling these coins. It's like the stock exchange, yes. Today the Bitcoin variation is closing at -5.34%, it's a lot for 24 hours. If you make the right moves you can make a lot of profit. (Interview given on June 11, 2020)

The description is interesting in that it points to a typical fintech 2.0 man-machine assemblage, as described in the work of Karin Knorr-Cetina and Urs Bruegger (2000) when talking about market makers (derivatives selling agents) of Swiss Bank. As they described, these agents worked coupled to five television screens to monitor market information:

Most conspicuous, however, are the up to five computer screens confronting each trader, displaying the market and serving to conduct trading. When traders arrive in the morning they strap themselves to their seats, figuratively speaking, they bring up their screens, and from then on their eyes will be glued to that screen, their visual regard captured by it even when they talk or shout to each other, and their body and the screen world melting together in what appears to be a total immersion in the action in which they are taking part. The screens in turn capture the market, which exists only on screen, where it comes as close as one can get to the ethnomethodological sense of a locally produced phenomenon. (p. 146)

This quote makes it possible to understand an important specificity of fintech 3.0: by becoming an *investor* through their personal communication devices, each individual resembles financial market professionals, who connect with information technologies all the time so as not to miss opportunities of profit. In other words, fintech 3.0 reproduces, on the individual's scale, the practices and values of the global financial market. Thus, a way of living is incorporated into individuals' daily lives and, ultimately, a fundamental ethics to the legitimacy of financial capital through information technologies.

It is true that the implementation of Bitcoin would end up exposing the aporias of the ideology that led to the development of cryptocurrencies (Paraná, 2020). The use of bitcoins for illegal activities, such as the purchase of drugs and weapons through alternative computer networks, and fraud, with the bankruptcy of the MT Gox platform being the most emblematic case, called into question the objective of using such technology as an effective currency competitor to sovereign currencies<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, the proliferation

<sup>13</sup>For some economists, cryptocurrencies should not even be considered currencies properly, as they do not have the capacity to settle contracts in a national jurisdiction (Gala, 2018; Paraná, 2020). It would, therefore, be an asset for the purpose of mere financial speculation.

of new cryptocurrencies and extreme appreciation of Bitcoin in recent years reveals both the strength of social mobilization of anarcho-capitalism and the penetration capacity of FinTech 3.0 in certain sections of the population.

### FINTECH 3.0 AND THE MASSIFICATION OF THE INDEBTED MAN

It shows, besides, that you are mindful of what you owe; it makes you appear a careful as well as an honest Man; and that still increases your Credit. (Franklin, cited by Weber, 1920/2004, p. 44)

In a word, money – the circulation of money – is the means for rendering the debt infinite. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983, p. 250)

The expansion of the offer of financial market products through digital platforms has consequences beyond the generalized access to credit and the consequent increase in the economy's liquidity. It also presents itself as a device of subjectivation (ethics) and creation of social relations (governmentality), since, as certain aspects of social theory sustain, capitalism is not restricted to utilitarian commercial exchange operations, but produces its own modes of subjectivation and circuits of affections that promote the functioning and reproduction of the system. Heir to this line of thought, Maurizio Lazzarato (2017) advances the hypothesis that the model of subjectivity of contemporary financial capitalism, or even the new spirit of capitalism, is the *indebted man*.

His thesis takes up the discussion by Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1976) on debt as a structuring force in social relations. This hypothesis is based, in turn, on the rereading that these authors made of Nietzsche. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche (1887/1998) opposed liberal economic theory by looking at the origin of responsibility – for what is good or bad, for guilt – the foundation of the idea of *value*, which would only later be appropriated by economic discourse<sup>14</sup>. Contrary to the liberal assumption that man would naturally be prone to exchange and trade, the philosopher would point out the *debt* and the inherent *morality* as the pillars of subjectivation and, by extension, of social relations. Notably in his second dissertation, he maintained that in the supposed original societies – what he called the *prehistory of man* – the milestone of evolution that separated man from other animals was the development of memory inscription techniques in individuals (mnemonic techniques), thus creating a relationship of collective responsibility.

This made man “an animal that can make promises” (Nietzsche, 1887/1998, p. 47), that is, a being whose promise is the retribution for the *debt* that represents

<sup>14</sup>As Lazzarato (2017) reminds us, “the political economy that ‘appropriated’ the category of ‘value’ by making it derive from exchange, .... To criticize economic and moral values, it is necessary that ‘the very value of these values must be called into question’ [Nietzsche’s quote]. It could not be further from Adam Smith’s theory” (p. 81).





his existence to the ancestors of time immemorial and their representatives among the existing ones (spirits, plants, totemic animals). To do so, however, it was necessary to create a mnemonic technique for inscribing the memory of debt on the individual's body itself. In oral societies, the memory of debt is inscribed on the body through pain – lacerations, tattoos, scars, a system of cruelties that makes memory indelible – which generates in the psyche a relationship of reverence, or rather, hierarchical relationships between *creditors* and *debtors*<sup>15</sup> – the equivalence between damage and pain that is transmuted into submission by the debtor to the creditor.

<sup>15</sup>This understanding is what makes Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1983) state that “Society is not exchangist, the socius is inscriptive: not exchanging but marking bodies, which are part of the earth.” (p. 208).

<sup>16</sup>As translators and commentators on Nietzsche's work underline, it is essential to observe the play on words that the author uses, since in German, *schuld* means both *guilt* and *debt*, just like its derivative adjective, *schuldig*, means both *guilty* and *indebted*.

Nietzsche (1887/1998) would also add that, in European society, Christianity had taken this logic to a second stage: with the invention of writing, it was possible to internalize the memory of the existential debt, through guilt (*schuld*, in German) for the original debt (*schuld*, in German)<sup>16</sup>. Max Weber (1920/2004) would deepen this idea, connecting Protestant ethics to what he called the *spirit of capitalism*, that is, the need to internalize a historically specific normative disposition to justify the systematic accumulation of money through rationalized labor.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972/1976, pp. 241-244) resumed the Nietzschean thesis, recalling that, if in primitive societies debt determined side alliances between different lineages or clans, it was extinguished every time marriage or *contradom*, initiating a new debt. The debt would thus be *finite*. With the advent of the State, however, the debt shifts. This would be controlled by a despotic machine that would impose on its subjects a debt in relation to the despot, who presented himself as a transcendent being to that society. Debt was thus transmuted into *infinite* and *transcendent*, to be paid no longer to the earth, but to a transcendent being through a sovereign currency that flows through taxes<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>Hence, the analysis of money cannot be isolated from taxes, as liberal theories do. As Lazzarato (2017, p. 32) observes: “if ‘money is always distributed by an apparatus of power’, its circulation and rotation, as well as the equivalence of goods/services/ money, are established through tax, which makes money a general equivalent.... Currency is inseparable not from trade and work, but from tax – an instrument of power that is foreign and independent of the market”.

With the advent of capitalism and its disenchantment with the world, the debt continued to be *infinite*, as citizens' lives seem to depend on the State's ability to provide security against some supposed state of war of all against all. Nevertheless, it becomes *immanent*, as the State no longer represents a transcendent entity, but a machine for managing the population's life so that it can be productive for capital. Here, what might be called Deleuze and Guattari's *theory of money* (Guéron, 2017) comes into play. For both authors, in capitalism, money would have a double dimension: at a fundamental level, it is a means of exchange that makes up the purchasing power of workers, but this dimension would be subordinated to another, in which currency is capital-money that determines the effective purchase value of the exchange-money and aims to produce more capital-money (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1976, pp. 372-375).

Coupled with taxes and monetary policies, it is the capital-money that installs the infinite debt to capital as the structuring force of social relations. Hence, it can be said that “credit money expresses ‘the power of capital’, while exchange money expresses the ‘impotence’ of wage earners” (Lazzarato, 2017, p. 117). Instead of freeing individuals from the nominal debt, capital-money imposes on the *socius* an infinite debt to capital, mediated by the welfare state: all the money generated with work flows back to the payment of taxes and consumption of goods and services, therefore, the reproduction of the system itself.

Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1976) dealt with the logic of the welfare state, which had a certain strategy of income redistribution in social policies, therefore, exercising the mediation between the interests of capital and labor. Maurizio Lazzarato (2017) would take up this thesis to think about neoliberal capitalism. He argues that neoliberalism represents another moment of capitalism, in which the ascendancy of finance capital over other forms of capital (industrial and commercial) took place, making the state’s stabilizing function obsolete and thereby the debt of the civil society would pass directly to finance capital. After all, the pillar of neoliberal economic policies resides in the privatization of public goods and services and the concomitant facilitation of private access to credit, which is debt, as a lever for social life, in place of the previous social policies that distributed income.

As several critics have argued, if there is anything new about the so-called neoliberalism, it is that it is characterized by abandoning the typical belief of classical liberalism that it would be enough to restrict the action of the State in social life for *Homo oeconomicus*, the rational subject in relation to purposes, naturally predisposed to commerce, materialized. For neoliberals, the willingness to *undertake* must be institutionally built, from the establishment of policies that encourage individuals to take *risks* to obtain greater profit possibilities or, in other words, it becomes necessary for each individual to conceive of themselves as a company for which he is responsible (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2009; Dardot & Laval, 2016; Foucault, 2008). Hence, institutional transformations take place in order to make individuals distrust the policy’s ability to solve their daily problems and seek a substitute in the market for their survival.

By carrying out this movement, individuals assume responsibility – or rather, blame (*schuld*) – for managing their finances. Conceiving oneself as a company that needs to innovate to triumph in a highly competitive market, each individual must seek credit to undertake (valuing their human capital) and, for doing so, assumes certain indebtedness (*schuldig*), which carries the risk of failure. It should be remembered that indebtedness always entails the interiorization of a moral, because, as Nietzscheanly reminds Lazzarato (2017), “the creditor/debtor



relationship expresses the activity of training and the formation of subjectivity, before having an ‘economic’ meaning in the modern sense of the term” (p. 82).

The proof of the subjectivation of morality established between creditor and debtor is found in the insistent axiom of defense of fiscal *austerity* for both the State and the families. As Mark Blyth (2017) insists, the fiscal austerity argument is a moral philosophy rather than an economic theory, as the state’s accounts are not equivalent to those of families – they cannot issue currency, set interest rates, collect taxes, launch bonds of their debts to finance themselves etc. However, such an argument serves to constrain the State to withdraw from its social functions while forcing individuals to adopt a budget policy to take care of their private accounts.

The growing indebtedness of individuals makes it necessary to incorporate risk management techniques into the domestic economy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the financial market is presented as an ideal model for managing social life. After all, its *raison d’être* is risk management. The result is the financialization of everyday life (Martin, 2002), whose paradigm is the derivative<sup>18</sup>.

Contemporary derivatives are financial products created from mathematical formulas based on probabilistic theories. This turns them into a device that allows the risk associated with each contract to be decoupled from the underlying assets or future events that support the original documents (Bryan & Rafferty, 2014; Lépinay, 2011). Through Artificial Intelligence (AI), several insurance contracts are gathered, which are divided into numerous fragments, technically labeled as *attributes*, to then be condensed into financial products under various titles (CDO, Swaps, Options, among others) which, however, perform the same function: transferring the debts of others, promising low risk to creditors. As each financial product does not depend on compliance or non-compliance with a certain insurance, an idea is generated that the derivative is a risk product that does not contain risk for investors, since it became technically possible to transfer debts to third parties *ad infinitum* (Varoufakis, 2016). For creditors, the debt is never nominal, as it does not belong to them.

Some authors argue that the derivatives technique has given rise to new methods of labor management, something that has come to be called the *social logic of derivatives* (Arnoldi, 2004; Brayan & Rafferty, 2014; Martin, 2013). As neoliberal policies withdraw social rights, employment, housing, education or health contracts, among other traditional services, have followed the model of decomposing each agreement into attributes, which can be charged separately. Even the workforce is no longer sold entirely: the intermittent labor category allows the worker-enterprise to provide a service for a specified period of time to another legal entity. Such *fractalization of working time* (Berardi, 2018) implies

<sup>18</sup>Derivative is a type of risk insurance, being a contract in which future payments are established, whose values are calculated based on an underlying asset, such as the price of a stock, commodity, financial instrument or occurrence of an event. Its objective is to protect economic agents against price fluctuations over time. See Arnoldi (2004), Bryan and Rafferty (2014), Lépinay (2011), Martin (2013).

a whole new subjectivity on the part of the worker, who starts to be conceived as an asset, and new forms of social relations – social isolation.

Fintech 3.0 furthers the financialization of everyday life by offering financial services to individuals in an unprecedented way: through their own personal computer or *smartphone*, anyone can open a digital account, purchase and sell financial products and services, obtain a credit card or trade bitcoins. It is not necessary to go to a bank or exchange office to do business, thus escaping from the traditional bureaucracy of the great financial system and the collection of taxes by the government. However, unlike fintech 2.0 products, which dealt with large investors, trading debts of others with each other, fintech 3.0 is aimed at identifiable individuals. This is another decisive point: such information companies develop devices that link the debt incurred to individuals through their digital devices.

It is at this point that the materiality of digital media proves decisive. The memory capacity and its security systems serve to digitally record their debts in individuals. Commenting on the credit card, Lazzarato (2017) notes that:

The creditor/debtor relationship is inscribed on his credit card chip and, instead of disappearing, he carries it in his pocket, as if he were carrying his relationship to finance with him. Every purchase is a financial act that mobilizes credit and debt. The credit card opens the doors of the consumer society and, by requesting, encouraging and facilitating the purchase, it involves the consumer/debtor in the vicious circle of excitement/ frustration. The condition and consequence of the infinite repetition of the act of consumption is infinite debt. (p. 68)

Now the cell phone or notebook has become the bank branch of digital banks (Nubank, C6 Bank), connecting to digital wallets (PicPay) and financial education applications (Mobills, Wallet), which contain the financial data of each user. Digital platforms connect to each other, sharing each user's financial data. In this scenario, cryptocurrencies promise a deepening of surveillance over individual debt via blockchain: this registration system can generate perfect control over each transaction and each user's debt.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ultimately, it's not about predicting the future of Bitcoin. It could either consolidate itself as the main cryptocurrency in the market or be surpassed by competing technologies, such as Libra, of Facebook Inc., or, at the limit, it could even disappear in the near future. Such a cryptocurrency matters,



fundamentally, because (1) it has proven that cryptocurrencies are technically possible to operate according to strict political values and (2) it has developed a technology (blockchain) capable of allowing the creation of other financial assets, as it generates an artificial rarity in the digital environment. It is no coincidence that, despite the controversy surrounding Bitcoin, even central banks in some countries have presented guidelines for implementing their own cryptocurrencies<sup>19</sup> and the blockchain is being used for various purposes, such as the production of smart contracts or tokenization (the replacement of real data by equivalent data, with the same format and protected by an encryption key).

<sup>19</sup>In mid-2021, central banks in the UK and Brazil introduced guidelines for implementing digital versions of their sovereign currencies.

The ability of cryptocurrencies to operate as a system for archiving, processing and distributing personal financial data proves to be decisive for contemporary capitalism. It should be remembered that the digital economy is an economy of exploitation of personal data (Srnicek, 2018). Currently, debit and credit flows can be stored on digital platforms, which monitor the level of individual indebtedness and, depending on the case, can offer either services from a credit company, in case of acute debt, or investment, in case there is liquidity in the user's account. Furthermore, such data can be traded on the financial market, in the form of derivatives. What is negotiated between digital platforms are, more than sums of money, individual financial movement information. Instead of waiting for demand to seek financial services, algorithms can offer platform users a variety of products, which entangle them in an ecosystem of financial products. That is why it is possible to state that fintech 3.0 becomes an individualized debt registration system. Far from being *disruptive* – to use a native term – in relation to financial market practices, fintech 3.0 promises to take you to heaven, extending its logic to each individual of an entire population. ■

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Article received on July 13, 2020 and approved on April 28, 2021.





# Black Press and citizenship: Contents of *Correio Nagô*, *Mundo Negro* and *Nação Z*

## *Imprensa negra e cidadania: Conteúdos do Correio Nagô, Mundo Negro e Nação Z*

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the production of the black press in Brazil, from the historical and conceptual point of view, dialoguing with the concepts of citizenship and black citizenship. To this end, a brief history of black resistance is presented, highlighting a black press and the results of a content analysis of the black websites *Nação Z*, *Mundo Negro* and *Correio Nagô*, aiming to ascertain their thematic trends and contributions to the expansion of black citizenship. The analyzes indicate an important contribution of the black press to the publicization of critical analyzes of black people situation in Brazil, their achievements and rights, as well as the prioritization of these favorable themes to social equality in search for the expansion of black population citizenship.

**Keywords:** Black press, citizenship, black, blackness, media

### RESUMO

Este artigo discute a produção da imprensa negra no Brasil, do ponto de vista histórico e conceitual, dialogando com conceitos de cidadania e cidadania negra. Para tanto, apresenta-se um breve histórico da resistência negra, destacando a imprensa negra e os resultados de uma análise de conteúdo dos sites jornalísticos negros *Nação Z*, *Mundo Negro* e *Correio Nagô*, visando averiguar suas tendências temáticas e contribuições à ampliação da cidadania negra. As análises indicam uma importante contribuição da imprensa negra para a publicização de análises críticas sobre a situação do negro no Brasil, suas conquistas e direitos, bem como a priorização dessas temáticas favoráveis à igualdade social na busca pela ampliação da cidadania da população negra.

**Palavras-chave:** Imprensa negra, cidadania, negro, negritude, mídia alternativa

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## FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

REFLECTIONS AROUND ETHNICITY and race in the Brazilian context were always highlighted in the Black press, grounded on narratives featured by a Black person. Besides communicating critical news about the citizenship of Black people in Brazil, exposing the discriminatory process and the violence they are subjected to, the Black press has been trying to contribute with Blackness by validating the awareness process<sup>1</sup> and the debate around the matter of Black citizenship in Brazil.

<sup>1</sup>In this work, we understand Blackness as the collective aspect of an ethnic group – afro-descendants – that seeks to raise awareness and appreciation of the culture, identity, and historical memory of Black people in the Brazilian Society.

As from the first Black lampoons printed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (as *Homem de Cor* and *Brasileiro Pardo*), the Black press plays an important role in the process of Blackness, especially in regard to the production and broadcasting of content related to the daily life of Black people in Brazil – which has not always been and is not accurately portrayed in the traditional means of communication. Yet another characteristic proper to the Brazilian Black newspapers is the correlation of the Black press with the civil organizations. Many of these media were created from Black organizations, which contributes for the comprehension of an approximation between Black press agendas and Black people positions from the perspective of the social movements in recognition of rights.

Considering this brief contextualization, this article aims to describe the history of the Black press in Brazil and to analyze the thematic tendencies in the content of Black informative websites, investigating their contribution for the enlargement of Black citizenship. For that, we must acknowledge that, despite the end of slavery, the culture and daily practices in all levels of society still hold discriminatory mechanisms towards this group. Thus, we will first contextualize the question of Brazilian Blackness from a historical perspective, followed by a brief debate about the concept and history of the Brazilian Black press, approaching the concepts of citizenship and Black citizenship. Finally, we will present part of the results of an analysis conducted by Araujo (2019) regarding the contents produced throughout the year of 2018 by three Black websites that contribute with the debate around the role of Black means of communication to Black citizenship, namely: *Nação Z*, *Mundo Negro*, and *Correio Nagô*.

From the concepts arising from a small bibliographic research based on a content analysis conducted according to Bardin (2016), this study elaborated a categorization that enabled a broader reading of the contents produced by the Black news websites. To identify theme priorities and allow

inferences about the type of journalism and narrative senses, the most used words in these publications were quantified using the ATLAS. software. ti

## **BLACK RESISTANCE: FROM QUILOMBOS TO THE BLACK SOCIAL MOVEMENT**

The debate about the struggle of Black people in Brazil dates back to the slavery period in the country, which took place from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century until 1888. Ever since its institution, many actors from the Portuguese and Brazilian empires (among which the traditional means of communication) focused their efforts into naturalizing slavery based on an explicitly racist foundation about the inferiority of the African peoples and their Brazilian descendants. As stated by Moura (1977), these people had their “citizenship confiscated by the law that equaled the enslaved to a piece of furniture” (p. 10). Although often disregarded in Brazilian History books, such doing led to great resistance on the part of this group.

The forms of Black resistance to the Brazilian slavery can be divided into passive and active. Passive resistance included suicide, psychological depression (*banzo*), the assassination of their own children or other enslaved individuals, individual escape, collective escape, and the organization of *quilombos*. In turn, active resistance encompassed metropolitan rebellions for political power, jungle and road guerrillas, participation in anti-slavery movements, armed resistance to repressive invasions to the *quilombos*, and individual or collective violence against the landlords or overseers (Moura, 1990, p. 251).

The quilombos represent one of the most prominent symbols of the Black resistance, featuring throughout the Brazilian territory in the almost four centuries of slavery regime in Brazil. Wherever there was slavery, there was Black resistance to threaten the foundations of colonization; this revolutionary movement formed by quilombolas opposed to the slave system is commonly known as “*quilombagem*”. Brazilian quilombos are an important example of communities engaged on the resistance and fight for recognition of Black people’s right to freedom (Moura, 2014, p. 60).

In this scenario, the Quilombo dos Palmares is a particularly relevant quilombo not only for those who built it, but also for all resistance movements to the Brazilian slavery due to its strength and repercussion. The Palmares existed between the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and mid-17<sup>th</sup> century,



in the Serra da Barriga, present-day state of Alagoas, and resisted to the onslaught of local slaveholders and of the Portuguese state itself, which had to develop a real war strategy to defeat Zumbi dos Palmares and his men. Despite the success of the Portuguese empire in defeating the Palmares and the considerable smaller dimensions of these communities, the activity of this resistance movement increased up from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although many quilombos came to an end very shortly – especially those settled near productive areas, seen as a threat to the white society and to the exploration system (Carvalho, 2002, p. 48) – some communities outlasted in different parts of the country until nowadays.

The slavery system required a set of modifications in order to withstand for more than three centuries in Brazil, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Being one of the few countries in the world where slavery was still legal and experiencing growing international pressure, Brazil had to abolish the African slave trade in 1850. Later on, the Brazilian empire enacted the Law of the Free Womb of 1871, which granted freedom to all children born from enslaved women up from that date, and the Sexagenarian Law of 1885, which freed enslaved individuals over 60 years old. Although significant institutional advances, Brazil was the last country of the American continent to abolish slavery, in 1888. It took so long that, in the year of the abolition, most of the Brazilian Black population was already free (Carvalho, 2002, p. 47).

Many sectors of society participated in the abolitionist movement, including students, liberal professionals such as journalists and lawyers, and religious people. However, Moura (2014) highlights the protagonism of Black people in the enslavement resistance, stating that “the slaves fought alone in an active and radical way against the slavery institution” (p. 50). Although many Black characters played a prominent role in abolitionism, we emphasize two recurring names: Luiz Gama and José do Patrocínio. Besides activists, these actors are considered as intellectuals by Black people for their contributions as journalists and writers.

The question of race in Brazil does not frazzle with the enactment of the Lei Aurea, on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1888. On the contrary, this historical moment outlines the need for reviewing the racial concepts in a mixed-race society such as that of Brazil. Such urge was spurred by racial theories that gained strength with the social Darwinism that featured on the European racial debate during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as by studies on miscegenation that emerged right after, culminating on the ideology of racial democracy (Schwarcz, 2012).

In this scenario, the Brazilian society was divided into two poles: on one side, the intellectual *elite*, dominated by white scholars and inspired

by European and North American thinkers; and, on the other, the Black population, who continued to organize themselves for a political-discursive confront. This historical moment saw the rise of numerous organizations of the Black movement, Black newspapers, and Black thinkers who systematized knowledge around the question of race in the perspective of the Black population. Despite the lack of due recognition and social space, these productions played a key role in the construction of a critical view for part of the Brazilian Blackness, with whistleblowing and claiming actions.

The Black movement in Brazil is more solidly organized from the resentment of Black people who, despite being former slaves or born free, continued being marginalized. Besides lacking equity in the access to education, the right to vote, and constantly facing unemployment (given that available positions were often occupied by white immigrants), many Black people who migrated to the big cities were pushed to the suburbs – especially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where the Black movement was more structured.

According to Domingues (2007), many Black people “instituted the Black racial mobilization movements in Brazil, initially creating dozens of organizations (unions, clubs, or associations) in some states of the nation” (p. 103) in an attempt to reverse marginalization. Being excluded from the traditional press, this social group developed its own means of communication, enabling the creation of dozens of Black press newspapers in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Brazilian Black movement was violently oppressed during Vargas’ Estado Novo, especially after 1940, and this oppression was intensified with the military dictatorship instated after the 1964 coup. Thus, the reorganization of the social movements occurred simultaneously to structural changes in class entities, unions, student groups, and Black newspaper in the 1970s and 1980s. This Black mobilization gains a different perspective after July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1978, when a group of Black men and women organized a public act against racial violence on the stairway of the Municipal Theatre of São Paulo – especially in response to the discrimination suffered by four Black children from a volleyball team of the city of São Paulo; and to the arrest, torture, and assassination of Robison Silveira da Luz, a Black man accused of stealing fruit from a street fair (Figure 1 shows the text published in *Portal Geledés* referring to the event). This historical moment saw the creation of the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (MNU; Unified Black Movement), an instrumental entity for the inclusion of the racial agenda of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution.

Figure 1  
Images of *Portal Geledés*



Note. Screen print of *Portal Geledés*, 2021.

The advances in racial politics ensued after the 1980s are closely associated with the Black movement, such as the democratic signaling present in the 1988 Constitution, with propositions of affirmative politics like quotas for Black students in universities and in the public service, as well as the criminalization of racism and racial insult. From enslavement resistance to affirmative politics, all Black mobilization indicates a strong Black protagonism that is often ignored in the history of Brazil.

### BLACK BRAZILIAN PRESS

Although absent from most studies on the history of the Brazilian press, the Black newspapers emerged a few years after the first newspaper in Brazil,

in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: whereas the *Correio Braziliense* was created in 1808, the first Black lampoon, *O Homem de Cor*, was created in 1833 – both in Rio de Janeiro with a time gap of only 25 years between them. Decades later, in 1876, the Black newspaper *O Homem: Realidade Constitucional* was created in Recife (PE). Worth mentioning, all these newspapers emerged before the end of slavery in Brazil, in 1888.

Moura (2014) argues that the first Black newspaper had an indisputable importance to Blackness and to Brazilian society in general, for it demanded the incorporation of Black people into social spaces, especially working spaces. However, the author highlights that these publications were not limited to the question of slavery, as “these newspapers did not stand up to and dealt with the issues of Black slaves in their articles, claiming abolition and the end of servile work” (p. 210). Black newspapers that existed during the slavery period were produced and consumed by free Black and mixed-race people who searched for respect and better quality of life.

The abolitionist agenda was addressed by other newspapers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that, although not considered as being part of the Black press, included Black abolitionist characters. As shown by Pinto (2010), these are the cases of Luiz Gama, in the São Paulo newspapers *A Patria* and *O Progresso*; José do Patrocínio, in *Gazeta de Notícias*, and José Ferreira de Menezes, in *Gazeta da Tarde*, both in Rio de Janeiro. The author also mentions the contribution of non-Black abolitionists such as Joaquim Nabuco, who was better accepted by the intellectual elite of the period than Black writers.

Blackness was institutionalized with the end of slavery in Brazil in 1888, with the creation of the Black movement and the expansion of Black newspapers by Black groups and organizations. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these social movements start to demand changes from the Black perspective, in which scenario the Black newspapers play an important role in bringing to light race-based topics during a period of wide dissemination of the racial democracy and its belief of miscegenation as the salvation of the future of the country. According to Gomes (2012), the publications of the Black press within this period aimed to break the *racist imaginary*, having an “educative role, [which] informed and politicized Black population about their own destinies towards the construction of their integration in the society of the time” (p. 736).

As a result of the military dictatorship instituted during the 1960s and the 1970s, the operation of the Black press was strongly reduced, especially because the Black movement organizations lost their legitimacy. This period marks the beginning of a new phase in the Black press, given that many Black newspapers had to exist in hiding until the political opening, in 1985. During the period of





the Brazilian re-democratization, the Black press was aligned with Blackness and the demands for the inclusion of the racial theme in the 1988 Constitution. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Black newspapers followed the press crisis and reappeared on a digital format from 2000 onwards.

From a historical perspective, the Brazilian context indicates the existence of a Black press that has offered a differentiated treatment of the racial theme within the country reality. This enables us to search for a conceptualization of the Black press throughout the Brazilian history in relation to its contributions to Blackness and to the overall society. The concepts around the Black press vary greatly according to format (alternative or commercial) and location (Brazilian or North American). Araújo (2019) argues that the Black press may be understood as “communication vehicles specialized on the theme of race, on the fight against racism, and committed to the construction of Black narratives about many topics (economy, politics, sports, culture)” (p. 213).

Many of these channels are characterized as alternative for offering an approach to the thematic of race different from that offered by the traditional press – that is, precisely for their connection with Blackness. Peruzzo (2008) argues that the definition of alternative journalism relies heavily on communication channels that offer differentiated or specialized content. For him, “what characterizes alternative journalism is the fact that it represents an option of information source, for the content it offers and for its approach” (p. 5). In this sense, a large part of the Black press is understood as being alternative due to its commitment with subjects and themes deemed as subordinate by the traditional press.

Here, we must highlight core concepts on this theme presented by different scholars. For Moura (2014), the Black press is the bearer of an “alternative language that should be considered, within the structure of expression, as part of the Brazilian culture” (p. 249). To Bastide (1983) “the Black press arises from the feeling that a Black person is not treated the same as a white person; therefore, its primary task will be an instrument of protest” (p. 34). Pinto (2010) stresses that the Black press is made of “Black newspapers, created by Black people, to Black people, addressing topics of interest for Black people” (p. 19).

These contributions enabled us to propose a conceptualization about the Black press from the conception of communication vehicles focused on producing a journalistic content in which the Black character is presented as the protagonist of the events and debates, even if this content was not directly related to the racial questions. With that, such press was concerned with the expression and the world view of Black people about many topics, contributing with Blackness visibility and with the plurality of ideas in the public debate

(Araújo, 2019). The conceptualization of the Black press is broad, plural, and goes through a stage of concreteness. Yet, we reiterate our understanding of the Black press as communication vehicles producing journalistic content featuring the Black person as the protagonist of events and debates in both racial and non-racial themes.

### **BLACK CITIZENSHIP: RIGHTS, DUTIES, AND PARTICIPATION**

The debate about Blackness and the demands of the Black social movements are intrinsically related to the debate about citizenship. According to British sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall, who analyzed the development of citizenship in England from three historical moments – namely, the achievement of civil rights in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, of political rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and of social rights in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – “citizenship is a status conceded to those who are members of a community” (1963, p. 76).

Liszt Vieira (2000) explains that Marshall analyzed the notion of citizenship pointing the existence of generations of rights as a means to demonstrate the evolution in the comprehension and recognition of citizenship. According to the author, rights were originally categorized into three generations. First-generation rights account for civil rights, achieved on the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and political rights, achieved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (pp. 22-23). Second-generation rights are represented by social and economic rights achieved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are related to work, health, education, unemployment benefits, retirement, etc. In turn, third-generation rights refers to collective rights also achieved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This generation accounts for rights granted for the human groups, ethnical collectives, nations, in their self-determination and needs, such as the right to peace and environmental protection.

Subsequent studies advance in the characterization of the status of citizenship, pointing rights related to bioethics as comprising a yet fourth generation of rights, also achieved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These rights imply “to stop the destruction of life and to regulate the creation of new ways of life in laboratories of genetic engineering” (Vieira, 2000, p. 23).

And what about communication? How to situate it within the context of rights generations? Communication is imbricated in all dimensions and generations aforementioned. However, as stated by Peruzzo (2013), the time has come to

Claim that the right to communication is perceived as a specific generation of human rights, of a fifth generation: communicational rights or right to communication. Such a claim is justified based on the central role that the means of communication



and electromagnetic and digital technologies of information and communication, such as the radio, the television, informatics and the internet, have historically had on society. Legitimizing them as a specific dimension of human rights would help strengthening the struggles for democracy of communication, that is, the democratization of the power to communicate. [This process] would be an indicative to modify alterations in the law to grant subaltern classes the power to generate and enjoy the production of culture and information, and of knowledge. (p. 172)

Civil rights recognition is associated with the spirit of *individual freedom* that has been debated since the 17<sup>th</sup> century in England. According to Vieira (2000), the English society only started to recognize civil rights (that is, rights guaranteed to English citizens by law) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, based on a liberal perspective that praises the idea of a free citizen: “the citizen is conceived, by liberal theory, as an individual endowed with freedom and responsible for the exercise of their rights. Thus, citizenship is closely related to the public image of the individual as a free citizen” (p. 38). The recognition of other rights stem from expressive social conflicts throughout history in the context of the conceptions of citizenship in the Western World.

When reflecting about the generations of rights to citizenship, we must necessarily address the pivotal role of communication and of the media in social mobilization. Social mobilization and articulation were important gears in the fight for the achievement and expansion of rights. This explains why human groups include forms of direct communication and empower means of communication within the individual-society-state communication processes, seeking for equality in the distribution of citizenship rights. Therefrom emerges the notion of rights to communication, as well as the rights of human groups, popular social movements, and non-profit civil associations to access means of communication as broadcasters.

The freedom of information and expression brought to light nowadays does not refer only to the access of the person to the information as a receptor, . . . nor to the right of expressing themselves by “any means” – which sounds vague, – but to ensure the right of the citizen and their collective organizations to access social means of communication in the condition of broadcasters – producers and dif-fusers – of content. Thus, it means to democratize the power to communicate. (Peruzzo, 2005, p. 28)

This brief contextualization allows us to consider citizenship as a right in construction, with the Black social movements having among their goals

the granting of these rights to many segments of the Black population that are alienated from them, specially by acting directly in the fight against prejudice and the remains of centuries of slavery. The achievement of Black citizenship necessarily advocates for the opposition to racism and slavery in many Western societies until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the same period, metropolises such as England and France were debating the meaning of citizenship based on the civil and even political rights of their populations – which consisted mostly of white and free people. The debate around the issue of citizenship arrived a little late in Brazil, which may have been corroborated by the fact that the country was the last to abolish slavery in the American continent.

Although influenced by the ideals of the English and French revolutions, especially in regard to its administrative process, praising the sense of freedom, the Brazilian society did not absorb equality of civil and political rights entirely. According to Guimarães (2012), “the rationalization and perception of themselves as a race functioned as a justification to guarantee the denial of these rights to citizenship and allow the continuity of slavery or servility as a mode of production and a work relation” (p. 14).

As we see it, when reproducing the word *race* and expressions such as *Black race*, the literature itself denotes the incorporation of scientific perceptions that were once dominant, but recently refuted for stablishing distinctions seen as unfounded – for there is only one race: the human race. According to the Demography and Populational Studies Laboratory (2019) of the Department of Geosciences of the Universidade de Juiz de Fora, “there is only one race, and it was born in Africa. . . . [There is no] white, black, yellow, or red. There is only one race in the face of Earth: the human race. We are all part of it” (para. 1).

In this scenario, the enslavement of Black people must be understood as an egregious affront to the idea of citizenship, especially when we consider that its basis lie on a maximal concept of inequality – for it embraces the idea that a man could *own* another man, who could be kept under this condition by an extremely violent process. According to Schwarcz (2012), “in the first place, slavery legitimated the inferiority, which from social became normal, and, while in effect, inhibited any debate about citizenship” (p. 37). The author affirms that, in contrast to the white citizen, whom in some cases had civil and political rights guaranteed, the enslaved person may be understood as a “non-citizen”.

Such human condition was not automatically altered with the end of slavery and freedom achievement. When discussing the situation of Black people after the abolition, Moura (2014) affirms that the Brazilian society created mechanisms to ensure that former enslaved individuals and their descendants would not “find opportunities in the job market, in global social interaction, having



a social space where their circulation is restricted” (p. 210). According to the author, this treatment offered to the Black people is fundamental to explain their marginalization and even the adversities in terms of this people’s personality.

With the abolition of slavery, you may think that Black people became *their own person*; that they acquired the right to life, to come and go, to buy things – that is, that they achieved their civil rights, according to Marshall (1963). However, a considerable amount of former enslaved individuals and their descendants experienced a completely different situation, whereby, different from the chains of past times, they started to be discriminated due to the color of their skin and their social conditions. Moreover, as a result of an eugenic process that sought to promote the miscegenation of the Brazilian population based on the European immigration, Black individuals suffered with the lack of opportunities and the state omission – legitimated into state policy (Munanga, 1999) as to guarantee their non-survival and underdeveloped social conditions.

Guimarães (2012, pp. 36-37) highlights three historical moments in the debate about Black citizenship in Brazil. The first moment comprises “the achievement of individual freedom” with the end of slavery. Although such an achievement cannot be deemed as what the author calls “active political citizenship”, it represented a significant civilizing advance for Black people and for the overall society, as it puts an end to the ownership of one person over another based on skin color and social condition. The second moment accounts for the New State, in the 1930s, in which occurs the “recognition of the cultural legacy of the Black race [*sic*], brought together with the social rights of the urban worker”. This movement was committed to the ideals of racial democracy, whereby citizenship is regulated from the “nationalization of the ethnic and racial cultures and the opposition to racism”.

After abolition, the Black population was far from obtaining their civil rights, a fact that is reflected in the society of present days: Black and mixed-race people occupy the worst positions on any quality of life indicator; they are the greatest victims of violence; have lower wages; and occupy almost inexpressive spaces in instances of decision-making and power, the public service, private companies, or in better-paid professions. Even over 130 years after the abolition, Black people remain in the bottom of the social and economic pyramid of Brazil.

The inequalities of opportunities in education and employment and the discrimination founded on the myth of racial democracy (which persuaded mostly non-Black citizens) hampered the possibilities of debates and effective actions against racism in the Brazilian society. Thus, the Black population has fought for improving their living conditions, as the state has done very little

when it comes to actions aimed for this population. As stated by Carvalho (2002), “the Black population had to face the challenge of social ascension by itself and often had to do so by original routes, such as through sport, music, and dance” (p. 53).

In becoming a liberal republic, Brazil refused to put an end to the process of racial deformities arising from centuries of slavery, leaving Black people on a deplorable situation even after the abolition. This fact is emphasized by Guimarães (2012) by adding that “the sub-citizenship of most of the Black and mixed-race people avoided, for a long time, the consciousness of the racial roots of social hierarchy” (p. 16). For him, a *second abolition* was necessary.

Rather than that, the state implemented a policy aimed for the whitening of the population, stimulating the European immigration in the decades post abolition and resting on the racial democracy – which produces a significant ideologic effect until nowadays. This allow us to understand that not only Brazil denied Black people the social rights, but also acted against it, for it endeavored in disseminating the ideology of racial democracy, thus waiving State of any anti-racism responsibility (Almeida, 2018, p. 69).

Nearly one century after the abolition, the Black issue finally managed to reach the State scope due to the effort of this population; that is, social rights acquisition becomes a topic of debate in the social strata. As the whole society has a historical debt with Black people due to centuries of slavery and the ensuing denial of developmental opportunities, affirmative actions can be deemed as a way of guaranteeing this population’ social rights. According to Guimarães (2012), the advances in the exposure of racism and racist practices were fundamental to the advancement of Black citizenship, as such process unveil specific colors, races, genders, and sexual orientations to inequalities that ought “to be fought” (p. 37).

Many Black Brazilian women and men lack citizenship because they lack civil rights. In fact, many of them lack the mere right to life, being the greatest victims of violence in the country. This population also lacks political rights, for they have no guaranteed spaces within public power instances, and social rights, for they are denied basic opportunities of education, health, dignified housing, and work. However, the present-day society already shows concerns with raising awareness about the need for a Black citizenship.

## BLACK PRESS CONTENTS

To better understand the contributions of the Black press for the Black citizenship, this section will discuss the content of three contemporary



journalistic Black websites from different Brazilian regions, namely: *Correio Nagô* (Bahia), *Mundo Negro* (São Paulo), and *Nação Z* (Rio Grande do Sul). Aiming to correlate the Black press production with good practices of journalism, we will also approach the general aspects of the articles, as well as their authors, sources, and the journalistic genre. Finally, with the aid of content analysis, we will give some considerations about these publications and the contributions of the Black press for the quest for Black citizenship.

The channels highlighted in this work were chosen based on an exploratory study about the Brazilian black press, being identified as the oldest communication vehicles in their regions – *Mundo Negro* in the Southeast, *Correio Nagô* in the Northeast, and *Nação Z* in the South. We identified no Black newspapers in the other regions of the country. Despite producing opinionated content, such as the traditional press, these websites may be considered as journalistic for positioning themselves as intermediators and addressing the topics of Blackness and the Black movement.

*Correio Nagô* was the oldest Black website identified in the Northeast region, created in 2008, in Salvador – BA, and introduced as one of the communication vehicles of the Ethnic Media Institute. In turn, *Mundo Negro* is presented as one of the pioneering digital Black channels in Brazil. The website was developed in 2001, in São Paulo, and has no explicit connection to any institutions. Finally, *Nação Z* was created in 2003, in Porto Alegre – RS, including the website that served as the object of analysis of this study, as well as and a printed issue provided by the Ilu Publishing Company. All publications of the three Black websites published during 2018 were included in this research, leading to a sample of 503 articles: 210 in *Correio Nagô*, 166 in *Mundo Negro*, and 127 in *Nação Z*.

Using the ATLAS.ti software, we verified the 30 most recurrent words in these texts, excluding articles, prepositions, verbs, names of communication vehicles, and the authors. As shown in Table 1, black (3017 appearances) and women (894) were the most recurring words, followed by racism, history, fight, and human rights – which occurred more than four hundred times, highlighting the importance of themes related to Blackness for these websites. These occurrences allow us to estimate the role of the Black press in the public debate, besides backing the vision of Bastide (1983), who states that the Black newspapers tend to “value everything that is Black” (p. 146).

**Table 1**

*Recurrent terms in the publications*

Sites	Recurrent Terms
Correio Nagô	Media (495), women (469), ethnic (459), black (417), life (331), social (299), Salvador (273), fight (272), human rights (267), Rio de Janeiro (267) and Bahia (264).
Mundo Negro	Black (1455), Facebook (402), racism (237), people (232), producer (211), project (207), Twitter (179) and women (173).
Nação Z	Black (659), music (334), scene (323), Porto Alegre (314), prize (298), history (273), women (252), project (241), racism (239).
All	Black (3017), women (894), project (642), racism (631), media (538), people (538), music (537), prize (532), social (524), Rio de Janeiro (520), history (497), life (473), woman (471), ethnic (469), Facebook (440), we are (439), fight (426), human rights (418), Bahia (376), scene (361), Salvador (354), net (353), Twitter (339), national (333), theatre (331), Porto Alegre (321), community (315) and Africa (310).

*Note.* Elaborated by the authors.

For providing a better understanding regarding the mentioning of Black women in the news, we highlight an article published on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018, by *Mundo Negro*, entitled “*Corpo e ancestralidade: como construir autoestima sendo uma mulher negra de pele escura?*” (Body and Ancestry: How to Build Self Esteem Being a Dark-Skinned Black Woman? – Fonseca, 2018). The text evinces the preoccupation with the protagonism of the Black woman. Here, we should mention that the word *Black* is also used to refer to *population, people, or youth* – meanings that embrace the figure of the Black men.

The recurrence of these terms and the approach to themes revolving around the challenges lived by the Black population in Black websites points to what Guimarães (2012) defends when debating Black citizenship, stressing the importance for exposing racism and racist practices so that they could be “fought off” (p. 37). In other words, the Black press contributes to the critical exposure of racist practices from an attentive approach to citizenship rights. This is the case, for example, of the article discussing the occurrence of Black genocide primarily in the suburbs of the big cities, which has been reported by the traditional press in a biased and sensationalist way.

Other words that are rather recurrent among these articles are *project* (642), *racism* (631), *media* (538), *people* (538), *music* (537), and *prize* (532). Among these, we outline the word *racism*, which denotes the commitment of the Black press to combating racist practices and contesting the racial democracy ideology. In this regard, we may mention the article published by *Mundo Negro* on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, entitled “*Racismo cotidiano leva ao estresse agudo, ansiedade e depressão*” (Daily racism leads to acute stress, anxiety and depression”



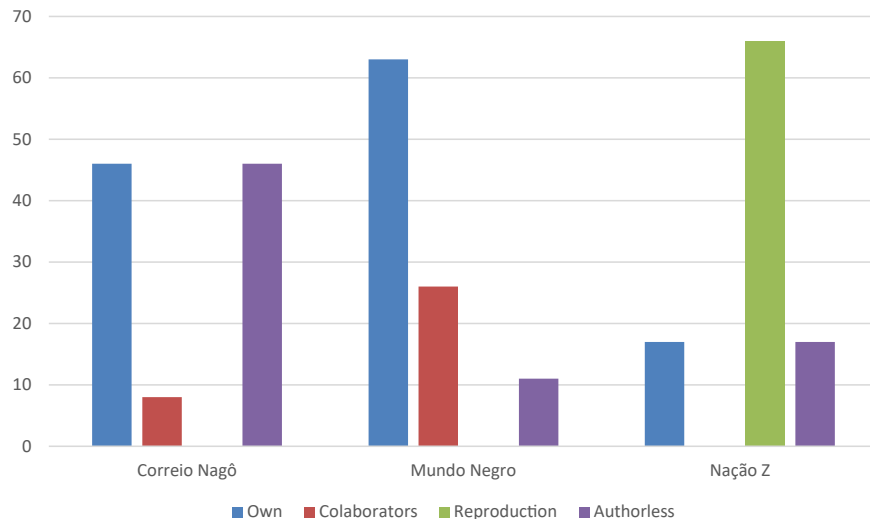


– Nascimento, 2018). The text discusses the existence of racism and the possible psychological impacts for the victims of this process.

By observing the set of journalistic aspects in these publications, we may rightfully infer that good journalistic practices can contribute to a quality journalism. For that, we surveyed all the publications from November 2018 (Black Awareness month) in the three websites, resulting in a sample of 49 articles: 24 of *Correio Nagô*, 19 of *Mundo Negro* and six of *Nação Z*. All articles were analyzed as to authorship, types of journalistic sources used (Lage, 2001), and diversification of journalistic genres (Marques de Melo & Assis, 2010).

As shown in Figure 2, when analyzing the authorship of the publications, we verified a considerable amount of original content produced by the sites *Correio Nagô* (46%) and *Mundo Negro* (63%). In turn, only 17% of the contents published in *Nação Z* were of their own authorship.

**Figure 2**  
*Authorship of publications*



Note. Elaborated by the authors.

Articles written by collaborators represent 8% of the publications of the *Correio Nagô* and 20% of *Mundo Negro*, whereas none was registered in *Nação Z*. Many of these cases account for Black journalists who develop articles to the Black press in a collaborative way, such as Laísa Gabriela de Sousa – the author of “Com o tema ‘Agbára Dúdú’, MAST celebra a Consciência Negra na XXVI Semana de Gastronomia” (in English, “With the theme ‘Agbára Dúdú’, MAST

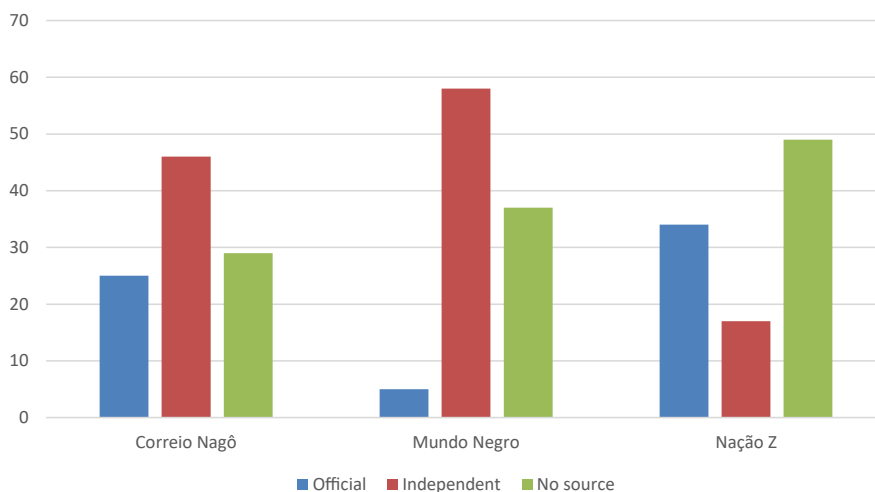
Celebrates Black Awareness in the 26<sup>th</sup> Astronomy Week”), an exclusive text published by *Mundo Negro* on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

The effective participation of collaborators on elaborating contents to the Black press may be associated with the characteristics of the Black channels of the past. As exposed by Bastide (1983, p. 131), the structuring of the Black press in Brazil encountered several obstacles, which lead the Black movement bodies to create many newspapers that relied on collaborative work. Our results indicate that collaboration is still an important feature of the Brazilian Black press.

We also found authorless and reproduction articles – that is, articles that were elaborated by the communication department of organs and entities and reproduced by the website, crediting the original source. Among the authorless materials, 47% pertain to the *Correio Nagô*, 11% to *Mundo Negro*, and 17% to *Nação Z*. As for reproduction articles, *Nação Z* was responsible for all materials identified in this study, corresponding to 66% of its content– a percentual considered high, which is not considered a good practice of investigative journalism.

This research also explored the types of journalistic sources used in articles based on the classification proposed by Lage (2001, p. 62), who groups journalistic sources into official (public or organizational power), unofficial (independent organizations), and specialized (people capacitated to talk about the topic). Considering our sample of 49 articles, we verified the presence of official and independent sources within the texts, as well as no sources.

**Figure 3**  
*Source of publications*



Note. Elaborated by the authors.



Figure 3 shows that independent sources were the predominant type of journalistic sources employed by our study sample, representing 46% of the publications in *Correio Nagô*, 58% in *Mundo Negro*, and 17% in *Nação Z*. Such finding points to dissonant characterizations of the Black press in constructing narratives based on characters that conform to their editorial line. A good example of such is the article “Qual a diferença entre o cinema produzido por mulheres negras no Brasil e na África?” (In English, “What is the Difference between the Cinema Produced by Black Women in Brazil and in Africa?” – Malia, 2018), published by *Correio Nagô* on November 22, 2018. The text is centered on the narrative of Brazilian and African filmmakers who are dissociated from governments or organizations but have the knowledge to talk about the topic of the article.

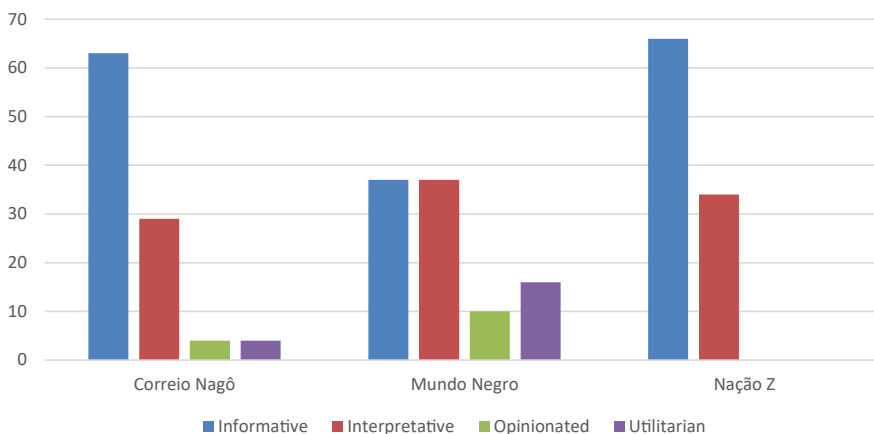
Contrary to the traditional press, especially when it comes to debating questions about ethics and race, the use of official sources by the Black press is not as recurrent. According to Araújo e Silva (2017, p. 13), most of the articles about the racial theme published on the websites *G1* and *R7* rely exclusively on official sources, whereas only 25% of the publications of *Correio Nagô*, 5% of *Mundo Negro*, and 34% of *Nação Z* used official sources. These findings indicate an independency on the production of these channels in relation to official organs.

In featuring Black characters, the Black press corroborates with what Ribeiro (2017) termed as “standpoint” in debates, considering that it favors groups lacking social conditions to access certain spaces. According to the author, the standpoint “is not about affirming the individual experiences, but rather about understanding how the social place occupied by certain groups restrict their opportunities” (p. 61).

Articles without an identifiable source are highly recurrent among our study sample, representing 29% of the publications in *Correio Nagô*, 37% in *Mundo Negro*, and 49% in *Nação Z* – the most prevalent category in this channel. If we consider the good practices of journalism, the expressive number of articles in these conditions can be also considered a negative indicator, given that sources can contribute to the credibility of the publications.

Marques de Melo and Assis (2010, p. 45) state that the production of journalistic content is better understood by their verification and organization according to the following classes (or genres) and their respective functions: informative genre (social vigilance function), opinionated (ideas forum), interpretative (clearing and educational role), entertaining (distraction and leisure), and utilitarian (help on daily decision-making). Such classification enabled us to identify the informative genre as predominant among the analyzed production.

**Figure 4**  
*Genre of publications*



Note. Elaborated by the authors.

Figure 4 shows that informative articles represent 63% of the material published by *Correio Nagô*, 37% of that published by *Mundo Negro*, and 66% of *Nação Z*. Considering the *surveillance function* inherent to this genre (Marques de Melo & Assis, 2010, p. 49), the contents addressed in articles from this category refer to events related to Blackness – many of which are absent from the traditional press. Other journalistic genres may be more effective in contributing to a broader debate about issues associated with Blackness, which indicates a content limitation given that the informative genre is more recurring in these channels.

Interpretative texts, due to their educative and/or enlightening role (Marques de Melo & Assis, 2010, p. 49), certainly contribute to a broader debate on the question of race. As shown in Figure 3, this genre accounts for 29% of the articles published by *Correio Nagô*, 37% of *Mundo Negro*, and 24% of *Nação Z*. Except for *Mundo Negro*, where the percentual related to interpretative genre was the same as that of the informative genre, articles from this category were less expressive in the Black press. The role of the Black press in discussing racial themes may be exemplified by the article “CONSCIÊNCIA NEGRA: Jovens falam sobre identidade, racismo e resistências” (In English, “BLACK AWARENESS: Youth Speak about Identity, Racism and Resistance” – Ricardo, 2018), published by *Correio Nagô* on November 16<sup>th</sup>. The text discusses racism from the perspective of young black people, especially Black women, highlighting their life and experiences.

Articles from the opinionated and utilitarian genres were rather uncommon, occurring only in *Correio Nagô* and *Mundo Negro*. The opinionated category,



in which we identified important reflections, especially regarding the racial theme, comprised 4% of the material published in *Correio Nagô* and 18% in *Mundo Negro*.

The journalistic aspects analyzed in this study allow us to consider the different stages of good journalistic practices in the Black press. By resorting more to the collaborative journalism than *Nação Z*, *Correio Nagô* and *Mundo Negro* managed to produce an expressive amount of articles using independent sources and compatible to the interpretative genre – thus enabling the production of more relevant texts in the proposed debates on Blackness. Our results indicate that, despite the highlighted advances, the Black press can still improve its good journalistic practices, offering articles that are more attractive and of better quality for the readers. Moreover, the narrative presented by the Black press fulfils the important role of featuring the Black person, emphasizing topics related to Blackness and the Black protagonist.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The considerations about the meanings of Black resistance (from slavery to the post-abolition period, until the present days), the importance of the Black movement and the Black press, and the debate on Black citizenship enabled us to investigate the contents published by Black websites from a perspective that highlighted a journalistic production featuring a narrative of Black protagonism. By observing the contents produced by the websites *Correio Nagô*, *Mundo Negro*, and *Nação Z*, we identified a set of recurrent words that pointed to the racial theme, such as *black* and *black women*, reinforcing the characterization of the Black press as the bearer of a language of Black people's expression.

Our analysis also indicated the importance of collaboration on content production, as well as the use of independent journalistic sources and of interpretative articles. In this sense, this study stresses the key role of the Black press in proposing journalistic narratives from the perspective of Blackness, underlining the proactive protagonist of the Black people in the thematic approached and in the sources and genres employed, contributing to expansion of Black citizenship in the Brazilian reality.

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Article received on July 17, 2020 and approved on April 1st, 2021.

# Conservatism and toxic masculinity in gamer culture: An approach to *Magic: The Gathering*

## *Conservadorismo e masculinidade tóxica na cultura gamer: Uma aproximação a Magic: The Gathering*

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### ABSTRACT

Based on an ethnographic study conducted between 2016 and 2020, this article discusses the performance of toxic masculinity within social spaces related to the card game *Magic: The Gathering*. It suggests a relationship between the observed behaviors and the reinforcement of conservative values within the *Magic* community during the game experience, to further understand the social dynamics of gamer culture. Such observation stems from the assumption that the community of players formed during the game results from the articulation of two particular sociotechnical contexts: nerd culture and the mechanics inscribed in the design and experience of the game itself.

**Keywords:** Toxic masculinity, conservatism, games, nerd culture, *Magic: The Gathering*

### RESUMO

A partir de um esforço etnográfico empreendido entre os anos de 2016 e 2020, este artigo problematiza a encenação de uma masculinidade tóxica dentro de espaços de convívio relacionados ao *card game Magic: The Gathering*. O objetivo é sugerir uma relação entre os comportamentos observados e o reforço de valores conservadores na comunidade formada a partir da experiência deste jogo, avançando na compreensão das dinâmicas sociais da cultura *gamer*. Essa observação parte do pressuposto de que a comunidade de jogadores formada a partir da experiência desse jogo é o resultado da articulação de dois contextos sociotécnicos particulares: a cultura *nerd* e as mecânicas inscritas no design e na experiência do jogo em si.

**Palavras-chave:** Masculinidade tóxica, conservadorismo, games, cultura nerd, *Magic: The Gathering*

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**INTRODUCTION**

**T**HE POLITICAL DIMENSION of play is commonly neglected, and this fact has two historically problematic epistemological roots. The first concerns play itself and the thought surrounding this phenomenon: play, as to common sense, has never been considered productive or honorable, valiant, or valuable. Its status has always been one of childish entertainment, fantasy, make-believe, fiction, and an impulse that should be suppressed due to its uselessness. Play has never been the pillar for a constructive society, or one invested in development. It is the antithesis of a functionalist paradigm, and even its pedagogical status has been diminished by the phenomenon of mediatization (Hjarvard, 2013). Such perception dates to modernity, in the Latourian sense of the term (Latour, 1993), considering the civilizing project based on reason and the dichotomous purification of complex social phenomena. Even Huizinga (1938/2001) and Caillois (1958/2001), as Trammel (2020) points out, evaded the more obscure dimensions of play, as these did not consider its positive and playful epistemology to be a potentially good social force.

The second epistemological issue is found in the general negligence of the material dimensions of social phenomena: how would it be possible to conceive of the effects of the technical action, or of the preexistent conditions resulting from a formal system, when the subjective aspects always dominate such a discussion? The condition in which the subject unfailingly finds himself in a position of superiority over the object hinders the material dimensions from being involved in just any phenomenon – be it enabling or formative.

To consider the political dimension of play, this must be observed from another episteme. Play, as *ludus*, is not only a “situated action” – but also a programmed, prescribed action. The action performed in play is not devoid of prior meaning, even though it can be transformative. It occurs within an atypically circumscribed context that directs its intentionality and prescribes meaning.

The above thinking guides the argumentation of this work, conceiving of two cornerstones for its development. First, that it is necessary to consider play as essential to understanding a time (Falcão, Marques & Mussa, 2020), for it is a social force as significant as, for example, politics or religion – a status that was highlighted in the works of Huizinga (1938/2001) and Caillois (1958/2001). Second, that the objects need to be considered from their values of association, and not from their conditions of subjectivation. It is not enough to perceive what the object entreats, from the discursive point of view, but rather *how* this condition can be perceived in its materialities. Play is the product of its time; its structure, a tribute to it.

This thinking guides the observation of the context formed around the trading card game *Magic: The Gathering* (*MtG*), or simply *Magic*: a rich community that mobilizes professional and amateur players, referees, content producers, resellers, fans, and all kinds of roles within the creative industry. The experience in this social context illustrates (1) social and power relations that are important to understanding the contemporary social spectrum, besides underlining the fact that (2) these relations can be seen not only in the performance of specific cultural codes, but also in the materiality of technical artifacts that prescribe, in turn, ways of acting in which individuals – players – interact.

This article discusses toxic masculinity behaviors performed within relational spaces related to *Magic*. The discussion stands in the overlap between the historical and cultural relation of masculinity to video game culture, which mobilizes this particular type of performance – one that is less evident yet responsible for associating men to knowledge of and advanced proficiency in computing technology, while part of a structure of hegemonic masculinity<sup>1</sup>, as we will explore later.

This observation stems from the articulation that the community of *MtG* players engages in from two sociotechnical contexts: (1) nerd culture<sup>2</sup>, which we will discuss in depth in this article, and (2) the mechanics inherent to the design and distribution of the game itself, aspects which have previously been explored (Falcão & Marques, 2019) but that we will briefly discuss here. Beyond the discussion of genealogical roots, this study carried out ethnographic fieldwork both in the physical contexts related to the game *Magic: The Gathering* and in the informational contexts used as a support by the actors discussed here. Throughout 2018, in three distinct physical stores located in Northeastern Brazil, we observed an interactional context developed through the practice of *MtG*<sup>3</sup>. In this context, we noticed two conditions that guided our analysis of this practice community: first, the lack of female *MtG* players in the competitive environment; and, later, a ban on discourse related to gender issues in gaming environments and its surroundings.

Seeking to understand these environments, throughout 2018 we monitored WhatsApp groups related to these particular places to look for signs that would explain the absence of women in competitions in physical spaces. This fieldwork allowed us to understand these behaviors and sociotechnical contexts, pointing to gender relations and toxic masculinity in game-oriented spaces and offering a particular understanding of the maintenance of these conversational spaces (“echo chambers” and “safe spaces”) of (ultra)conservative and reactionary discourses (Braithwaite, 2016; Gray, 2014; Mortensen, 2018). In the following section, we will discuss a brief example from our fieldwork on the card game under study.

<sup>1</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is understood here as a pattern of practices that allow men to be dominant over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Evidence indicates that current western conceptions of masculinity are the result of a military, social, and economic history undertaken by the capitalist states of the Northern Atlantic (Connell, 1993). The male player's masculinity thus emerges from these contemporary western spaces through an increasing value given to work and effort, both of which are central themes for the creation of hegemonic masculinity.

<sup>2</sup> In this text, nerd will be defined as a specific person that has a high technical interest with obsessive or exclusive dedication on a given subject, especially technological and/or linked to themes like fantasy, science fiction, video games etc. The expression, as we know it, was coined in polytechnic institutes between 1930 and 1940 and has evolved since then, being added to the dictionary around 1979 thanks to the crucial role of television in the popularization and dissemination of nerd culture in the United States, just as with the correlation with the term geek (Lane, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> An important part of the observation data that composes this study results from the participation in institutional groups that belong to these spaces on the application WhatsApp, used by the community for its various functions that range from maintaining the networked conversation to structuring competition practices for *MtG*.



### **AN APPROACH TO *MAGIC: THE GATHERING***

Although play, in its broadest sense, have been extensively studied within social and human sciences, including by emblematic thinkers in these fields (Goffman, 1961; Simmel, 1983, among others), discussing play in its strict sense and the social relations it establishes remains a challenge, especially in interdisciplinary and neighboring contexts. If we discuss sports – a particular type of socially accepted organized play – the issue is dissipated by the latent knowledge coming from the cultural interaction with the rules of football, volleyball, or even the eccentricity of some Olympic sports. When we study video games or even the growing board game culture, the problem intensifies: how can we understand the internal aspects of a culture if we do not understand the technical aspects that guide it? Each one of these cultures around video games, in their many contemporary representations, is mainly driven by aspects of the design inherent to each of these technical contexts (Falcão, 2014).

*Magic*, the game that organizes the social context observed, has extensive and complex rules, competitive formats, and most importantly, social contexts that surround it. Created by Richard Garfield – an American mathematician, inventor, and game designer – *MtG* was the first modern trading card game (TCG) to be invented, and it is not merely a simple card game. The best way to describe it is to quote one of the clichés used by the community: “It’s like chess and poker at the same time” (Morris-Lent, 2015). The game is structured by players combining cards to reach an end goal: victory. The TCG is played competitively by two players in a battle that marries expertise and rules – a mental, agonistic skill – with the luck of drawing ideal cards at the right timing – which is perceived as randomness. Different from chess or poker, which have a limited set of pieces – 32 in the case of chess, and 52 cards in a deck – since 1993 *Magic* has had additions to its set of *pieces*, which in this case are cards that can be combined with others for specific effects.

Two basic aspects make *Magic* different from traditional card games that use 52-card decks: first is the fact that it relies on a strong diegetic aspect in its design, which is intrinsically linked to the way the game is codified by the game design team at Wizards of the Coast, the company responsible for its publication. *Magic* simulates a duel between two *planeswalkers*. In the argument that acts as the fictional base for the game, innumerable planes of existence occupy a *multiverse*. Though this narrative dimension might appear to be irrelevant, it is not: the characters and worlds created by Wizards of the Coast are the main tool used to elaborate advertising strategies and reach the audience on social media (Švelch, 2020).

The structure that enables competition, in turn, is the other factor that distinguishes *Magic* from other classic card games: to play, a player needs a deck – a collection of 60 cards that will be used in the game. These cards are previously organized according to a personal playing strategy and can come from any of the dozens of game expansions. The variable aspect of the game’s structure is interesting from a design standpoint: *Magic* has, due to its design, a very particularly emergent gameplay (Juul, 2005) that is guided by a game plan but that depends on drawing the necessary cards in a movement of near randomness<sup>4</sup>. Thus, in order to succeed it is necessary to make judgments based on what one expects of one’s adversary, one’s own deck, and finally, by relying on luck.

To conclude this explanation and return to the central discussion about the behaviors identified in the communities of practice, it is necessary to highlight that access to these cards is not particularly equitable: *Magic* is sold in booster packs – packets that contain cards organized by their rarity – with 15 cards each, of which only one is rated *rare* or *mythic*. This ratio affects how often a card can appear and impacts the quality of a card in its design: rare cards are usually more powerful and versatile, casting the game in one’s favor through their absolute value.

The rarity of the cards is a more relevant factor than one might imagine at first glance, since the player can only acquire a card in two ways: they either buy a booster and count on luck to get the desired card, which has a considerably low probability, or they buy the card from specialized stores that resell specific cards – called singles – in a practice that the community terms the “secondary market.” Depending on the factors of rarity and demand and considering its importance at a given moment, the price of a *single* card can vary from a few dozen to a few hundred Brazilian reals.

Thus, the very design of the game is geared towards very specific player audiences. A brief search on a site dedicated to *MtG* shows, at the time this article was written, “cheap decks” in the range of \$290 (Griffith, 2020) and particularly expensive decks in the range of \$1400 (Zeranox, 2020). *Magic*’s main demographic is made up of people who interact with the so-called geek/nerd<sup>5</sup> culture<sup>6</sup> that tends to be masculine, white, middle class, cisgender and heterosexual (Salter, 2018; Salter & Blodgett, 2017). In her work on race, gender, and deviation in video games, Gray (2014) states that a discussion of the masculinity portrayed in and by video games needs to be understood through a variety of lenses. In the next section, we resume this historical discussion on the construction of masculinities in nerd culture and how this aspect has overlapped in the context of video games, in general, and in *MtG* in particular.

<sup>4</sup> A tutorial for how to play *MtG* is available at: Wizards of the Coast (2017).

<sup>5</sup> The expression *geek*, with the connotation we have today, appeared in 1980 and became popular in the following decade, used in a correlated manner with the term *nerd*. For Lane (2018), the term *geek* has been used to replace the old *nerd* in common usage.

<sup>6</sup> Recently, specialized literature has argued that the terms *nerd* and *geek* cannot be simply defined, mainly when the complexities of their everyday use are taken into consideration. Despite the differences, we opt to employ the term *nerd* in the vast majority of cases, understanding it as the semantic equivalent of *geek*, because both can include technoculture gamers, and from the natural and intrinsic exchange between the key ideas of the expressions – the obsession devoted to a given pursuit, intelligence, technology, and male gender, for example (Lane, 2018).



One consideration regarding the ways of experiencing *Magic* is important to frame the work presented here. The emerging question addresses an incongruence in the fact that this article discusses the toxicity of gamer culture, even though *Magic* is a TCG rather than a video game. One point must be taken into consideration: the technical and symbolic intersections noted by Švelch (2020) in his discussion concerning the process of mediatization undergone by *Magic*. The fact is that the ecosystem in which the practice of this game unfolds is a continuum composed of a physical, in-person dimension and a media, platformed dimension.

It is, in our opinion, methodologically unfruitful to explore this distinction: our ethnographic research pointed to an absolute intersection between the physical space of local game stores (LGS) and the experience on the platforms on which the game can be played. Such condition, combined with the fact that Wizards of the Coast itself publicly stated it was elevating *Magic* to the e-sport category<sup>7</sup>, in our perception, is more than enough for the TCG/platform distinction to be seen as a mere technicality that does not hold up to observation of the day-to-day life in this community<sup>8</sup>. This denotes that our approach to the game must be directed not to the platform specifically, but to the entire infrastructure, which is precisely the work undertaken in this ethnography. This implies, as well, that it is possible to notice nuances in these relations from any perceived contexts – which leads us to confirm that constructions of masculinity and toxicity emerge from both nerd and gamer culture.

<sup>7</sup> As discussed by Chase (2018).

<sup>8</sup> The platforms are usually used as a support for training or experimentation, whereas the local competitions are naturally perceived as having greater importance, since they are sanctioned – i.e., recognized – by Wizards of the Coast.

### NERD CULTURE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES

The confluence of social forces that drove the cultural transformations of the 1960s and '70s was crucial for the development of video game culture (Robinson, 2007). Multicultural social movements such as counterculture, for example, offered conditions for the transformations in technology to be broadly and gradually accepted and structured into a pattern that, given time, would establish the sociotechnical environment of cyberculture (Salter, 2018). These cultural conditions were also appropriated by other more specific cultural niches, which experienced a particular segmentation oriented towards young middle-class white males, between the ages of 18 and 25 and enrolled in higher education (Robinson, 2007).

Understanding this context is fundamental to building a critical insight into a nerd culture that is intrinsically connected to the acknowledgement that technological ability has garnered in social life (Salter, 2018). The emergence of this identity, in particular, has caused a growing questioning of the bases on

which it is based (Kendall, 1999, 2000): West and Fenstermaker (1995) state, based on the idea that all social relations are informed by gender, race, and class, that the origin of nerd culture is strongly linked to the ideals of hegemonic western, and more specifically from the United States, masculinity.

It is recognized that across time and geographic locations, masculinities are transformed and translated into distinct forms, depending on the location and various other existing tensions in the society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Reeser, 2010). The potential of a new form of masculinity, at any moment, to be culturally exalted over the other preexisting hegemonic forms (Connell, 2001) makes the scenario even more delicate.

For Chandler (2019), hegemonic masculinity – that is, in terms of power – is a predominant approach in masculinity studies. The foundation of hegemonic masculinity is found in an understanding of female existence as a potential sexual validation for men, while they compete amongst themselves to win this “sexual object” (Gray, 2014). Gray reiterates that hegemonic masculinity consists of a set of practices that place women in a continuous state of submission. Chandler (2019), in turn, refers to hegemonic masculinity by what he believes to be its current nomenclature – *toxic masculinity* – for it evokes insight into the construction of masculine identities in relation to their toxicity (Chandler, 2019; Kupers, 2005).

From this approach, the previous definitions equally support an understanding of toxic masculinities as socially regressive masculine traits that nurture domination, devaluing women, homophobia, and violence (Kupers, 2005). This objectified and expropriated understanding of femininity characterizes toxic masculinity (Chandler, 2019), which, in video game culture, is conceived as predominant and from which the community is frequently stigmatized by the strong correspondence with traits such as homophobia, misogyny, racism, and tendency towards hostile and violent behavior – all expressions of toxic masculinity.

Considering this discussion and the cultural context documented in various works in the field of game studies (Chandler, 2019; Massanari, 2017; Salter, 2018; Salter & Blodgett, 2017), the performance of masculinity in video games is closely related to nerd masculinity – and this is intimately related to technological mastery in the game environment. In its conception, video game culture was guided by the promotion of a militarized masculinity, through the varied practices of game design and narratives centered around war scenarios (Johnson, 2018).

Besides that, the very structure of the video game market makes it unfeasible and risky to develop inclusive games that propose a restructuring of perceptions of femininity and women<sup>9</sup>. A major factor in this is the conventional understanding of the *player's* identity as being associated with a specific demographic – male,

<sup>9</sup> Although recently both the AAA video game industry and independent producers have been exploring multicultural and inclusive themes, besides challenging constructions around concepts of masculinity and femininity, these games represent only a small portion of the total industry output. Besides this consideration, this movement can also be seen as a precorporation strategy (Fisher, 2009), in which the industry appropriates ideological content, not to endorse it, but to use it for its commercial potential.



white, cisgender, heterosexual, and middle class (Gray, 2014; Johnson, 2018; Murray, 2018; Robinson, 2007; Salter & Blodgett, 2017) – whose representation has been a key part of the power structures shaped in video game culture for decades (Braithwaite, 2016). With the rise of digital technology – and the culture related to it – starting in the 1980s, and especially in the context of US culture, being a nerd also came to mean having an aptitude and intelligence in areas that deal with technological knowledge. In this context, the image of the nerd also reaches greater acceptance, given the broad sociotechnical overlap and growing appreciation of technology (Salter & Blodgett, 2017).

Nerd masculinity is most visible when members of this culture consider themselves attacked by some product or action, usually of a multicultural nature, that provokes an outcry on forums and in communities that harbor and foster nerd identity, causing members to repudiate en masse the source of the grievance (Salter & Blodgett, 2017). These individuals' strategy consists of lobbying on forums and social networks as to make any discourse in favor of diversity and multiculturalism inviable. They compose what Massanari (2017) calls *toxic technocultures*, a concept used to “describe the toxic cultures that are enabled by and propagated through sociotechnical networks such as Reddit, 4chan, Twitter and online gaming” (p. 333).

The relation between this nerd identity and established cultural hierarchies, which embodies hegemonic masculinity, interrupts the promotion of a reconciliation by the nerdism (a group of nerds) to its position in the context of contemporary pop culture. The archetypal model of the hypermasculine nerd<sup>10</sup> – an identity constructed by the rejection of both feminine constructs and culture and traditional athletic masculine aesthetics (Salter & Blodgett, 2017) – only outlines the substitution of a traditional hypermasculine ideal<sup>11</sup> for another standard that continues to maintain hegemonic masculinity within pop culture.

In this regard, although nerds having achieved relevance as a cultural icon represents a significant change (Salter & Blodgett, 2017), this aspect continues to preserve the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2005). Though a movement for greater diversity in media production in this context exists, the idea within which the nerd was construed and the white cis-heterosexual men that represents it seem to hinder female inclusion and participation in the content, actions, and communities of practice of this culture.

Burrill's (2008) notion of *boyhood* is particularly useful to illustrate our point: it proposes a regressive nature of masculinity in the first world capitalist context, where external pressures force men into a masculine childhood.

<sup>10</sup>This refers to a model derived from the dualistic view that represent nerds as both victims and outsider heroes due to the redefinition of masculinity or of the context (Salter, 2018; Salter & Blodgett, 2017). The visual culture of the United States has a strong ideological tendency that characterizes whiteness – and especially the white male protagonist – as a victim and not a hero (Murray, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> The hypermasculine ideal is traditionally represented by physical aptitude, interest in sports and beer, and a complete aversion to intellectualism (Salter & Blodgett, 2017).

Burrill stresses that games would be an ideal tool for this manifestation in digital environments, for they serve as spaces of regression, escape, fantasy, in an environment away from feminism – and the non-idealized feminine –, class struggle, and family and political responsibilities. In this escape where men can try to prove their masculinity, it is to be expected, then, that *invasion* attempts constitute threats, bringing issues from the *real world* into this bubble. These movements in nerd culture are responsible for maintaining a supposed desire to *save the past* (Salter & Blodgett, 2017), under the premise that it provided more benefits than the present.

Actions include, for example, efforts to keep science fiction free from supposed political agendas and social metaphors, efforts to protect hypermasculine video games from feminist interference and, in sum, to preserve nerd cultural spaces for the “true” participants who share that experience, identity, and the same set of values, without ever testing or challenging them (Salter & Blodgett, 2017). This argument invites a nostalgic dimension that plays a key role in the construction of the nerd and gamer identity, as well as reveals an approach towards an extreme *conservative disposition* (Oakeshott, 1991), responsible for discursively tinting a determined period with embellishing, romantic, and archaic ideals. The following section will focus on questioning these marks of the past and the ideology that they trigger in the cultural context under study.

## CONSERVATISM AS AN OPERATOR IN NERD/GAMER CULTURE

Nerd/gamer culture embodies a tenuous relationship with the past: it evokes a nostalgic longing for a historical period that was not as idyllic or uncomplicated as this culture imagines it to have been (Salter & Blodgett, 2017); a certain sense of gratitude directed towards a past that has supposedly bequeathed fundamental and necessary bases for preservation in the present. Nostalgia, in this case, is an influential cultural and emotional force repeatedly used to defend a conservative ideology<sup>12</sup>, revealing the past to be an inaccessible ideal in comparison to the reality of the present (Coontz, 2000).

Oakeshott (1991), one of the main philosophers of conservative thought, sees conservatism as a *disposition*. This means that the will to be satisfied with what is available in the present, combined with the rejection of the desire or search for something new and yet undefined in the future, would be the bases of conservatism: “to delight in what is present rather than what was or what may

<sup>12</sup> Robin (2011) defines conservatism as a reactionary ideology, originally against the French Revolution and, more recently, against the liberation movements of the 1960s and '70s.





be” (p. 1). His vision, thus, reinforces a conservative thinking that affirms the present. Even so, the author acknowledges that conservatism is usually justified in the imminence of a sense of loss, “in the idea that that which the present offers is about to be reaped by some radical political agenda” (Trigueiro, 2015, p. 102).

Trigueiro (2015) stresses the need to relativize Oakeshott’s (1991) concept, insofar as the ideas of present and past are, by definition, connected. While Oakeshott (1991) offers a reading of conservatism from the perspective of an intellectual who is himself a conservative, on the other hand, it is relevant to problematize it with an understanding of the phenomenon from a thinker whose political orientation is diametrically opposite: Robin (2011). This author defines conservatism as a meditation – and a theoretical interpretation – on the experience of holding power, having it threatened and trying to regain it, or only acting to maintain it.

Robin (2011) positions conservative ideas as a “mode of counterrevolutionary practice” (p. 17) that emerges to preserve the privileges, hierarchies, and power of some over others, in the wake of a democratic movement. This critical approach is distinct from Oakeshott’s (1991) definition, whose bases are built on themes like liberty, limited government, resistance to change and innovation as a condition of human nature and character – which, he argues, is resistant to such sudden initiatives – or common values.

In other words, conservative ideology can be understood as a determined reaction, a defense against the attacks of a specific emancipation movement, which in its response consistently absorbs features of the movement it opposes (Robin, 2011). In the so-called “Modern Era” this skeptical tone that is concerned with the preservation of conservatives’ privileges, in the face of possibilities of radical shifts in society’s power structures and hierarchy, is more frequent in the private sphere than in the public one, finding struggles against causes like labor movements and feminism (Robin, 2011)<sup>13</sup>.

Robin’s (2011) argument emphasizes that a classist spirit exists perennially in conservative rhetoric, i.e., that it upholds an idea of banning, at different levels, the liberty and agency of subaltern classes. The author develops a critique that understands conservatism as reactive and contingent to conflicting radical political agendas and programs – without which it loses force and rhetorical power – in addition to being complementary to the left. These political ideals – called conservative, reactionary, revanchist, or counterrevolutionary – originated and grew, according to Robin, in battles and polarization. From the French Revolution to the fights for Black liberation, from decolonization movements

<sup>13</sup> We would like to highlight that historically the nerd/gamer community thinks of its spaces much more as a private environment than public, given their conditions of access.

to the struggles of First Nations peoples and communities, from the sexual revolution to women's liberation – the changing threat transforms the ways of fighting it (Robin, 2011).

Turning back to the context of nerd and video game culture, members of these communities often seek to affirm their cis-heteronormativity and hegemonic gender roles under the guise of a conservative, nostalgic perspective that denotes an illusory victimhood. Similarly, the online harassment campaign known as Gamergate<sup>14</sup> also had its discourse fueled by nostalgia and displayed a socio-technical manifestation consistent with nerd masculinities and forms of online harassment, threats, attacks, and humiliation driven by various digital platforms like Twitter and Reddit (Massanari, 2017; Salter, 2018). “Gamergaters” – as they became known – punished and defamed their critics, secure in the premise that they needed to be put back in their place: subjugating them is the right path, they argued. The movement's rhetoric suggests the existence of a crusade against feminists and other select enemies, often directing misogynist, antisemitic, racist, homophobic, and transphobic attacks (Braithwaite, 2016; Salter, 2018).

Nerd culture, and gamer culture in turn, are partisans of a nostalgic behavior that is closely related to an extremist *conservative disposition* (Oakeshott, 1991) or (ultra)conservative spirit, as suggested by Coontz (2000). The author's argument focuses on how much the idealized past acts a vehicle for reactionary ideologies, including those concerned with gender roles that try to criticize society in its current state for not maintaining standards of the past (Coontz, 2000). “Nostalgia for a safer, more placid past fosters historical amnesia about these precedents, deforming our understanding of what is and is not new” (p. 12). Part of the rhetoric of nerds and *MtG* players is based on a past-centric perspective of the male gender, in a movement dedicated to maintaining a structure of privileges and misogynistic, cis-heteronormative, and hegemonic social roles.

In her study, Coontz (2000) analyzes the tendency of contemporary society, especially in the US context, to frame the 1950s as representative of a historical period when the family was healthy and therefore ideal. For many, this period became a *golden age* when *traditional* family life prospered. A profound cultural and emotional nostalgia for this invented past was created, independently of this perfect construction being effectively unachievable at any point in history. The recurring argument is that “if the 1950s family existed today... we would not have the contemporary social dilemmas that cause such debate” (p. 46).

Coontz suggests that this discourse implies a return to the family values of former times, which encourages moralization and conservative hegemonic

<sup>14</sup> Gamergate was a misogynist campaign originating within the video game industry and the gaming community in August 2014, after the game developer Eron Gioni published a defamatory article about his ex-partner and fellow game developer Zoe Quinn. It was an act of retaliation after their brief relationship ended (Salter, 2018). So-called gamergaters place cis-heterosexual white men as the typical gamer and the true victims of Gamergate, who are oppressed by constant requests for diversity and at risk of losing their games to others with more inclusivity (Braithwaite, 2016).



ideological thought: “a seemingly gender-neutral indictment of family irresponsibility ends up being directed most forcefully against women” (p. 60), blaming them for the crisis of the traditional family due to the transformation of their roles in society. The insistence on a “return to the traditional family” provides support for the representations of gender and sexuality within the nerd/gamer culture – and the nostalgic rhetoric adopted by its members – to reaffirm the dominant power dynamic to recover the privileges of a past that is supposedly superior to a present seen as degenerate and in decline.

In *Magic*, the players evoke an ideal-type of the past from a nostalgic dimension of identity, as previously stated, structuring the intersubjective fabrics of nerd culture. Just as factions of the conservative political spectrum and the extreme right in Brazil and the United States long for the perfect domestic life of the post-war era, at the height of the so-called “golden years” of the 1950s (Coontz, 2000)<sup>15</sup>, the players look to a legendary golden era of nerdism. Such a period never existed outside imagination or the false sense of the past, in the ongoing need to guarantee the protection, privilege, power, male exclusivity and control of technology in certain nerd spaces and activities (Salter, 2018).

The players’ unhappiness stems from discovering that nostalgia is more powerful than reality. This observation leads to a search to internally define what has contributed to the unhappy context experienced today. Their sadness must belong somewhere and the hunt for who to blame falls on, above all, feminists, who are recurrently associated with – in the media, on innumerable online platforms, or in daily life itself<sup>16</sup> – a discourse of *unhappiness* and *anger*, as opposed to the *happy*, submissive conservative wives. Happiness, then, assumes a rhetoric that conceives it as an emotional and economic good that comes exclusively from middle-class homes (Ahmed, 2010). “Feminists don’t even have to say anything to be read as killing joy... they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places” (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 65-66).

Based on philosophy and feminist cultural studies, Ahmed (2010) addresses a provocative critical cultural analysis to the imperative of *being happy*. The author accurately shows how happiness has historically been used to justify submission and social oppression, upheld through various techniques of violence and subjugation in service of maintaining a social pact that privileges the rights of some over others (Ahmed, 2010). Her approach also reveals how a defiant oppression can cause unhappiness, the affective and moral labor performed by the “promise of happiness,” and how it is promised to only those who wish to live their lives the “right way” – i.e., the one that is socially validated.

<sup>15</sup> With the consequent return to the traditional family and, in the national context, to the golden moments that they believe to have existed during the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship.

<sup>16</sup> As can be seen, for example, in videos produced by youtuber Bruna Torlay (2020).

Thus, feminists and other critical groups are easy targets for the players' frustration with their communities and lives. While the uncritical and political validation of various nerd media, products, and derivatives is regarded time and again in this culture's environment, feminists or any other distinct individual are seen as villains (Salter & Blodgett, 2017). Starting from a line of thought similar to Salter and Blodgett's (2017), we can suggest that thinking of women and minority groups as members of these communities cracks the image of the player as a solitary and disagreeable man. Any attempt to disrupt this shared environment, or to view these subjects as visibly different, generates acts of toxic masculinity.

In this regard, the players' sense of nostalgia also highlights two key aspects of this culture: (1) the close ties between the player and a male gender identity; and (2) the player as a consumer category whose time-consuming hobby is being diminished by the growing popularity and access to games today: "For some players, there is a genuine sense of loss, watching games becoming mainstream and accessible" (Juul, 2010, p. 151). As performed during Gamergate (Braithwaite, 2016), this sense of loss is related to the gamer masculinity, so much so that opening to new groups is seen as an attack on men and the identity of the "original members." We have here a perception that relates this behavior to a certain romantic ethos belonging to the *conservative disposition*, which is usually positioned as a voice that cries out about the threat of losing power.

Again, the use of this identity as a weapon is central to rhetorical strategies and hate campaigns targeting female audiences, as observed in the Gamergate case and documented in the vast research trove on the topic (Braithwaite, 2016; Salter & Blodgett, 2017). The nostalgic artifice evoked also employs an understanding of suffering as part of what makes gamers exclusionary, thus being used to offer them a certain moral superiority and justify their aggressive and misogynistic claims as a form of defense that actually disguises the hatred hidden in a moralizing campaign against a certain *threat* to their domain (Braithwaite, 2016). This attitude of victimization seeks to cloud relations of dominance maintained through control and assertion of technological power (Salter, 2018). This form of power is manifested in competitions for status and respect that are imposed among and on other men, from which women are repeatedly excluded, states Salter (2018). We will further elaborate on these and other issues in the following section.



## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Considering what has been discussed thus far, it is necessary to further explore the local practice of *Magic* to observe the production and performance of toxic masculinities. We used an ethnographic and anthropological approach that combines the experience and cultural gateway of the places of consumption and proliferation of the game, with the observation of support communities on the WhatsApp application. Such a methodological composition sought a more complete observation of the interactions and used digital devices to adequately illustrate the phenomenon.

The issue that stands out in this decision concerns the fact that the behavior observed in the LGSs alone is not sufficient to describe how these places give rise to toxic or reactionary behaviors: our observation indicates that local performance is, many times, the culmination of a relationship cultivated on other platforms<sup>17</sup>. In the case of LGSs that host very private scenes, involving a limited number of players – as opposed to events like a grand prix (GP) or a larger competition –, the experience is communal and personal. WhatsApp groups work as extensions of the physical space of the store, within which one can establish relationships because of/with the game. These communities are commonly used to keep the actors involved, both in the dimension of the game – serving as an outlet for discussion on technical aspects, media repercussion, or even commercial launches – and in a broader experience, guided by values shared by the various groups represented therein.

Thus, it is indispensable that we study these platforms, because ultimately many of the situated behaviors are contextualized or justified by the relationships construed in this dimension, which strengthens the continuity of the social experience, rather than the perception that forums, social networking services and other digital devices promote an ephemeral communication<sup>18</sup>. This set of additional devices thus provides benefits so that players are permanently together in the game networks. The digital devices that support the continuity of the communal experience of the game facilitate, in turn, the conversation surrounding other topics. Memes, news, and political content circulate with considerable ease, stirring people up and inspiring certain behaviors.

Protected by the impression of anonymity and by what Gray (2014) calls *toxic online disinhibition*, individuals who are particularly quiet in personal interactions in stores prove to be eloquent defenders of their ideas, suggesting that in-person social interactions are often considered sacred events, since it

<sup>17</sup> We refer, once again, to Massanari's (2017) concept of toxic technocultures, which transpires with equal hostility on online communication networks seen as safe spaces (Braithwaite, 2016; Gray, 2014) for the dissemination and advancement of extremist and ultraconservative discourses, practices, and communities.

<sup>18</sup> Mortensen (2018) highlights the dimension of this persistence and continuity when discussing Gamergate and its use of spaces as "echo chambers" that foster hatred and violent behavior. Braithwaite (2016) offers a similar perspective.

is there that the *playing* happens. This guides two conditions that contribute to this methodological digression: (1) that the practice of the game invites a behavior of respect for fair play – a truce, however subtle – since (2) combative behaviors are often shown in the support communities.

The research that supports the observation undertaken in this article dates from 2016 and has participants and observations in several states in the country, which we visited and followed, albeit briefly, in groups like those described above. In this iteration, we present a compilation of events observed in stores in Northeastern Brazil – one in João Pessoa, Paraíba, and another in Teresina, Piauí –, whose documentation took place in-person throughout 2017 and 2018, as well as on the previously described digital supports.

As can be inferred from this outline, an understanding of the geographic locations of these spaces remains to be discussed: one must note that what is at play is not only the individual *Magic* player, but also the identity aspect performed from belonging to these states in particular or, more generally, the Northeastern region. The visits to the stores were always one or more times per week, with fieldwork lasting from one to four hours per day, at times in order to engage in the competitive environment, and at others to simply enter into conversation and observe the movements of the players and the community as a whole. We recorded over 500 total hours of local participant observation and thousands of chat lines on WhatsApp.

The following incident was chosen for it included the presence of women in the environment, in both a discursive and physical in-person dimension. We would like to stress that the presence of women on the WhatsApp application or at in-person competitions is rare. Our objective, finally, is to problematize how the manifestations of toxic nerd/gamer masculinity occur in these environments, from this incident.

The setting of the spaces dedicated to *Magic* is, in general, heterogeneous: each of the *stores*, commonly called LGSs, have its own parameters. All, however, are organized with a series of tables with chairs facing each other, as one would see at a chess match. On the table, the players lay out their playmats – rubber mats that keep the cards from being damaged by contact with the tables – and play their matches, which vary according to the game formats.

It was in one of these spaces, in João Pessoa<sup>19</sup>, that we came across an interesting development: four youths around 20 years old were playing with a sealed product that works like a board game: they already knew the cards and what type of game it would produce. Such products are usually consumed by

<sup>19</sup> The names of the establishments were omitted to not expose those involved in the case studies presented in this discussion.



casual players and collectors who are interested in the thematic/narrative and material aspect rather than the competitive aspect of the game.

As we observed the environment, we noticed that the topic of discussion among the group was the narrative of the game. One of the younger man was explaining to the group the relationship between Jace Beleren, an archetypal hero, and the villain Nicol Bolas, characters in the *MtG* multiverse. At a certain point in the conversation, a comment about Beleren's romantic interest, Liliana Vess, quickly transformed into a debate around the sparse presence of women in *Magic* stores. This issue is important and speaks not only to the process of subjectivation and production of toxic masculinity, but also to how these environments are established to understand these spaces: as much as they are often projected as places for the socialization and performance of the consumption of nerd culture, the contingent of female audience that frequents them is summarily reduced.

This fact both invites a perception of the construction of male identities with regard to their toxicity (Chandler, 2019; Kupers, 2005) and collaborates so that these spaces contribute to a self-reinforcing dimension. It creates what Mortensen (2018) terms "echo chambers" (p. 791) that advocate a discursive homogeneity, or what Gray (2014) calls "a 'safe' space to discuss and consume stereotypical ideas about race and gender" (p. xiii). One of the observed establishments, in particular, combined a series of functions: it was, yes, a space to practice *Magic*, but it was also a themed café with board games available for the customers. This space – much more than the first one – was often frequented by women, but they rarely developed any relation with *Magic*. It was as if this store held two distinct universes in the same communal space: in one, people ate, drank, and had fun; in the other, the energy was heavy and conflict was palpable.

Returning to the conversation of the four young men, at the moment that the topic was raised, one of them spoke up and started commenting on a media event that had occurred recently: on the program *Encontro*, hosted by Fátima Bernardes and broadcast in the morning on Rede Globo, actress and youtuber Kéfera Buchmann had abruptly corrected a young man on national television, using terms like *maninterrupting* and *mansplaining* (Nascimento, 2018). The mere memory of the episode was enough to enrage one of the young men: "She interrupts the guy and starts talking about 'man interruption' [sic]!" – with a jocular inflection put on the last word.

It caught our attention that this conversation came up in the discussion about the absence of women in the game. Its occurrence implied a knowledge,

on the part of the group, of multicultural topics associated with feminism, a topic generally ignored in circles like this one (Gray, 2014; Murray, 2018; Salter, 2018; Salter & Blodgett, 2017). Ignored or neglected not because toxic or misogynistic behavior would be curtailed, but simply because, by the nature of the space, the topic just does not come up. The masculinity developed and performed in an environment like that of the stores is rarely confronted, since the female presence is almost always at the service level. All the stores we visited employed women – cashiers, general employees, administrators – but they do not participate in the community experience and are practically invisible in the game space.

The female traffic at the game tables is indeed negligible. At the two establishments we visited, only one woman was casually interested in *Magic* and she appeared reluctant to enter the competition.

My reason for not playing competitively is that I have anxiety disorder, competitions make me anxious because of the time limits and since I don't know how to play properly, I need to think a lot about the plays and having a time limit makes me nervous... I think it's intimidating because I was just starting *Magic* and at the store there were only experienced players. Some were nice to me, they were patient and answered questions or recommended a deck, but in general the players aren't very welcoming. (Female player, 2019)

The account is consonant with our observation for it both questions how the figure of women is received in the competitive environment inherent to these establishments and underlines a particularly discriminatory design in the game. *Magic* has an extensive and complex set of rules – more than 100 pages in its manual – and learning them is a time-consuming activity. Besides, applying the rules on the fly – at the right time – is not the same thing as knowing them, which means that the game requires a lot of attention. This testimony reveals a pernicious dimension of *agon*, by Caillois (1958/2001): these competitive spaces seem to foster an inherent hostility in which the peer recognition stems as much from mastering the technical aspects of the game as from sharing certain values of a particular political identity.

This background is interesting because it contextualizes the problem: as the store in João Pessoa – unlike the other store with which we had systematic contact – is a hybrid, working as both a café and board game store, its public is more diverse than in other instances. Its structure is also considerably superior, since it needs to meet other consumer expectations. Resuming the condition





in which the dialogue took place, one could see that that specific space allows for adverse opinions that wouldn't necessarily be discussed in other circles – an undisputed narrative in which only a certain type of actor is permitted.

The scene changed once other people entered the store: young women who know the young men go up to them and greet them, but sit at another table and proceed to place their orders and choose a board game to pass the time. For the *Magic* players, the conversation takes another course since the performance space of masculinity and criticism of feminist ideas is spoiled by the female presence.

Similar discussions were witnessed in other spaces without having to necessarily be provoked, but they rarely ended on an argument that was not conservative or sexist: the reason women do not play competitive *Magic* has little to do with the spaces being commonly impenetrable and necessarily toxic; it's their fault – they simply don't want to play. Even our speaker reluctantly admitted that “maybe the masculine environment is a little scary” (Female player, 2019) when questioned about female friends and acquaintances who are interested in the game but not in the LGS.

Gray (2014) argues that games, like a significant part of pop culture, offer a *safe* space that both acts as a means for the circulation of accepted stereotypes of the other and creates environments to normalize these representations and punish all those different who seek to challenge the hegemonic organization of game culture. In other words, games also represent the dissemination of previously *private* jokes and prejudices that are now often made *public* during game matches and on various streaming platforms and social media services. As stated previously, the nerd/gamer community does not see these comments as necessarily public, since they consider the game space – and even the surroundings – to be private. These indications were visible in the conversations witnessed at the LGS in João Pessoa, but are not limited to it.

Burriel's (2008) notion of boyhood is very useful in helping us understand the previously discussed conditions, since it suggests a spatial maintenance that ensures the absence of the female figure. Under the pretext of their lack of desire, a performance space is designed that offers safety and encourages sexist, misogynistic, and (ultra)conservative discourses. Notwithstanding this condition, our hypothesis underlines the fact that such an occurrence is indeed linked to how nerd culture has developed over the years, but also to the form – in the strictest sense of the word – of the game. Returning to the discussion about the design and distribution of *Magic*, we can approach the issue of the value of certain cards and their combinations and from this infer target audiences and behaviors.

Kendall (1999) points out that the marker of hegemonic masculinity that pervades the nerd stereotype is that of high purchasing power and employability. Unlike games that preserve balance in their experience, in *Magic* players with greater purchasing power benefit from the game design, which implies a demographic predominantly composed of white, cis-heterosexual men with above-average purchasing power. Being at the top of a cis-heteronormative hierarchy makes them, besides ignore the privileges interwoven in their social situation, extremely protectionist of practices they assume to be exclusively masculine<sup>20</sup>.

Besides the related incident, our experience with competitive *Magic* presented us with an atmosphere that ranged from passive-aggressive to hostile – rarely friendly – that clearly showed the formation and maintenance of rival groups sustained by the agnostic stimulus of reward and symbolic capital inherent to victory (Simmel, 1983). In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the WhatsApp groups are not very different from the personal interaction in stores, as far as hostility and the absence of women go. As the erasure of this presence in communities related to nerd culture is formed, produced by the performance of a boyhood (Burrill, 2008) that eclipses female subjectivity in these environments, one would expect the same to happen in digital contexts, such as the WhatsApp groups that serve as support for the stores – after all, as Braithwaite (2016) stated, social media also operate as safe spaces for the propagation of aggressive and violent misogyny. It is in fact what our observation suggests, since in exclusively male spaces violent attitudes and topics like pornography are commonly present and contribute to the condition.

The relations between the forms of banning, punishment, and identity policing promoted within *Magic* do not show a mere residual coincidence with the Gamergate campaign, but rather are aligned with a long-standing subjectivation process of toxic nerd masculinity that is always available. The recurrence of this set of anxieties, rhetorical strategies, and hate campaigns directed at women and ethnic-racial minorities can and will be used, as necessary, to subordinate the female or other minorities' presence in a space culturally and historically construed under the domain of and for the perpetuation of male power.

The search for legitimacy and equal rights by minorities hurts the basic principle of the imagery present in a considerable part of the gamer and nerd demographic: a society built on the foundation of a false meritocracy that hides centuries of social and ethno-racial debts. This argument, followed by the debate on the class stratification promoted by *MtG* design, is relevant

<sup>20</sup> This stratification perceived in the game design itself is subject to variations due to the multiplicity of formats adopted by *Magic*. Pauper, for example, which consists only of cards with a common rarity – i.e., that appear at a significantly higher rate, increasing their availability – is a cheaper format, with decks priced around \$50, according to the *MTG Goldfish* website (<https://bit.ly/3h4SS43>). But it is not adopted in official competitions, since many players consider it to be an introductory format for beginner players or for those who aren't really able to invest in the game. The very existence of the Pauper underlines the exclusionary nature of *Magic*.

# A

because the community of players is not only marked by masculinity and opposition to femininities, but also by whiteness, “the specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate white people over people of color” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 56). DiAngelo (2011) argues that white North-Americans live in a social environment responsible for shielding and isolating them from *racial stress*, resulting from an disruption of what is considered racially familiar, according to the author. These isolated environments of racial hierarchical protection, that game/play spaces (and situations) can stage with relative ease, produce white expectations for racial comfort insofar as they simultaneously limit the capacity to tolerate racial, and we would add, gender and class, stress. The breakdown of this protection triggers what the author calls *white fragility*.

White fragility is one aspects of whiteness and its effects. It is a state fueled by situations of racial stress, responsible for invoking a series of defensive movements, some of which cover the externalization of emotions like anger, resentment, fear, and guilt, besides behaviors like arguing, silence, and withdrawal from a given stress-inducing situation. These behaviors fulfill the role of reestablishing the racial balance of white people. These disruptions, according to DiAngelo (2011), have the capacity to take on multiple forms and stem from a considerable number of sources (p. 57).

The observed discourses and behaviors allow us to infer that minorities’ fight in search of visibility are symptoms of a condition that we can call *player fragility* and this, in turn, makes up an essential part of the establishment of normative and toxic structures at work within *MtG*. These structures condition and confer the status of banned on all minorities involved in the contemporary battle to renegotiate the gamer identity. The idea of player fragility, in an allusion to white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) on which it feeds, is understood as a set of defensive reactions, and can be illustrated by Burrill’s (2008) notion of *boyhood*. It is a state in which even the slightest amount of stress triggered by equitable gender, race, class, or sexuality actions become unacceptable, occasioning a variety of defensive movements, punishments, and policing that culminate in the manifestation of various forms of toxic masculinity and toxic technocultures – including multiple acts of violence.

This set of movements, similarly to white fragility defined by DiAngelo (2011), incorporates the external manifestations of emotions like anger, resentment, and fear, besides aggressive behaviors of various kinds. These

behaviors, in turn, work to restore the game as a harmless male pastime, a space of white comfort, and the ethno-racial, gender, and class *balance* and hierarchy of white, cis-heterosexual players, of a pretense and nostalgic original gamer identity, of a narrative responsible for constructing a worldview where white youth, irrespective of traditional definitions of masculinities, are heroes-cum-victims by the continuous advance of an agenda in favor of diversity and multiculturalism.

Thus, the manifestations of toxic masculinity against women and other minorities in gamer culture can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain the nerdy white men's space intact. This defense mechanism reaffirms a rejection of traditional physical hypermasculinity, while constituting another kind of fraternity that offers an alternative staging space centered on a performance of rationality and positivism.

In 2016, after the presidential elections in the United States, Gamergate resurfaced in popular discourse (Salter & Blodgett, 2017). The similarities in the manifestations of toxic masculinity among Gamergate and *Magic* players – though not restricted to them alone – with the far right online movement, the alt-right – and of this with *Bolsonarism* and *Trumpism* – are diverse and in no way should be treated as a mere chance. These relations are reinforced in NBC News' (2017) video report “How Gamers Are Facilitating the Rise of the Alt-Right” by and in Lees's (2016) analysis of the connection between Gamergate, the relations with the White House and how “the 2014 online hate-storm presaged the tactics of the Trump-loving far right movement” (para. 1). “Leading up to the Charlottesville rallies, alt-right organizers used a messaging service called Discord, originally created for video gamers. This is the latest in the history between the alt-right and the gaming community” (NBC News, 2017, para. 1).

These reports show that these links are denser than previously imagined: there is a direct relationship between the discourse of exclusion and subjugation used by players and nerds and that promoted by the so-called alt-right media, which is based on existing communities such as Men's Rights activists and a variety of other movements aimed at men who believe that the past afforded them more benefits and privileges than the present. Our argument, in line with the analyses by Lees (2016) and Salter and Blodgett (2017), is that nostalgic ethos and (ultra)conservatism support both the set of rhetorical strategies and hate campaigns used by Gamergate and the enactment centered on a performance



of (toxic) masculinities by *Magic* players and, more than that, can be read as intrinsic indices of a link to the alt-right.

Although the cluster of dynamics shown in *Magic* and Gamergate is ultimately fed by men's vendetta against women, a particular narrative of reform was produced: an call to *make gaming great again* – whose resemblance to the campaign slogan adopted by Donald Trump in 2016 (“Make America Great Again”) is not mere coincidence. The movement developed continuously in the *MtG* community of practice should not be thought of as an isolated case in a past context, but rather as part of a historical campaign of resistance to the democratic march undertaken by the groups of women and social minorities in subaltern positions against their oppressors in the state, workplace, church, and other hierarchical institutions since the beginning of the so-called “Modern Era” (Robin, 2011).

This context is not detached from the various manifestations of entertainment of our time, be it sports or video games, as reinforced by the analyses of Falcão, Marques, Mussa and Macedo (2020), Lees (2016) and NBC News (2017). In almost every campaign, under various banners – labor movement, feminism, abolition, decolonization, sexuality, socialism – and different slogans – liberty, equality, rights, democracy, revolution –, this resistance occurred with violence and non-violence, openly and in secret, legally and illegally (Robin, 2011). Our argument is to place the movements and countermovements in *MtG* as part of the history of contemporary politics, or at least as one of its histories. They are battles between social groups; between those who hold more power and those who fight for change in historically colonized spaces.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: WHAT IS AT PLAY?

In this article, we sought to relate the effects of the creation and performance of a toxic masculinity to the experience of the *MtG* community of practice. In the observed stores, the presence of female players is still quite limited and the discussions never reached the topic of their silencing, since access to the game is made difficult. From a less hostile suppression to male players' expressions against the female presence in *their* spaces, what we notice is the production of a masculinity that is based not on difference, but in detriment of it: the fostering of a homogeneous environment that ensures that the spaces in stores and WhatsApp groups is considered safe for the manifestation of violent ideas and exclusion of what is feminine. The identification of players and store owners,

opposed to the female presence in *MtG*, with the figure of Jair Bolsonaro and with symbols and discourses adopted by the far right and ultraconservatism also point to the desire to maintain male privilege and the nerd/gamer identity as it has been conceived and consolidated.

Our analysis suggests that manifestations of toxic masculinities in *MtG*, as conservative modes of practice (Robin, 2011) and set of defensive reactions (DiAngelo, 2011), are reactive, contingent, and complementary to an opposing radical political program championed by women and social minorities – without which these actions lose strength and rhetorical power. The political ideas of a considerable part of the player demographic which generally occupies the right side of the political spectrum and purport to be apolitical, are forged in battle, in an intense battlefield demarcated by real and rhetorical borders (Salter & Blodgett, 2017). Unlike what Robin (2011) suggests, however, an upside-down conservatism – or rather, ultraconservatism – in *MtG* remains in the thoughtless defense of an unchanging old regime or of a thoughtful idolized traditionalism.

It thus assumes a reactionary attitude by showing an insistent inclination to recreate a certain idealization of the past, founded on a supposed “golden era” that contains, in its epistemology, ideational and transcendent traits – typical of non-conservative ideologies – that respond to the immanent nature of conservatism (Trigueiro, 2015). We can call it ultraconservatism. The process of subjectivation of toxic masculinity occurs, in part, by an enactment of violence as an available tool to these players for identity policing. Here the variety of manifestations of player fragility, which often erupts when whites are challenged in their racial worldviews, illustrates the function of reestablishing the racial-ethnic, gender, and class balance and hierarchy of white cis-heterosexual players. Future studies should help to map the multiple forms – spanning various practices of violence – and sources by which player fragility and toxic masculinity act, including different gaming activities and situations.

Finally, this article is first foray that points to the need to explore these environments as performance spaces of political culture, thus connecting observed behaviors and discourses not only to political performances particular to the Brazilian culture – a relation between *MtG* players and supporters of President Jair Bolsonaro in this case – but, above all, subjectivities developed from perceiving the creative industries as part of the neoliberal capitalist ecosystem and from the processes of colonization that Brazil has experienced. Moreover, traces revealed not only in the discourse explained in this article, but in other aspects



of our sampling suggest a link between this conservative and traditionalist (patriarchal) discourse with others of a neofascist nature. Further studies should explore this connection, which seems to converge on the identity of the *Magic* consumer audience in Brazil. ■

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Article received on September 11, 2020 and approved on June 5, 2021.

# RESENHAS

# Research lore and vanguard in communication studies

## *Tradição e vanguarda na pesquisa em comunicação*

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### ABSTRACT

Review of the book *Comunicação e Método: Cenário e Práticas de Pesquisa*, launched in 2020, in which Marialva Barbosa suggests methodological trends in communication research, based on 109 theses defended in 2017 in Graduate Programs graded Capes 5 or higher. The author typifies four synthesis-models for these trends, advocates for an essayistic communicational writing, an intellectual work of interpretation and of transformation of social reality, and establishes a distinction between analytical techniques and the theoretical-methodological design of research.

**Keywords:** Methodology, communicational field, epistemology

### RESUMO

Resenha do livro *Comunicação e Método: Cenário e Práticas de Pesquisa*, lançado no final de 2020, no qual Marialva Barbosa aponta tendências metodológicas na pesquisa em comunicação a partir de 109 teses defendidas em 2017 em programas de pós-graduação nota 5 ou superior. A autora tipifica quatro modelos-síntese para essas tendências, defende uma escrita comunicacional ensaística, um trabalho intelectual de interpretação e transformação da realidade social e estabelece a distinção entre as técnicas analíticas e o desenho teórico-metodológico de uma pesquisa.

**Palavras-chave:** Metodologia, campo comunicacional, epistemologia

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THE BOOK BY Marialva Barbosa, *Comunicação e Método: Cenário e Práticas de Pesquisa* simultaneously challenges two recent complementary myths that feed each other in the research on communication: the fetish of method and the taboo of essay. In the last ten years or so, it seems that graduate students have been increasingly distressed in face of the peculiar task of having to define their method *before* starting their research. In this sense, this book can either alleviate or worsen the distress of new researchers for the same reason, by showing that method is a unique construction carried out *during* the research process. If, on the one hand, the author's explanation allows relieving the distress of the most anxious ones, as they discover there is no need for guesswork regarding the technique they will apply, on the other hand it increases the pressure on those who miss creative or critical vocation.

This new obsession with a magical selection of method is often translated into mechanical texts reduced to mere descriptions, that fail in taking on the required risk of the whys, eager to meet an imaginary demand for scientificity borrowed from other fields. The fight for a logic unique to the area would firstly pass by advocating for the quality of the text, when the author states that essay is the superlative form of communicational writing. Here she refers to *essay* as a work that puts forward social interpretation and analysis, i.e., which considers the results of research rather than simply exposing data. The *essayistic* text that she advocates is far from speculative reflections or texts that freely approach given topics. Here, essay would be synonymous of a pleasant text that, nevertheless, presents empirical evidence. This concept, however, goes far beyond. Intellectual production requires more than beauty and evidence. It requires a unique interpretative gesture that is also expressed in the methodological architecture of the research, and in how the academic handles with data.

Having introduced the matter, let us move on to what the work *is not*. The book *is not* a manual. It does not enumerate, describe, and teach how to use the most prevalent techniques in communication research. On the contrary. By presenting examples and discussing methodologies, Barbosa elects creative approaches to emphasize how these methodologies were anchored in well-defined theoretical grounds. In fact, the book resembles a map that shows several paths, obstacles and safe places, tracks that have been tried and abandoned, detours, shortcuts, routes that have been transformed into others. Inspired by Martín-Barbero's (2004) methodological cartography, Barbosa draws a route that does not necessarily lead to a final destination. Rather, it depicts possibilities and devises communication as the great science capable of managing the human phenomena of the 21st century, as advocated by Sodré (2011, 2014).

Although professional researchers can identify much of the method of the research even in the absence of a description by the author, Barbosa seems to have intended to show her ideas more explicitly in this book, recording what she has been teaching her pupils and students since the 1990s. And that was not the first time (Barbosa, 2002, 2007). In other texts (Barbosa, 2005), she explained the origins of her history-based hermeneutic training, even though her attention by then was focused on journalism. Her vision is broadened in this work, especially after the impact of Sodr  (2014) on her mindset.

Paradoxically, the book *is neither* an epistemological discussion about methodology in the field of communication. As she makes clear in the beginning of the second chapter (p. 33), Barbosa does not claim this role of expert, and there is no proposal to disrupt the field. Quite the contrary. Her view on methodology is quite similar to that of Martino (2018) and Braga (2011), for example. Apparently, her contribution intends to enhance the fight for maintaining an epistemology unique to the field. It seems that such fight is threatened by excessively descriptive works which do not venture on social interpretations, or which are focused on the media rather than on mediations, devoid of any supportive philosophy.

The work is divided into two parts. In the first part it primarily approaches the theoretical field of communication, and how it is constructed as an academic area. It is a twofold approach: through reflection and through the rescue of practice. First, the author looks back over scientific knowledge throughout the centuries, forgoing the sterile goal of approaching the whole history of knowledge. Maybe that is why the first chapters may seem a little superficial. The journey, however, has a direction and exploration has a purpose: to discuss the historicity of communication processes; how the communication issue is considered under each epistemological perspective. And these perspectives follow one another in the quest to define the essential: whether the forms of knowledge belong to the subject, to the object, or to some kind of relationship between both.

Whether knowledge is a mere record of data by the subject, data that exist separately in the physical and ideal outer world or whether, on the contrary, the subject actively intervenes in the process and organization of the object that, in fact, does not exist in essence but emerges in the very process of production of knowledge. (p. 23)

The journey reaches up to the *linguistic turn* of the 1960s, which paves the way for skepticism and postmodern theories that “assert the discontinuity between narrative and reality, argue that organizing the text as a story imposes itself on the facts, the narrative always being the product of an imaginary construction, losing its aura of veracity (even when it relies on sources)” (p. 25).

Here the author once again breaks up with conventional writing in a book on research methodology and practices, by openly taking a stand and criticizing viewpoints and paradigms, especially the “shattering of knowledge” resulting from postmodern theories. But the reader is not taken by surprise. In the first paragraph of the introduction Barbosa warns that

there is no possibility, however much traditional canons of writing and the academia propose, of emptying the self when producing something that comes out of the one who writes, to be then included in the gaze of the one who will read it in different times. (p. 9)

This certitude permeates the book, ranging from incentive to the use of the first person in the text of theses and dissertations, to considerations about the need for struggling in times when science is being discredited, while “indifference, individualism, anesthesia in face of suffering have been frequent actions in this often not so admirable new world” (p. 31).

Establishing a communicational field, defining an object of study, defending an area of knowledge as belonging to communication is part of a debate that has been more heatedly waged since the 1990s. Among other obstacles, the author points to the fact that communication has always resorted to methodologies from other areas – which she does not see as a problem, on the contrary. She also emphasizes the disruption of conceptual certainties, a dilemma shared with other human sciences, which led to a thematic multiplicity in communication research, “often missing the rigor of a theoretical-methodological conceptualization” (p. 34). Quoting Rüdiger (2007) and Sodré (2011), Barbosa wonders if in a world ruled by communication, would not communication be “a place of amalgamation of social sciences knowledge where, under the aegis of communicational, dispersed knowledge would be condensed? In this sense, wouldn’t communication be the science of the 21st century?” (p. 35). This is argued in a review about Sodré (2014) published in the same journal (Barbosa, 2015). To the extent that the area would be in the process of overcoming media bonds, as the author says mentioning Braga (2011), it is about “unraveling the communicational of our objects” (p. 13). Likewise, as Martino (2018) teaches, communication should be found in our objects. The work brings no proposal of disruption. On the contrary, it aligns itself with these classical scholars of methodology in communication as a way of advocating for a traditional research standing that departs from empirics, and is not reduced to mere description, demanding thinking in any social research, i.e., grounds and a philosophical project. Of course, thinking is not only in a sub-item named *discussion of results*, but is found in the *way*

of thinking, which is the method. The method, therefore, cannot come before empirics that lead to different sites and obliges the researcher to come up with paths to answer their disquiets and ask new questions.

This is the starting point for Barbosa to study the praxis, by tracing a course of trends and research in the area. The timeline begins in the 1970s, a time that coincides with the regulation of communication courses in Brazil, and by 2017 had reviewed 109 theses defended that year. In addition to the consolidation of communication subfields acknowledged throughout the establishment of the field, research showed that works are gradually driven by the perspective that communication is concerned exclusively with media and media processes, in an attempt to think over deeper issues that cut across time such as discursive ethics, communication flows, and processualities of practices.

It is based on the understanding that the contemporary world is communicational and, therefore, comprehension and understanding of the human action are only possible contingent on looking at communication. Communication, in this sense, proposes breaking the boundaries between the disciplinary logic of the 20th century and the organization of knowledge around issues that go beyond the establishment of isolated fields of knowledge. (p. 60)

From this framework, she found that of the 109 theses studied, 82 still focused on media objects or sub-areas of knowledge, while 27 were already grounded in the idea of communication as “amalgam of knowledge in the 21st century” (p. 60), again under clear influence of Sodr  (2014). Those 27 theses are the baseline for her typology of methodological trends in the field, presented in depth in the second part of the book.

In the second part, one can understand a distinction that is often a great challenge for entry-level advisor professors: explain to their students the difference between method – the thought-form that a thesis, for example, takes on – and the multiple techniques of analysis. The steps of a scientific research project are systematized in there: problem formulation; theoretical model building; relationship between theory and methodology; construction of the corpus and interpretation. What is more intriguing is that this is done by showing the pathways in practice, making use of the students’ production, providing concrete examples of methodological paths previously run by researchers. To that, in the book the author inverts the in-class method used in methodology courses. In the absence of actual students to speak their ideas, she takes a sample of theses and takes the opposite path: she reduces their methodological designs to retrospective project forms in order to illustrate what, for her, would be the trends in the field.



Once again, emphasis is attached to the need for deriving methodology from theory: a research problem cannot be built neither methods can be conceived without electing a theoretical referential belonging to the same lineage, to the same theoretical place, despite the possible divergences between different authors. Theories build the methodological paths, and thinking on methodology exclusively as a tool that enables building a scientific relationship with the empirical object is an error that leads to many others (p. 10).

For this, communication research should not be cast in stone. On the contrary, in the sixth and last chapter Barbosa presents creative works in the analysis of empirical materials, “dissonant movements around the possibilities of analysis in immersive attitudes” (p. 113). Reader is then introduced to the detailed description of methodological perspectives that Barbosa typifies as: 1) mode of disarray; 2) writings of interstices; 3) constellations; and, finally, 4) wandering.

The first one corresponds to the mode of cartography, according to which the researcher would not be concerned with presenting a strict description, a record of a phenomenon, but would approach it from multiple concepts, not focusing on a single concept or theory. According to the author, in this method the object would speak through the set of experiences and sensations it provokes in the researcher that is then *disorganized*. The second perspective works on features to be observed in a voluminous empirical corpus with comprehensive focus, and whose characteristics comprise interstices that connect, separate, and form the corpus itself. These characteristics are elected by the researcher themselves. The logic of these variables is perceived precisely in the gaps between objects. The third aspect, which the author calls “constellations”, is the construction of a corpus grounded in heterogeneous objects, so that the very arrangement of the empirical material is configured in an analytical gesture. Finally, “wanderings” refers to ethnography.

In the author’s opinion, wanderings would be the four methodological architectures in line with Sodr e’s (2014) proposal on communication for the 21st century. Therefore, it is not aimed at a representative diagnosis of the area, but at a selection of those theses that, in her understanding, more autonomously overcome the focus on media, going through the processes of Mart n-Barbero (2003) and moving towards a philosophy of the common, as proposed by Sodr e (2014).

Barbosa also explains that semiotic-discursive, ethnographic and cartographic proposals have stood out (p. 93). The author, however, does not neglect the techniques of analysis – questionnaire, film analysis, text analysis, interviews, field observation, documentary analysis – as well as the preferred choices of the empirical corpus. It is clear that talking about method demands precision: we are referring to the theoretical-methodological construction that materializes the researcher’s thinking, or to simple tools.

The author's interest for innovation is not for chance and it pursues an epistemology of its own to achieve communicational knowledge and doing. To them would correspond: why not? – a writing of its own, a communicational writing. Barbosa explains that when she speaks of communicational writing, she is referring to “a becoming rather than to what we build today as textualities in projects” (p. 109). However, she brings from Sodr e the notion of communication as the science of the common, as “the place where life is established, related, and organized” (p. 108). According to the author, in that place there is no room for a scriptural plot governed by the discursive parameters of a science that does not match the contemporary dimension of human action, i.e., a communicational dimension.

Marialva Barbosa's book draws from her more than 40 years of experience as a professor – many of these teaching methodology – but *Communication and Method: Scenario and Research Practices* does not rule out reading other more structured works on the history of communication theories or methodology. On the contrary, readers will profit from previous theoretical baseline that allows identifying biases in the author's writing. For example, she points to immersion as a forefront research trend, and disregards quantitative techniques, which did not appear in the sample.

Finally, one could say that the book rescues the intellectual *step-by-step* in a specific case and generally fulfills its ambition: “to share processes and reflections accumulated in decades of teaching the discipline, so as to continue supporting young researchers who, newcomers to the research field, are faced with methodological issues” (p. 9). She understands science as a transformative power since, according to the author, “thus scientific practice is always political and revolutionary, insofar as it proposes changes to make the world more understandable and, therefore, more livable” (p. 73). At the end of the reading, the student or novice researcher is left with the notion that theoretical ground is the cornerstone of any scientific method; that communication is the superb science of the 21st century, and that the researcher must develop intellectual autonomy. ■

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Article submitted on March 16, 2021 and approved on May 25, 2021.